

# WAGs

## (Writing Accountability Groups)

*A tool to establish a sustainable writing habit  
~since 2013*

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**JOHNS HOPKINS**  
M E D I C I N E

# Does one ever just show up...

- at church and hope a service happens?
- at the ballfield and hope a game happens?
- at school and hope a class happens?
- at the theater and hope a movie starts?
  
- Of course not! There's always a schedule/a plan! So why do we "hope" we'll write today/this week?

# Agenda

1. What is a WAG?
2. How do we know it works?
3. Why should we WAG?
4. What happens when people WAG?

# What is a WAG?

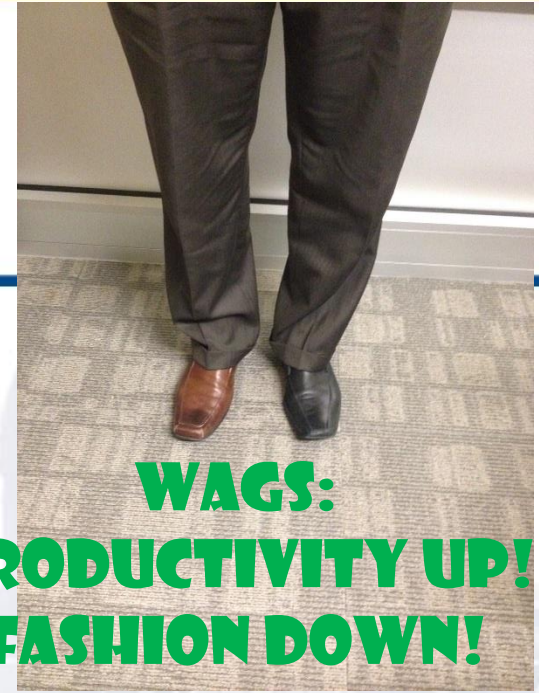
A WAG is a **peer-facilitated, active writing group** that meets **once a week for 1 hour** over a 10-week block

- 15 minutes of updates and goal-setting
- 30 minutes of timed, communal writing
- 15 minutes of reporting and wrap-up

WAGs are focused on **developing a process and habit of writing** (no peer review of your writing)!

**Limited to 4-8 members** and you **MUST** commit to attending at least 7 of the 10 weekly sessions.

# Hopkins WAGGERS



**WAGS:  
PRODUCTIVITY UP!  
FASHION DOWN!**

## THE WAGGING WILDCATS

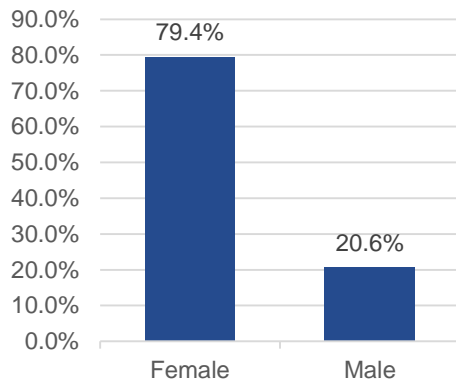


# Agenda

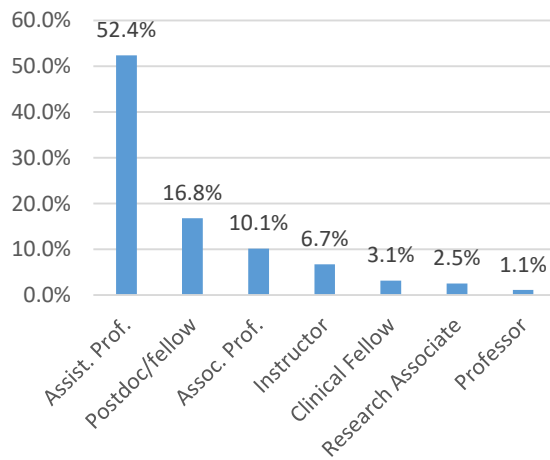
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# 73 WAGs (~450 WAGgers)

WAG Participants  
(N=373\*)

