



# Developing Writing Habits That Work

*a workshop for graduate students  
and postdocs*

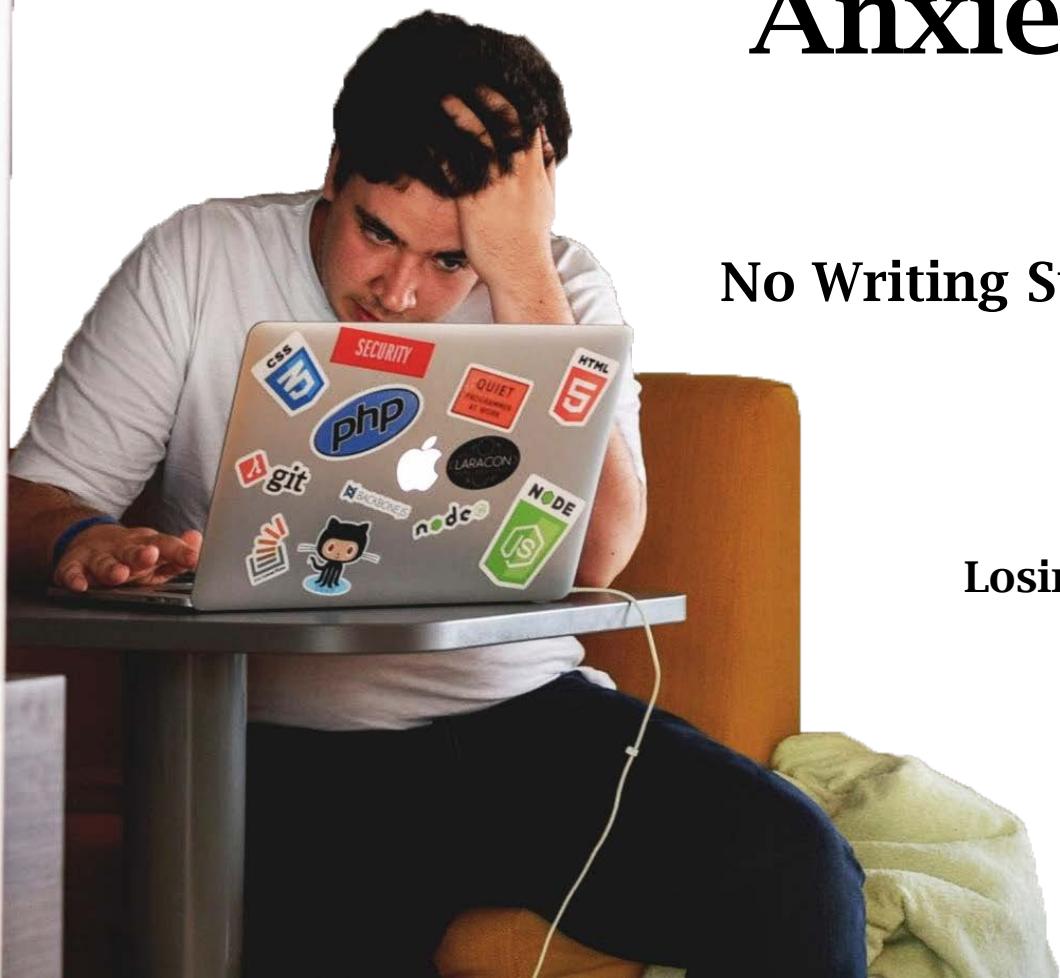
January 18, 2018  
2:00 - 3:00 pm    323 UNION



[gradschool.utah.edu/upcoming-events](http://gradschool.utah.edu/upcoming-events)



# What is less effective about my current writing habits?



Guilt

Anxiety

No Writing Structure

Losing Focus

Perfectionism

Struggle to Complete Sections

Writing in Panic

No Time to Work on Writing

Procrastination

Lack of Motivation

Haphazard Schedule

*“Writing is easy;  
all you do is sit staring at the  
blank sheet of paper until the  
drops of blood form on your  
forehead.”*

- Gene Fowler

# Writing Myths vs Writing Truths

## MYTH

Writing well is a talent. You're born with the talent or you're not.

Good writing freely flows from the mind to the paper.

Inspiration is needed to create excellent writing.

Bad writing equals failure.

## TRUTH

Writing well is a skill, and like all skills it can be developed with work.

Good writing is the product of hours of revision, reflection, and practice.

Practice is needed to create excellent writing.

Bad writing is the foundation for good writing.



