

Writing Workshop Presentation: Can't find time to write?

Padma Venkatraman , Friday, May 12, 2006

Padma T. Venkatraman is a trained scientist and an untrained writer, who often writes under the name T. V. Padma. In addition to publishing her research in scientific journals, she has authored over 100 popular science articles in newspapers and magazines, and has about 20 children's books to her credit (fiction and nonfiction). She works part-time at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School, as Director of Graduate Diversity Affairs.

Thirteen Tips on Becoming a Prolific Writer

1. Fall in love with writing, right now!
 - Think of an arranged marriage; even if you didn't have your say, find something you enjoy in it
 - Don't say you don't like writing, as this will reinforce negative views on it
2. Don't say you don't have time to write even though you want to; you have just as many hours in the day as Einstein, Marie Curie, and Subramanyam Chandrashekar.
 - We have just as much potential to write and contribute as the best among us
3. Write every day, even if you don't write every day.
 - Even if for 5 minutes, think and/or write about your projects
 - Constantly stay in touch with your project
 - Be mentally linked and engaged with your writing
4. Write as you read.
 - As you are reading relevant literature, start writing about it as it pertains to your project
 - Read Critically from a writing standpoint. (Give yourself writing comments on the articles you read).
5. Are you schizophrenic? Do you suffer from mild or not so mild attention deficit disorder?
 - Feel okay about jumping around on several projects
 - Be flexible about working on parallel projects
6. Write as you work.
 - Jump in the middle (method), or even the end (references, figures, tables)
 - Go at your Results (graphs, figures); it is concrete and very doable
 - Then, take on more challenging portions (discussion and introduction)
7. Deal with rejection.
8. Hand someone else a bit of authority.
9. Give yourself a carrot when you get done writing. Champagne works, too.
10. Make writing a priority.

11. List mania.
12. Respect yourself and others.
 - Thank Reviewers
13. Never compromise quality for quantity.
 - Publish whole, integrative papers and don't splinter them into many similar papers

Padma's comments:

- Most proud of historical fiction (now in 2nd edition)
- Love creative writing
- Loves current work best
- Research Question -> Methods & Materials -> Results -> Discussion -> Introduction
- Don't edit while you write; just write
- Its just plain stupid to leave a project unwritten; get it done
- OCG 583 (Scientific Writing): Padma will teach next Spring 2007 (4pm 2-3 days/wk)

Joan's comments:

- Realizing that writing is like problem solving, math, science, all of which she loves, makes it easier to write

Lisa's comments:

- Realize that like sports and entertainment, we need a lot of practice before we do the main performance
- Writers often forget that we can have practice and rough patches before a polished project

David's comments:

- Starts with outline and then tries to work through Introduction – finds this difficult
- It is best not to be too critical while writing; can always go back afterwards and edit
- Okay to save all the drafts? (Padma says, "Yes, put all versions on a CD")
- Advice about writing discipline? (Need deadline)

Barb and Suzanne

- If you spend too much time on one perfect paragraph, it is too hard if you have to cut it