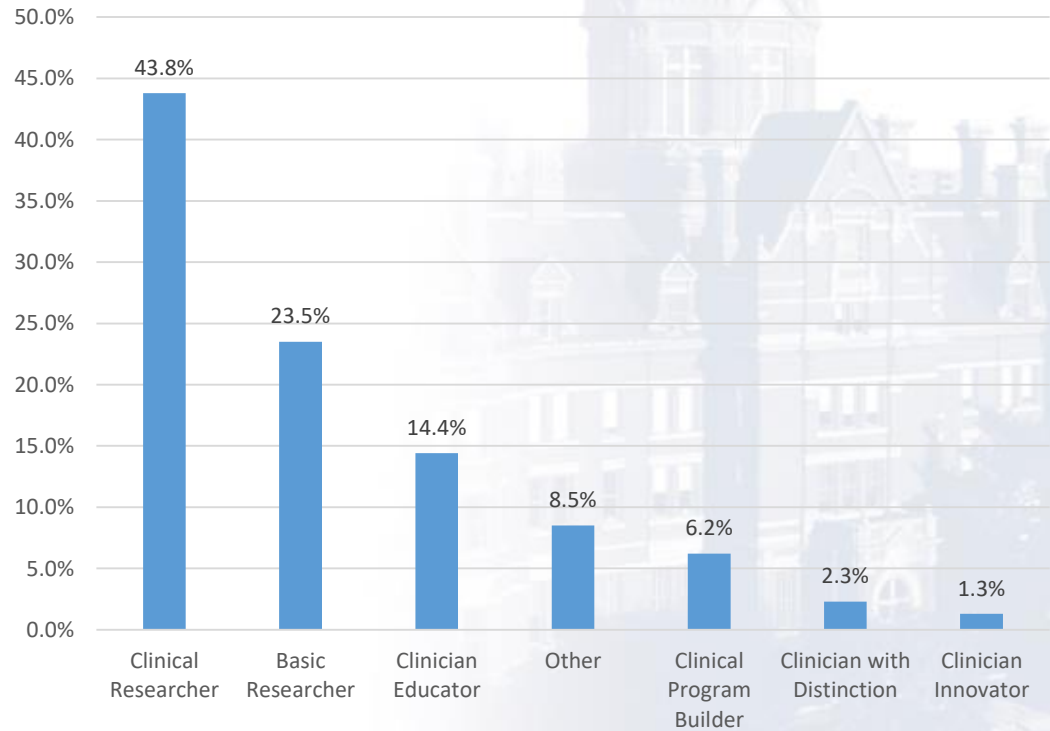


Rank



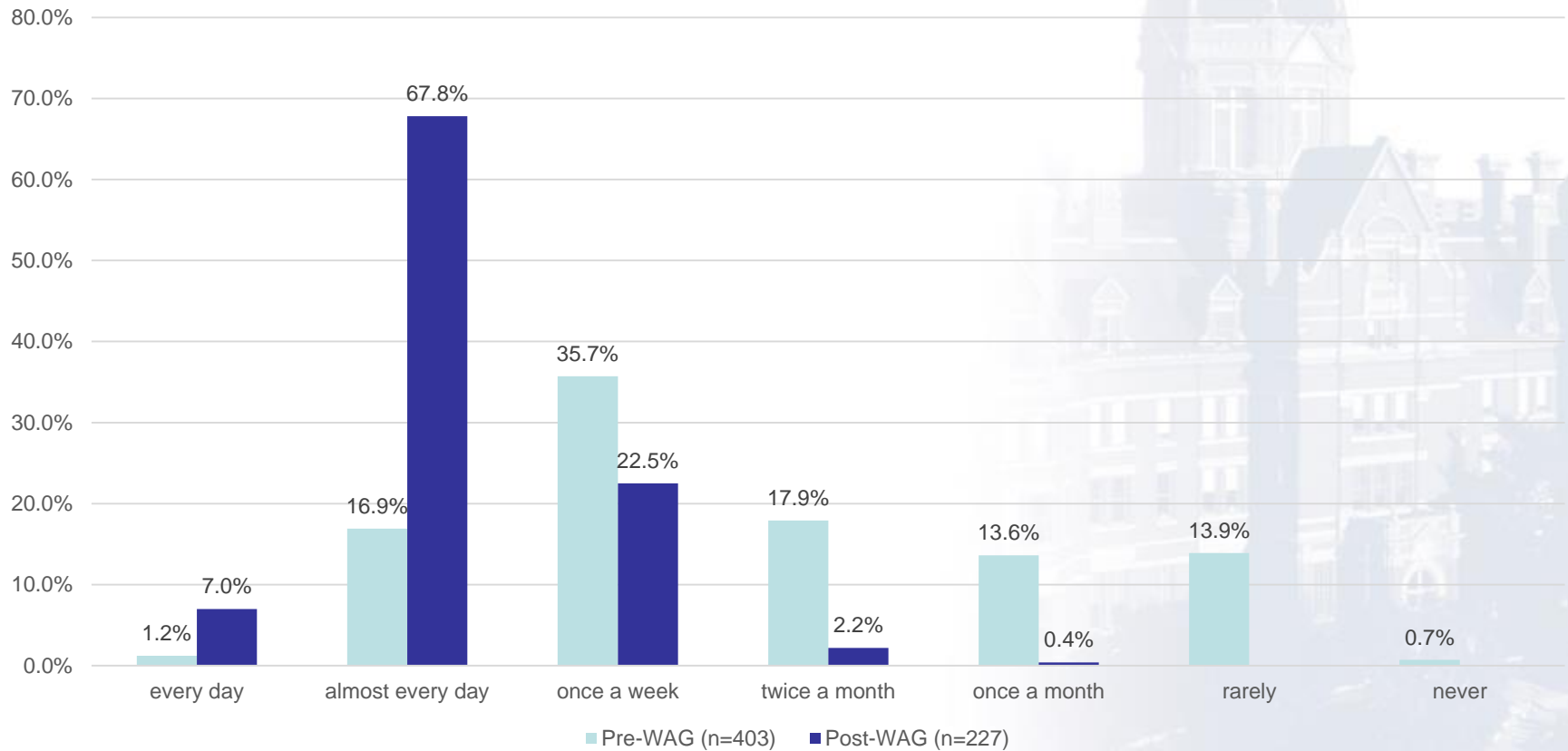
At rank: mean = 3.3 years (SD = 3.5)