## Great Expectations.

## Chapter I.

WISBECH  
MUSEUM

# Habit #1: Practice, Practice, Practice

- Step #1: Change your thinking.
  - Good writing isn't something that happens to you via inspiration. It's something you achieve through consistent practice.
- Step #2: Set a requirement for every day.
  - You can set a word count or a page count. Your goal is not excellent writing, your goal is to get a predetermined amount of writing on the page.
- Step #3. Organize your schedule for success.
  - Prioritize your writing habit.
- Stretch Habit: Track your inspirational moments.

# Procrastination and Perfectionism

**PROCRASTINATION**



**PERFECTIONISM**



# Procrastination and Perfectionism

## PROCRASTINATION

Arises from fear of failure.

Prefers the present moment over the future.

Creates stress.

Is a bad writing habit.

## PERFECTIONISM

Arises from fear of failure.

Prefers the future over the present moment.

Creates stress.

Is a bad writing habit (with caveats).

# Habit #2: Sh\*\*\*y First Drafts

From *Bird by Bird* (1994) by Anne Lamont:

Even after I'd been doing this for years, panic would set in. I'd try to write a lead, but instead I'd write a couple of dreadful sentences, XX them out, try again, XX everything out, and then feel despair and worry settle on my chest like an x-ray apron. *It's over*, I'd think calmly. *I'm not going to be able to get the magic to work this time. I'm ruined. I'm through. I'm toast.* Maybe, I'd think, *I can get my old job back as a clerk-typist. But probably not.* I'd get up and study my teeth in the mirror for a while. Then I'd stop, remember to breathe, make a few phone calls, hit the kitchen and chow down. Eventually I'd go back and sit down at my desk, and sigh for the next ten minutes. Finally I would pick up my one-inch picture frame, stare into it as if for the answer, and every time the answer would come: all I had to do was to write a really shitty first draft of, say, the opening paragraph. And no one was going to see it.

# Habit #2: Sh\*\*\*y First Drafts

From *Bird by Bird* (1994) by Anne Lamont:

Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere. Start by getting something -- anything -- down on paper. A friend of mine says that the first draft is the down draft -- you just get it down. The second draft is the up draft -- you fix it up. You try to say what you have to say more accurately. And the third draft is the dental draft, where you check every tooth, to see if it's loose or cramped or decayed, or even, God help us, healthy.

# Habit #2: Sh\*\*\*y First Drafts

- Step #1: Don't expect to be brilliant from the get-go.
  - This is true whether you start writing early or leave writing to the last minute.
- Step #2: Drown out your inner critics with volume.
  - When faced with a daunting writing task, start by overdoing it. Don't forget to give yourself time!
- Step #3. Don't worry about things that don't matter.
  - Spend time on the core of your writing – the ideas, the argument, the descriptions, and not on the things that can be easily changed, like punctuation.
- Stretch Habit: Write about your writing.

*What do you think is the biggest  
problem facing graduate  
studies in 2018?*

# Accountability

“That which is measured,  
improves.

That which is measured and  
reported, improves exponentially.”

- Karl Pearson

# Habit #3: Make Yourself Accountable

- Step #1: Find a way of tracking your progress.
  - Spreadsheets, graphs, star stickers—whatever works best to see how you're progressing.
- Step #2: Be consistent, not perfect.
  - Forgive yourself without letting yourself off the hook.
- Step #3. Celebrate milestones as a culmination of practice.
  - Practice and performance are part of the same continuum. Recognize that you're celebrating writing practice as much as writing achievement when you do something difficult.
- Stretch Goal: Create a peer writing group.

# Why a Writing Group?

Access to Experienced Mentorship

## Expert-Level Criticism

Development of Relationships with Academics in other Institutions

## Solidarity

Commiseration

Exposure to Academic Opportunities

Social Outlet

## Networking

Preview of Review Processes

## Professional Practice

Increased Possibility of Collaborative Projects

Help with Difficult Subjects

## Antidote to Procrastination

# Building a Peer Writing Group

- Step #1: Identify your purpose.
  - A strong sense of identity and clear goals will help you when motivation lags.
- Step #2: Set guidelines for group behavior.
  - Writing-centered criticism
  - Consistent attendance
  - Focus on improving writing, not pointing out faults
- Step #3. Be consistent and patient.
  - Hold every meeting on time when scheduled, and show up. Send reports to people who miss. Allow for flexibility – Skype, Slack, Google Docs, etc.
- Stretch Goal: Create an interdisciplinary peer writing group.

