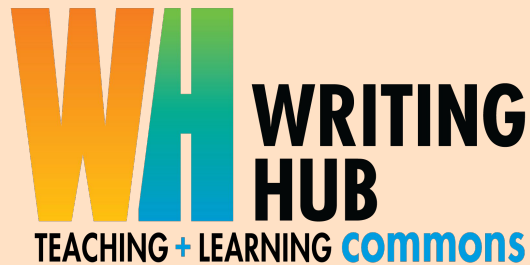




# Building a Sustainable Writing Practice

Matt Nelson, Director



# Land Acknowledgement:

UC San Diego was built on the **unceded territory** of the Kumeyaay Nation. We pause now to acknowledge the land and the original people of the area where the university is located. Today, the Kumeyaay people continue to maintain their political sovereignty and cultural traditions as vital members of the San Diego community. We acknowledge their tremendous contributions to our region and thank them for their stewardship.

Whose land are you on? <https://native-land.ca/>  
What might that compel you to do? Learn more? Care more? Do more?





# Welcome!

## ❖ Primary things first:

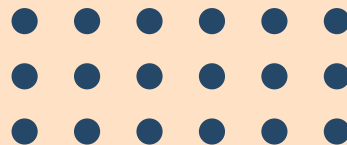
The world is hard enough right now. You're at a work thing, but you're still a human. (And so are we.) So do whatever you need to to take care of yourself in our time together: take a break from using your camera, doodle on some scratch paper to help you focus, get up to stretch, get water, change locations, use the restroom, etc.

Avoid the things that don't help you focus on your writing.

**Our main  
point:**

**Process,  
not product**

# Be intentional about your process



## Before you start writing:

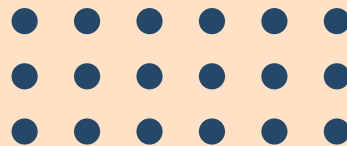
- Before you set intentions and goals, take a minute to bring yourself into the writing space. Detach from other obligations. Get what you need (water, a snack, etc.) and get rid of the rest. Breathe. Tidy your writing space. Doodle and let your mind loosen a bit.
- Turn off: your phone, your email send/receive, your WiFi...
- Recognize what helps you write and what doesn't. Recognize how the things you do or don't do before you try to write help or don't. Write it out in your writing journal to help you notice.
- Give yourself *permissions* before you start a writing session, e.g. permission to enjoy yourself, permission to stop caring what others might think of you and your work, permission to not worry about your students, partner, laundry, etc.

# Focus on your process

- Pay attention to your internal experience of writing, while writing.
- Keep a writing journal.
  - Record your intentions and goals.
  - Record your experiences.
  - Record your reflections.
  - Externalize your internal experience, rather than letting it go unnoticed, controlling your moods and behaviors without your intervention.



# Be intentional about your process



## Before you start writing:

- Set intentions, not (just) goals, for the session.
  - Goals are typically product oriented: e.g. finish chapter two.
  - Intentions are more process oriented: my intention is to enjoy myself for the next hour while I write. My intention is not to check my email, facebook, the NYT, etc. for the next hour while I write.
  - Goals give you rigid, binary feedback: you either met them or you didn't. If you didn't meet them, you feel bad. If you met them, you feel good. (And then tomorrow, when you don't meet your goals, you feel bad and wonder why you can't be like you were yesterday.)
  - Intentions give you more space for inquiry and acceptance. If I did meet my intention, how? How did it feel? What does that teach me for tomorrow?
  - Set intentions (and maybe goals) for each writing session, at the start.
  - Reflect on your intentions and goals at the end of each writing session.



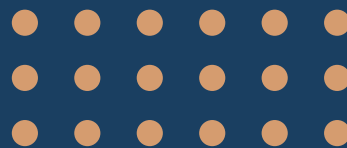
# Process, not product: Some implications for your writing practice

- When you sit down to write, be where you are in the writing process.
  - Recognize how many different kinds of tasks are hidden under the label “writing.”
  - Recognize that different tasks require different cognitive resources from you.
  - Recognize that bouncing from task type to task type without intention doesn’t help.
  - At root, recognize that, if you mean to be generating new language, anything other than generating new language doesn’t help.
  - One way to say this is: don’t edit while you write.
  - Another is: don’t research while you write. Don’t cite while you write. Don’t do data analysis while you write.



# During your writing session

- Keep a “later” list--as thoughts pop up about what you need to do, if it helps, scratch the itch by writing them down and moving on.
- Write down what feelings you are having, if helps. Where do you get stuck? What impulse do you have when you get stuck? (To get up, to check email, etc.) Write it down instead of acting on it.
- Write down what the critical voices in your head are saying instead of leaving them in there, controlling your mood and behavior.
- Recognize: writing is discomfort management. Stay in the chair! (The chair is metaphorical: stay in the standing desk, etc.)
- Take “cognitively responsible” breaks: breaks that don’t take you outside of the writing space.
  - Doodle. Stretch. Take a little walk. Don’t do things that will require you to reset your attention on your writing project afterwards.



## At the end of your writing session

- Leave a “breadcrumb” for yourself for your next writing session. Tell yourself what, exactly, you should do when you start again. This minimizes unnecessary re-reading.
- Reflect on your intentions and goals. What happened in the session? Observe and describe rather than judge.
- What are the wins? A sustainable writing practice (that isn’t binge writing for deadlines) relies on cultivating positive experiences.



# And make it social!

Writing accountability groups

Think-talk-write buddies

Writing-reading groups





# Thanks for participating!

Matt Nelson, Director