Track



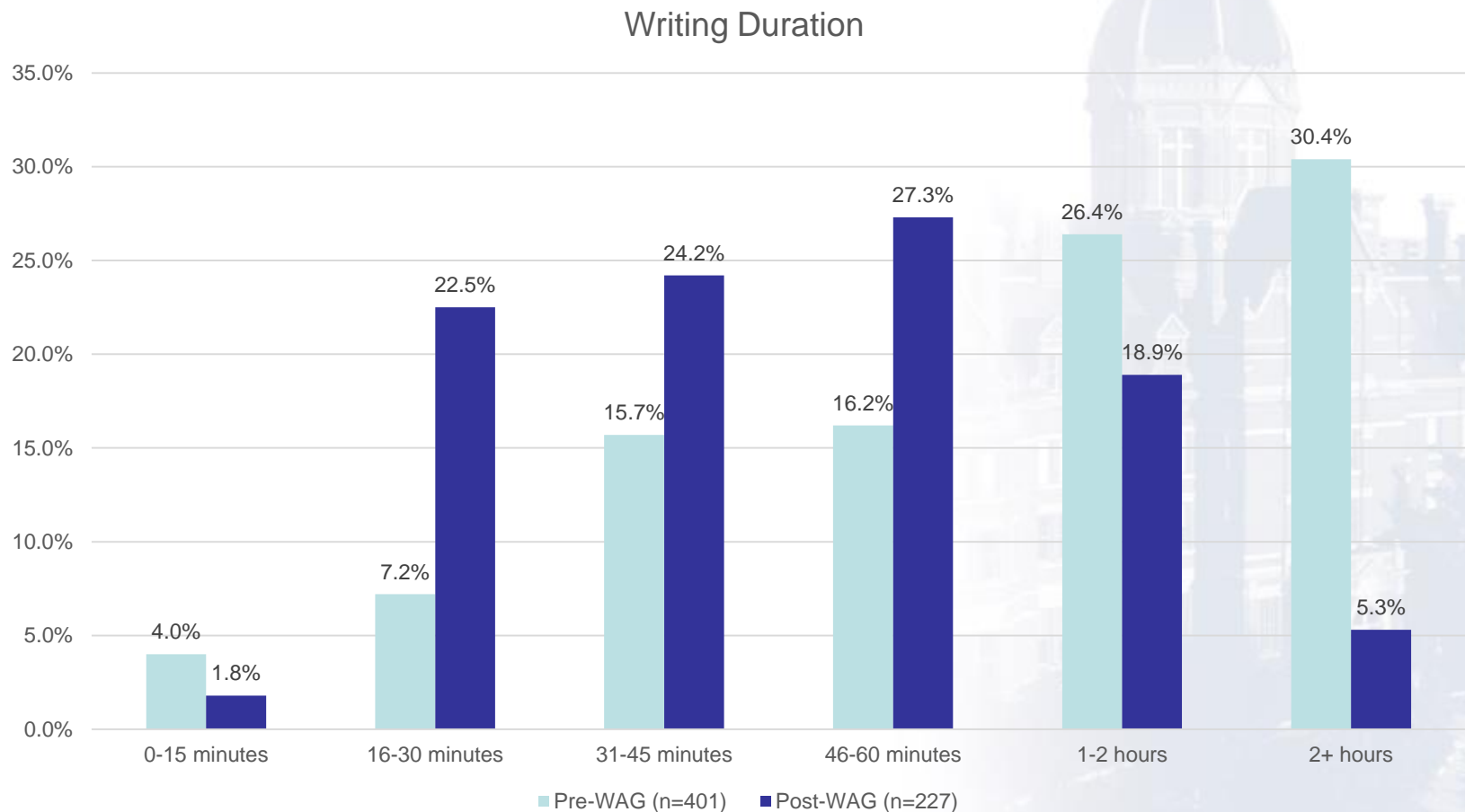
# How often do you write?