# Graduate Writing Help now available online

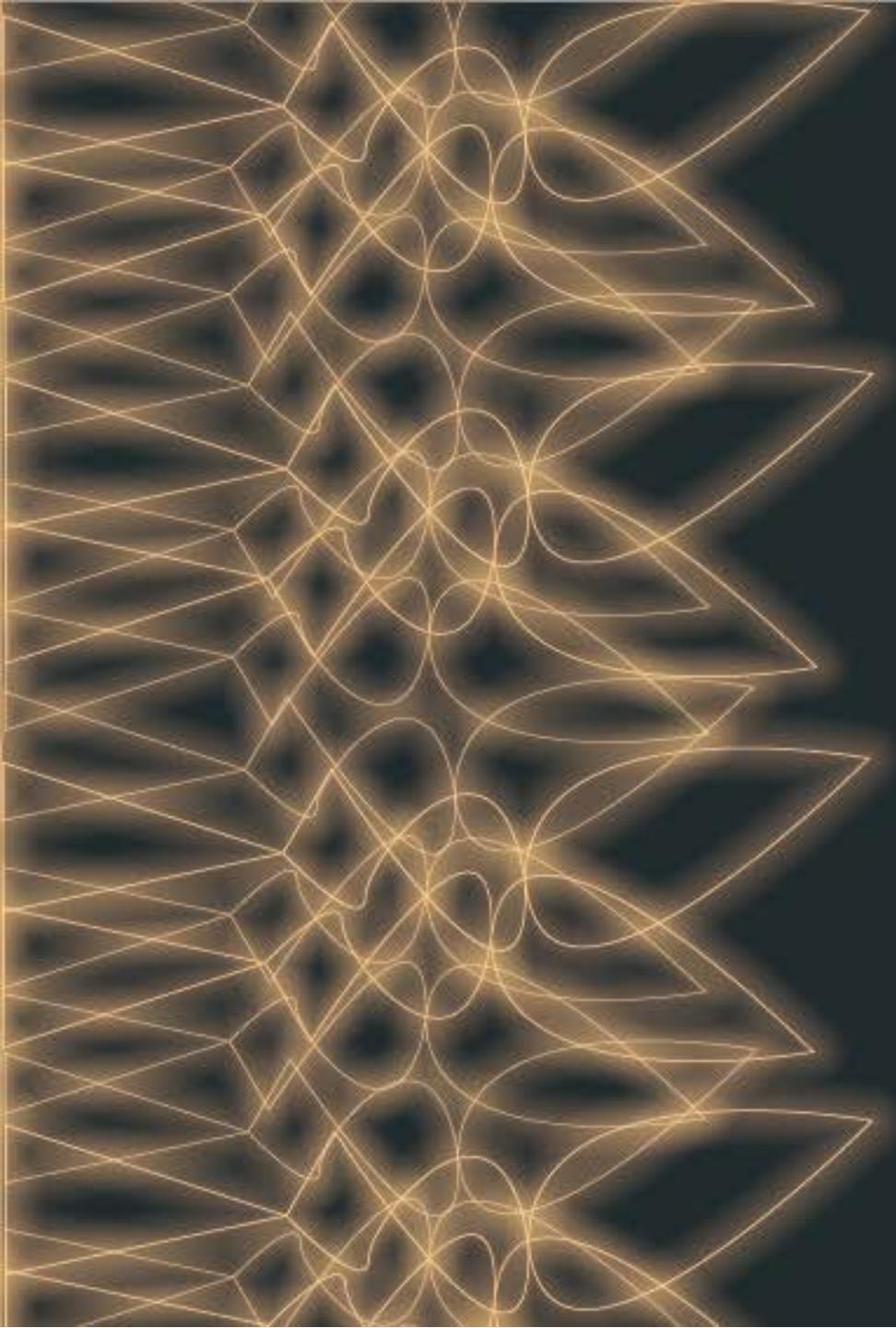


<http://writingcenter.utah.edu/graduate-services/e-tutoring.php>

# MARRIOTT LIBRARY GRADUATE STUDENT SOCIAL

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2018 FROM 11AM-1PM  
IN THE GRADUATE READING ROOM, LEVEL 1



A large, intricate graphic on the left side of the slide features a repeating pattern of overlapping, semi-transparent orange-yellow shapes. These shapes resemble stylized leaves or petals, creating a sense of depth and motion. They are set against a dark, solid black background.

# THEESIS & DISSERTATION FORMATTING WORKSHOPS

JAN 18

JAN 25

FEB 1

**FEB 7**

FEB 15

SPRING 2018

1 PM - 3 PM

**5 PM - 7 PM**

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