



>PLEASE  
>SELECT  
>YOUR  
>WRITING  
>SPEED

REVERSE SLOW MEDIUM FAST TURBO

**TURBO**

USE WITH CAUTION!  
COULD LEAD TO  
EXTREME  
PRODUCTIVITY

turbo  
charged  
writing

Journal  
Article

accepted

Final  
Draft

Journal  
Article  
FOR  
PUBLISHER

thesis chapter  
GRANT APPLICATION

JOURNAL  
ARTICLE  
FOR  
SUBMISSION

~~this paper~~  
I will discuss...  
~~this paper discusses...~~  
bugger

um.....  
ummmmm  
umm ..???.  
????  
?

Flinders University • Lecture • Research • Self-management



# Ben Bulbin, County Sligo, Ireland



Hugh Kearns

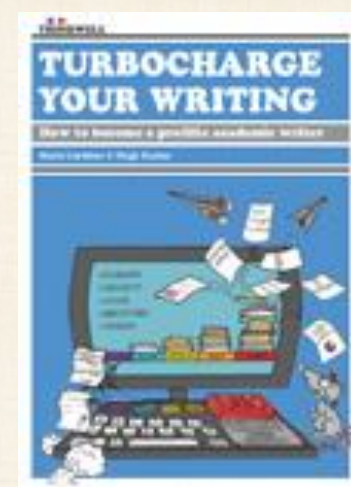
Maria Gardiner

Flinders University

Books



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- set goals and achieve them
- achieve sustainability in their career
- think more clearly and make better decisions
- reduce stress
- find out what is making them stressed
- learn how to evaluate and deal with emotions
- feel more content and confident
- spend more time with their family and those who matter

## Latest News

### New book - Time Management for GPs

Billed as the ultimate time management guide, this is tailored specifically for GPs and people in private practice.

### New edition of The 7 Secrets

This favourite has been given a new look and feel.

### Interview on ABC 891

Hugh and Maria talk about feeling overwhelmed.

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## COLUMN

## The care and maintenance of your adviser

Graduate students bear as much responsibility as their mentors for ensuring that they are well guided through their degrees, say Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner.

Ever since the advent of graduate school, students have complained about their advisers. It is almost an article of faith. The adviser is never available or too available; gives too much feedback or not enough; is too critical or isn't providing enough direction; and soon. Exchanging horror stories with other students is a great way to bond. But advising goes both ways — and if, after careful reflection on their own studies and progress, students determine that they are not getting the guidance they require, they must get the deficiencies.

It is not surprising that advisers figure large in graduate students' conversations. In 2009, the US Council of Graduate Schools in Washington DC reported survey results showing that 6% of the 1,856 doctoral students who responded identified mentoring or advising as a main factor in PhD completion. Our own research at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and our experience at graduate-student workshops across the world suggest that the adviser-student relationship has a big impact on completion time. It certainly influences whether students are still smiling at the end of their degrees!

Students often assume that once they call someone an adviser, he or she automatically acquires all the skills of advising. After all, if your adviser is the world leader in stem-cell technology, he or she must excel at the seemingly simple task of advising — not to mention possess highly developed interpersonal skills and a keen interest in graduate-student development. Sadly, that is not the case.

Sometimes, advising is a weakness of an otherwise very accomplished scientist. This is not surprising. Mentoring tends to be a private business, and often the only model available is an adviser's own experience of having been advised. If it was good, they decide to copy their own methodology; if it was bad, they do the opposite. There is no guarantee that either approach will provide the student with the guidance he or she needs.

A proactive approach is necessary. If your adviser isn't looking after you in the way you need, then you need to look after them. At some point in the PhD journey most graduate students come to an important realization. This is my thesis. My name is written on the front of it. I need to become the driver. The sooner they

can do this, the better. If you're not getting feedback, clear direction or the necessary resources, then you must do something about it. What does this mean in practice? Let us take some examples.

## MEETINGS

A comment we often hear at our workshops is, "My adviser is lovely but he/she is just so busy that we never get to talk about my thesis". And our response is, "Yes, your adviser is busy. All advisers are busy and will continue to be busy. Regardless, you need to organize meetings where you can get real face time and talk about your thesis". We're not recommending a quick chat in the coffee room or a brief word in the lab. No, we mean a lab meeting.