Writing Frequency





# What is the duration of your typical writing session?



WAG  
YOUR WORK  
WRITING ACCOUNTABILITY  
GROUPS



BOOTCAMP FOR INCREASING  
SCHOLARLY PRODUCTIVITY

KIMBERLY A. SKARUPSKI, PHD, MPH

*Guess what?*

**WAGGED IT!**



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MEDICINE

*Wagyourwork.com*

# UCF WAGGERS – What did you like **best** about the WAG?

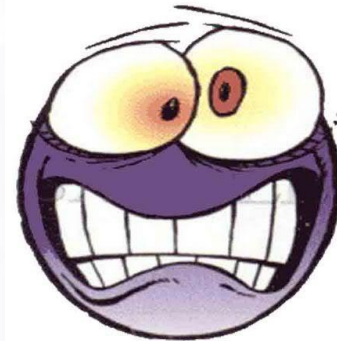
- Accountability
- Peer Support
- Feedback
- A bit of competition ; )
- Being intentional about writing
- I like the structure
- Dedicated time
- Dedication to writing and nothing else
- *“I enjoy being with my fellow WAGGERS and have established relationships with faculty members I did not previously know.”*

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# Writing is hard!

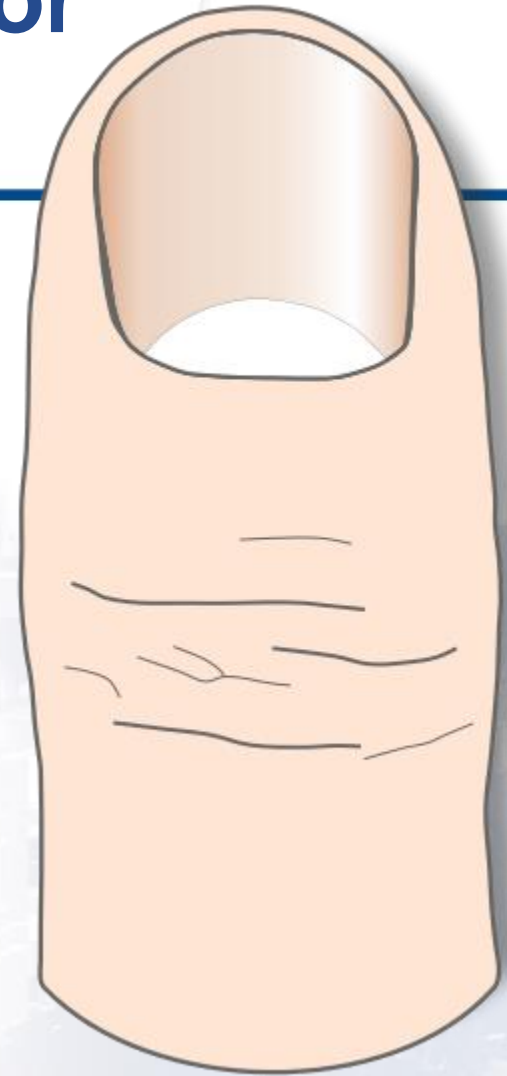
- “Having a book [grant, manuscript] rejected is horrible. It’s like having a baby and when you show it to people, they tell you to stick it back in your uterus.” *Candace Bushnell, Killing Monica*
- And you work in academic medicine where scholarship is the currency of the trade, the coin of the realm...
- so writing is your job...
- so do your job every day!



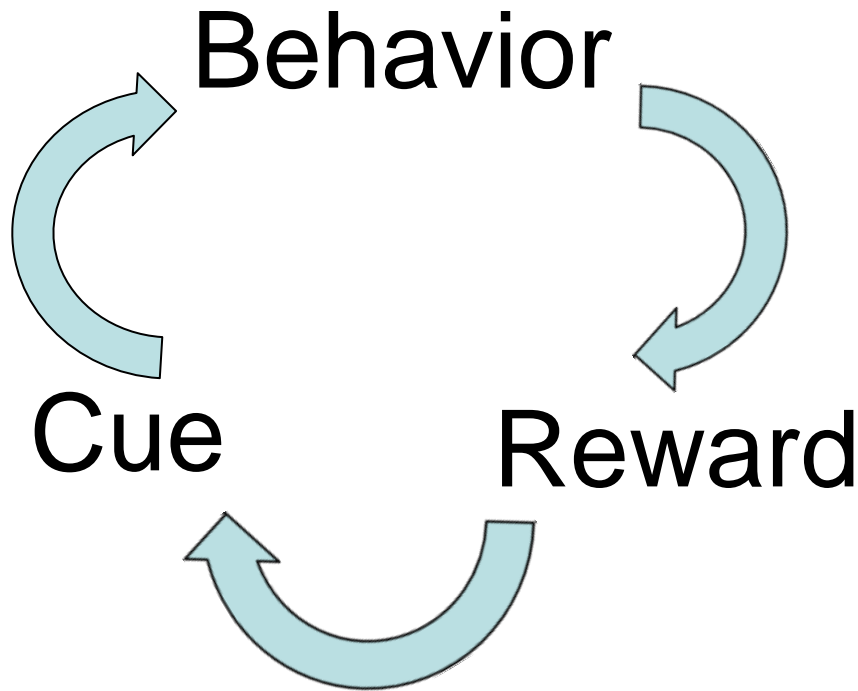
# General rule of thumb for promotion?

- 3 peer-reviewed manuscripts per year!
  - At least 1 first-authored
  - 1 last/senior-authored

So how do you make that happen?



# Establish a HABIT of writing!



## 3 R's of Habit Change:

**Reminder** (the trigger that initiates the behavior)

**Routine** (the behavior itself; the action you take)

**Reward** (the benefit you gain from doing the behavior)

*James Clear*

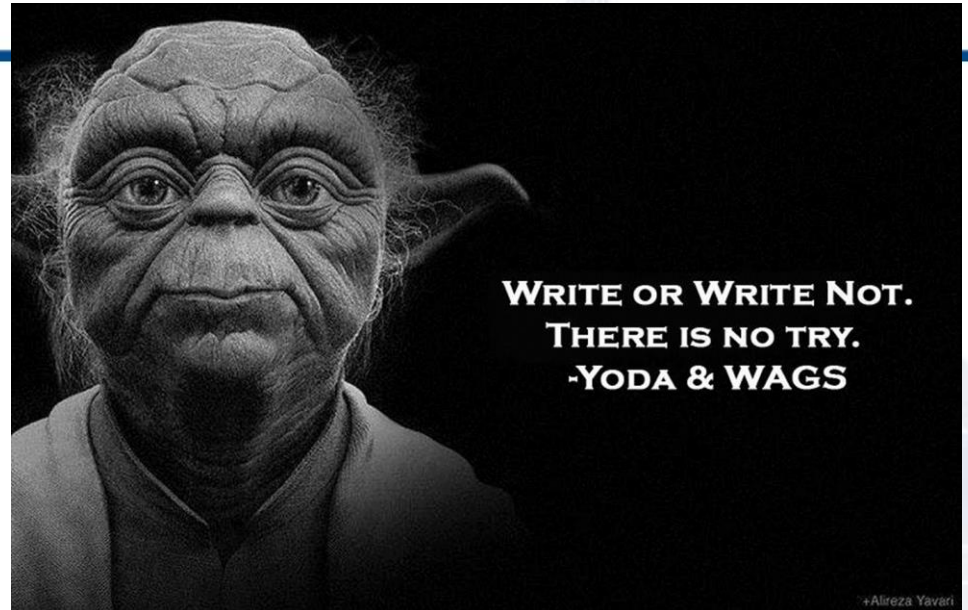
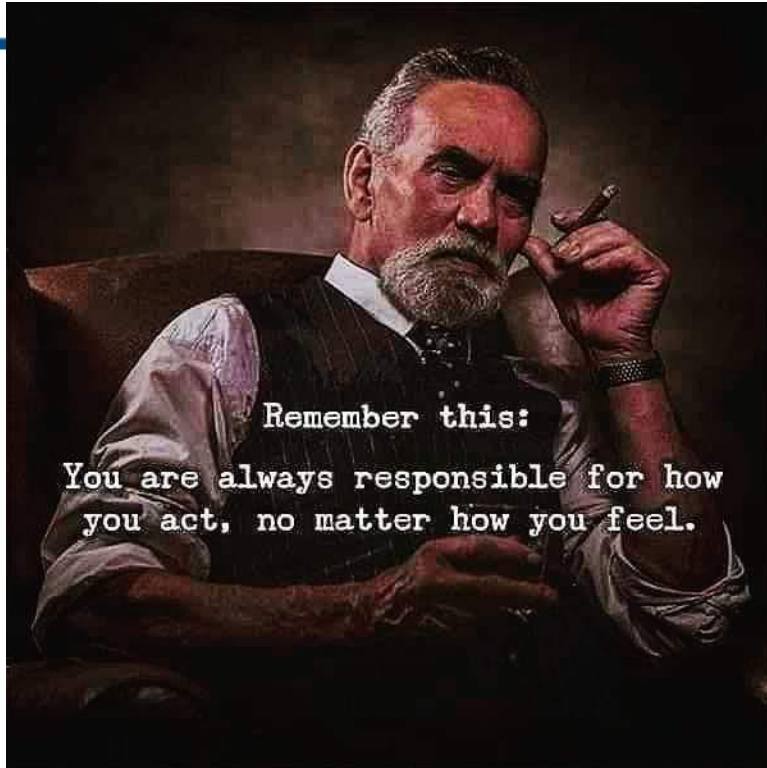
*The Power of Habit,*  
*Charles Duhigg*