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ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES HARRIS

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do in the next two weeks, the next meeting. This all sounds very straightforward. But if more students followed these steps, many adviser-student issues could be resolved.

## FEEDBACK

Again, in an ideal world, you should be skilled at articulate in a polite and deft way that we never get to talk about my thesis". And our response is, "Yes, your adviser is busy. All advisers are busy and will continue to be busy. Regardless, you need to organize meetings where you can get real face time and talk about your thesis". We're not recommending a quick chat in the coffee room or a brief word in the lab. No, we mean a lab meeting.

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370 | NATURE | VOL 469 | 27 JANUARY 2011

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27 Jan 2011  
Vol 469 - Nature

causes too much guilt. But have you ever, say, reorganized your folders to make it easier to find the files? It would speed up your writing after all. Or perhaps you've diligently labelled all the cupboards in the lab to make it easier to find things.

Although these activities or excuses seem acceptable, their fatal flaw is that once they're over, you still haven't finished that article, started that experiment or written your dissertation. You probably have an increased sense of guilt because you're not making progress on your goal. And although you've found and read that reference, you still don't feel motivated to write. Sadly, while you are answering e-mails or counting the glassware, the motivation fairy didn't stop by and make

e-mail exchange. It's your task, you in and you'll find you longer at it.

So if the motivation ping off your lab computer perhaps you should give up on your dissertation. Remember that there's a way to recover that elusive drive. Follow our three rules and watch your motivation grow. ■

Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner lecture and conduct research in psychology at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and run workshops for graduate students and advisers (see [thiswell.com.au](http://thiswell.com.au)).

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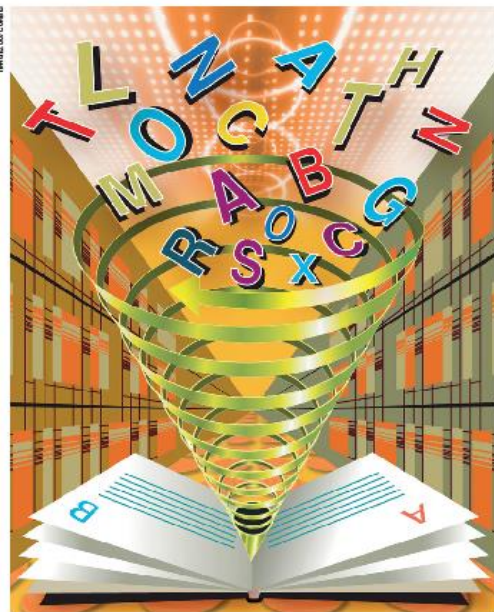
7 Apr 2011  
Vol 472 - Nature

## CAREERS

EDUCATION US needs to improve science literacy to prepare workforce p.110

TURNING POINT Biochemist's high-risk research direction pays off p.101

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## COLUMN

## Turbocharge your writing today

Before you can tackle the overwhelming task of huge writing projects, you must first put aside some widely held myths, say Maria Gardiner and Hugh Kearns.

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7 Jul 2011  
Vol 475 - Nature

As a graduate student, you might find yourself well on the way with your education and 'ABD' (all but dissertation). Day after day, you tell yourself that you really, really intend to start writing your paper. After all, you've collected all the data, analysed them many times and entered them into tables. But then you start thinking that maybe you need just a few more data. Perhaps, too, you need to try a different analysis technique. And what if the tables you used aren't the right ones, or need to be formatted differently?

Many of the thousands of researchers we have worked with are constantly being tripped up by finicky, nagging details that keep them from writing up their research. Every day, they mean to start, but every day, something gets in their way or seems more important — and this can go on for years. Some very common obstacles get in the way of high-quality, high-quantity scholarly writing, but powerful, evidence-based techniques can help researchers to overcome repetitive and unhelpful habits and get moving (see 'How to get out of a dissertation-writing rut').