# How many of you ever...

- Played a sport
- Played a musical instrument
- Created art – dancing, painting/drawing, poetry, singing, etc.
- Changed diapers
- Cleaned a house
- Detailed a car
- **PRACTICE!**
  - Repetition
  - Habit
  - Routine
  - Muscle memory
  - Mechanical
  - Automaticity



# Inspirational Memes & Blogs?



## The Daily Routines of 12 Famous Writers

*by James Clear*

[Read this on JamesClear.com](https://jamesclear.com)

<https://edgeforscholars.org/category/writing/>

# Which are YOUR barriers to writing? (note all that apply)

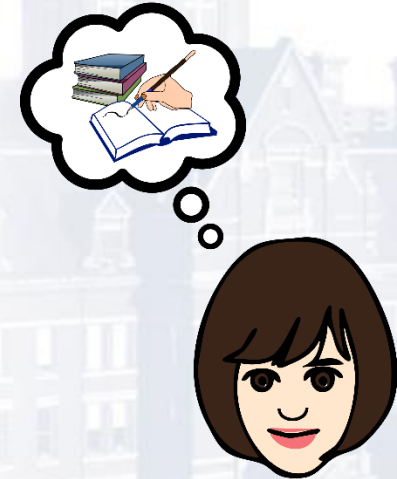
1. I have trouble getting started
2. My perfectionism prevents me from finishing
3. I have too many clinical commitments
4. I have too many teaching commitments
5. I have too many administrative commitments
6. I have too many personal/family commitments
7. I have difficulty with time management
8. I have too many meetings
9. I'm too busy writing grant applications
10. I have difficulty prioritizing
11. I don't have adequate statistical/data analytic support
12. I don't have anyone (mentors) to give me feedback and encourage me
13. I am not very interested in my topic
14. I don't know what to write about
15. English is not my first language
16. My writing skills are poor
17. Writing is not as rewarding as other things
18. Other, *specify*

# Myths/Barriers

- A writing muse
- No time to write
- I don't know how to start writing
- I'm not ready to start writing
- I can't finish writing
- **Remember, writing is your job. Do your job every day.**

# Myth #1: The myth of the muse

- Myth: “I need to be in the mood to write,” “I need to feel inspired,” “I need to feel motivated,” or the corollary, “I do my best work under pressure.”
- Debunking: Do you wait to be inspired to:
  - see your patients?
  - teach your classes?
  - attend meetings?
  - send emails?
  - take care of your kids?



Writing is no different. There is NO writing muse. Writing is our job! Do your job every day. It's the currency of our trade.

# Myth of the Muse: Suggestions

- Write a little every day (10-30-60 mins.)
- Schedule it in your calendar – respect it, show up, come on time, come prepared
- Be in the moment (no distractions)
- STOP when your time is up
- What will happen? Writing will become automatic, mechanical, and less emotional – i.e., a **habit!**

**“You have absolutely no idea how busy I am...I haven’t gone to the bathroom all day!”**

*{a former boss’s regular lament; I volunteered to hold our meetings in the restroom}*

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www.glasbergen.com



**“No matter how busy I am, I’m never too busy to stop and complain about how busy I am.”**

# Myth #2: I have no time to write

- Myth: “I can’t find time to write,” “I have too many competing obligations,” “I have too many interruptions,” or the corollary, “I can’t write unless I have a big chunk of time – I need ~4 hours.”
- Debunking: Of course there’s no time to write! Academic medicine has never been busier or more stressful! Is there something you find time to do every day (e.g., exercise, Starbucks, reading the news, internet surfing)? Why not writing?
- Important: you need less time than you think. Can’t find 30 minutes? How about 10?



# Franklin Covey's Time Management Matrix

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I (MANAGE)	II (FOCUS)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crisis</li> <li>• Medical emergencies</li> <li>• Pressing problems</li> <li>• Deadline-driven projects</li> <li>• Last-minute preparations for scheduled activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation/planning</li> <li>• Prevention</li> <li>• Values clarification</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Relationship-building</li> <li>• True recreation/relaxation</li> </ul>
	Quadrant of Necessity	Quadrant of Quality & Personal Leadership
Not Important	III (AVOID)	IV (AVOID)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interruptions, some calls</li> <li>• Some mail &amp; reports</li> <li>• Some meetings</li> <li>• Many "pressing" matters</li> <li>• Many popular activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trivia, busywork</li> <li>• Junk mail</li> <li>• Some phone messages/email</li> <li>• Time wasters</li> <li>• Escape activities</li> <li>• Internet</li> </ul>
	Quadrant of Deception	Quadrant of Waste

**DANGER!**  
*Tyranny of the urgent  
 Conspiracy of interruption*



# Myth of no Time: Suggestions

- Don't multi-task. It kills your focus
- Delegate if possible (is a co-author really good at \_\_\_\_? Triage!)
- Schedule *your* priorities (proactive) vs. Prioritizing your schedule (reactive) – schedule daily writing
- Review your calendar. Track your time for a week. Is your time and effort aligned with your life mission?

# Barrier #3: I have trouble starting

- Barrier: “I don’t know how to \_\_\_\_\_,” “I’ve been putting off the \_\_\_\_\_ because I hate that part.” Corollary: “I spent all my time on the \_\_\_\_\_ because I love that part.”
- Demystifying: Is this your checklist: “Work on grant” “Write XYZ paper”? Of course this is an overwhelming task! It’s too big. Instead of big, hairy, audacious GOALS, think SMART objectives!



# Barrier of trouble starting: Suggestions

- Schedule daily writing tasks.
- Use templates & formulas. Introduction: *“In discussions of ....., a controversial issue is whether ...while some argue that...others contend that.... This is not to say that..... (Source: They Say, I Say: The moves that matter in academic writing. Graff and Birkenstein).*
- Delegate.
- Editing easier than writing.
- Robotize your work.
- Project manage your papers.

# Barrier #4: I'm not ready to start writing

- Barrier: *I need: more data, to run more models, to read more literature.* Corollary: *"I am stuck because I'm waiting for a co-author's feedback."*
- Debunking: Are you ever REALLY "ready to write"? There's rarely an ideal time for anything. Forget about The New Year, Monday, next weekend - just start already!

ready. set.  
go!



# Barrier of not ready to start: Suggestions

- Start writing as soon as you have the idea
- Write throughout the process – it will help you refine your ideas; you will get more done and waste less time (ever notice that editing is much easier than writing fresh?)
- Writing is not what you do **AFTER** you've figured it out, writing is **HOW** you figure it out
- Expand your definition of writing.

# Barrier #5: I have trouble finishing

- Barrier: “I just want to read X more papers,” “I just want to collect a bit more data/run a few more models,” “I need to re-read it again for the umpteenth time.”
- Demystifying: Perfect is the enemy of good enough. Don’t let your perfectionism thwart your progress. Do you want to get scooped? Productivity is the metric, not perfectionism.

## THE CYCLE OF PERFECTIONISM IN SCIENCE



# Barrier of trouble finishing: Suggestions

- Limit the amount of time and effort you expend.
- Set firm (and SMART) goals and deadlines – publicly state them (at the WAG!).
- Write a contract with yourself/mentor/fellow WAGgers.
- Just get the paper out the door – give the reviewers job security!



# Agenda

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# WAGs (Writing Accountability Groups)

Question: What happens when...

4-8 faculty members



commit to 1 hour/wk

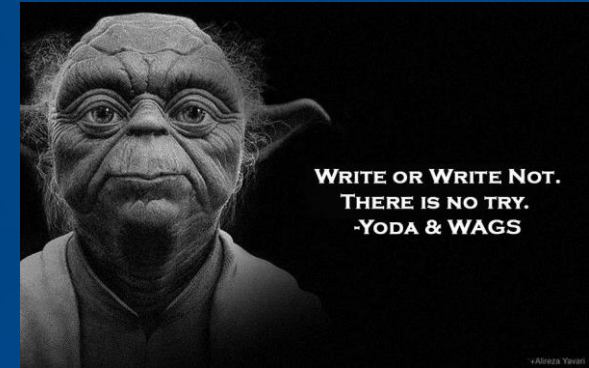


for 10 weeks?



Answer:

- ✓ Increased writing frequency
- ✓ Shorter writing session durations
- ✓ Greater perceived control over the writing process
- ✓ Built-in social support network
- ✓ Unmitigated joy!