## WRITING MYTHS

The biggest impediments to scholarly writing are long-held myths that seem to get passed down through the academic ranks like precious but unhelpful ancient wisdom. The first is the Readiness Myth — "I should write when I feel ready, and I don't feel ready yet". The secret to high output is that you have to write before you feel ready, because you might never reach that point. Researchers read endlessly and conduct countless experiments in the belief that it will eventually make them feel ready to write — we call these habits readiness and experientialism. But ironically, all that reading and experimenting often makes them less likely to write, and more confused. So the first way to speed up your writing is to stop waiting, stop reading and experimenting, and start writing. You won't feel ready, but you have to do it anyway.

This brings us to the second myth, the Clarity Myth — "I should get it all clear in my head first, and then I write it down". This isn't how writing works in practice. You have probably had the experience in which you were sure about how a paper would go until you started to write it. Then you discovered that there were inconsistencies, or it didn't flow well or the links didn't make sense. This tells you that it wasn't all that coherent in your head, after all. In fact, writing clarifies your thinking. Writing is not recording — you don't just take

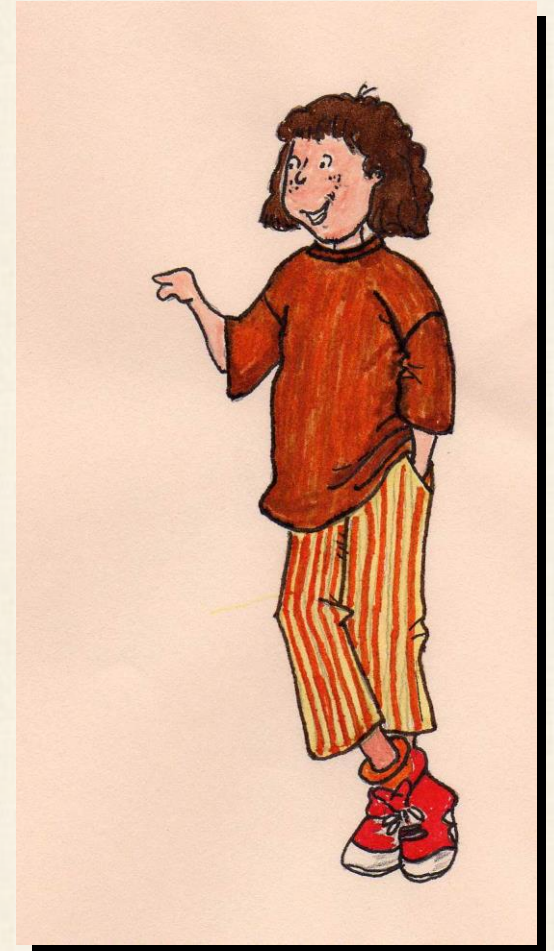
7 JULY 2011 | VOL 475 | NATURE | 129

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# Introductions

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- ❖ Your name
- ❖ Your discipline
- ❖ Your writing project
  - ❖ What do you need to write?