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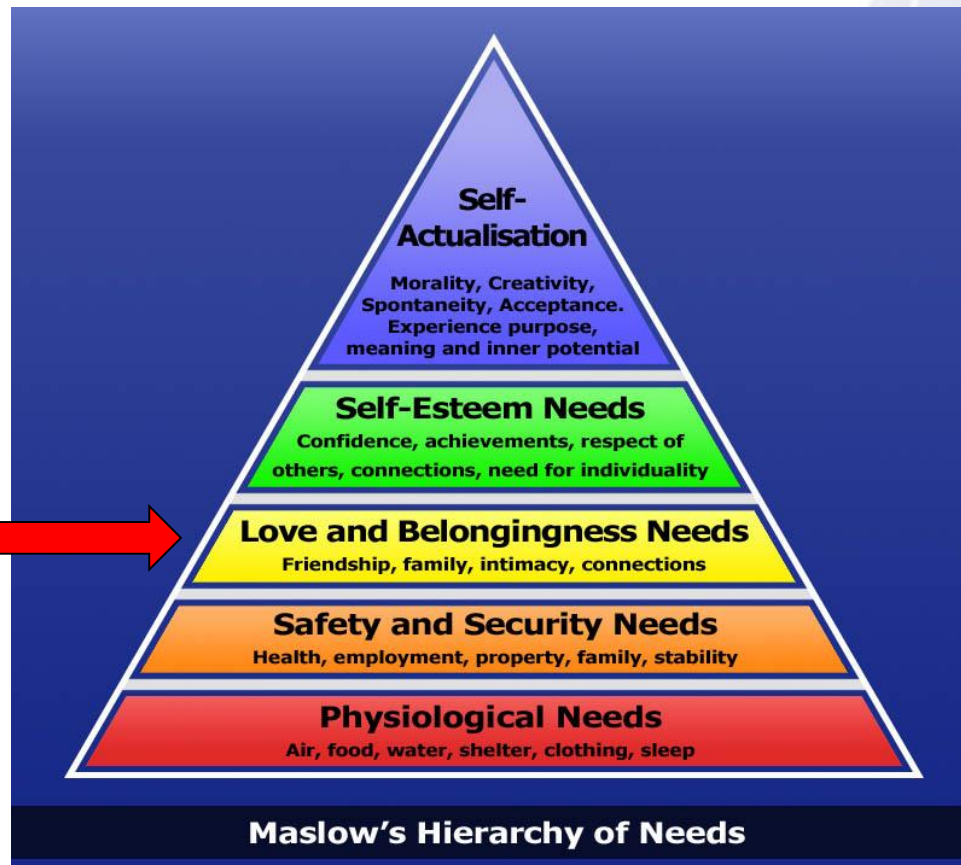
Kimberly A. Skarupski, PhD, MPH

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# WAGs = small communities of engagement!

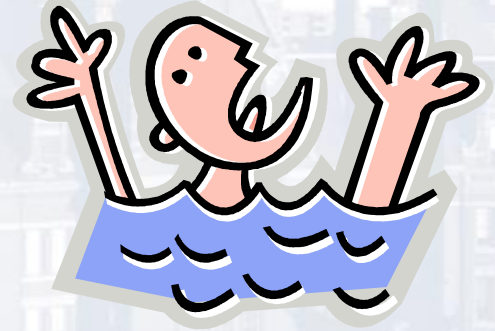
- “Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: ‘What! You too? I thought I was the only one.’” (C.S. Lewis)
- “We’re just all walking each other home” (Ram Das)

# Human connection & belonging is foundational!



# Social support/networks!

- Are you waving or drowning?
  - (“I was much further out than you thought/and not waving but drowning” Stevie Smith poem)
  - Do you have an “inner circle”?



# Myths/Barriers Recap

- There is *no writing muse*
  - Yes, you have *time* to write
  - Yes, you know *how* to start writing
  - Yes, you are *ready* to start writing
  - Yes, you can *close* the job!
- 
- **Remember, writing is your job. Do your job every day.**

# Adopt a mantra/motto

- Writing is my job; I will do my job every day!
  - Adopt a new habit! Make your scholarly writing automatic, mechanical, routine, and mundane.
- There is nothing magical or mysterious about writing; writing is a skill and I can learn it.

# How can you start a WAG?

Identify at least 3 others (limited to 4-8 WAGgers). Identify a weekly meeting time and place that works for all for a 10-week period. 1-hour weekly itinerary: 15-30-15 (report-outs and today's writing goal; 30 mins. of 'writing'; report-outs and writing goal for next 7 days). Get your WAG on!

View the myLearning course: "WAGs for Hopkins employees" and discuss in a group!?

<http://lms14.learnshare.com/l.aspx?CID=89&A=2&T=730731> or

WAGs youtube teaser: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_yrc89cdvUI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_yrc89cdvUI)

WAGs for the public: <https://www.wagyourwork.com/>

**Read the book!** WAG Your Work. Writing Accountability Groups: Bootcamp for increasing scholarly productivity. Amazon (\$6.99):

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/1979668485/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1525019520&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1979668485/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1525019520&sr=1-1)

**Read the article!** Writing Accountability Groups (WAGs): A tool to help junior faculty members build sustainable writing habits, by Skarupski & Foucher, *Journal of Faculty Development* (2018)

# References/Recommended Reading

- Advice for New Faculty Members, by Robert Boice (2000)
- How to Write a Lot, by Paul Silvia (2007)
- Write it Up, by Paul Silvia (2014)
- Getting Things Done: The art of stress-free productivity, by David Allen (2002)
- On Writing Well, by William Zinsser (2001)
- The Power of Habit: Why we do what we do in life and business, by Charles Duhigg (2012)



# Office of Faculty Development (OFD)

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<https://www.wagyourwork.com/>

[http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/fac\\_development](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/fac_development)

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