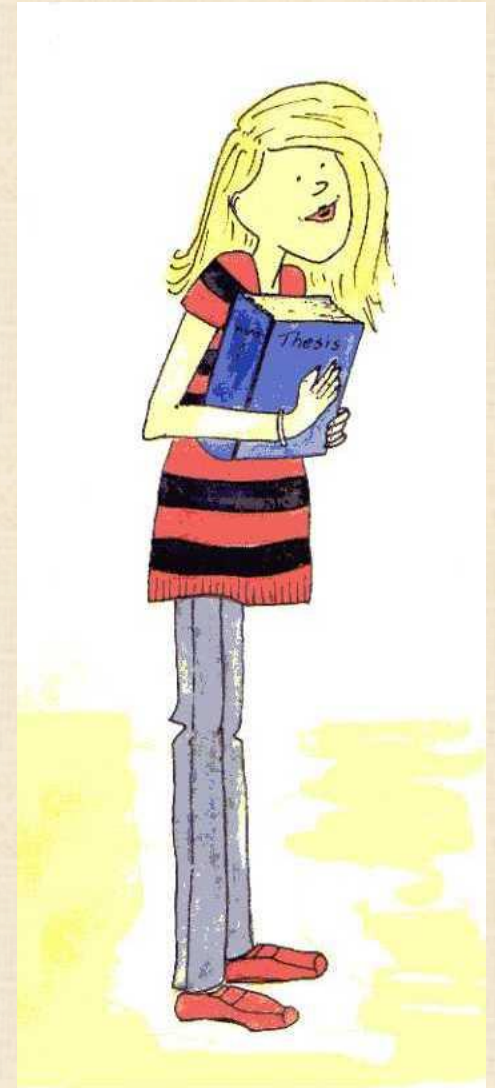


# The Typical Day

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❖ Thinking about writing

❖ 24 x 7



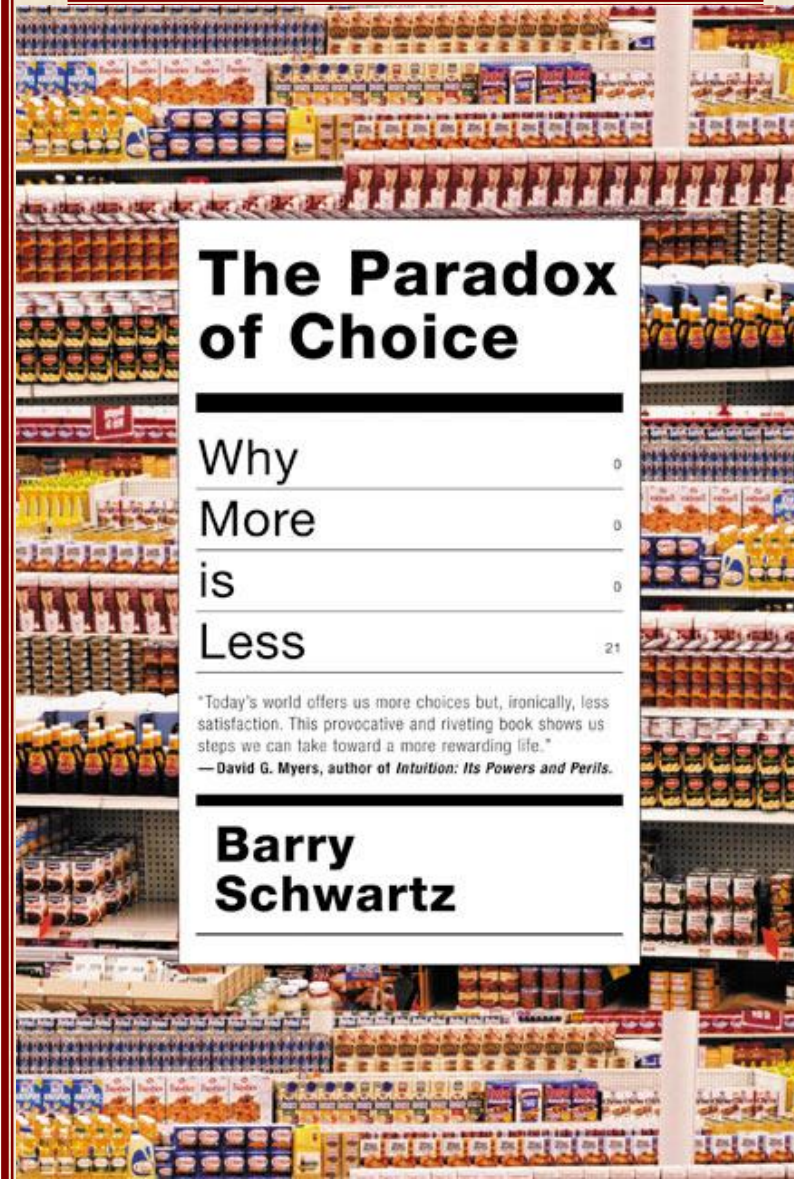






# The Next Thing?

- ❖ What is the next most important thing?
- ❖ Be specific



## The Paradox of Choice

Why 0  
More 0  
is 0  
Less 21

"Today's world offers us more choices but, ironically, less satisfaction. This provocative and riveting book shows us steps we can take toward a more rewarding life."

—David G. Myers, author of *Intuition: Its Powers and Perils*.

**Barry Schwartz**

# Jumbo Jets



Is it obvious?

What are you avoiding?

What would a colleague say?

The closest jumbo jet

Hold your nose

**SMALL**

**Micro**

nano

**T**

**N**

**T**

# The Readiness Myth

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## MYTH ONE:

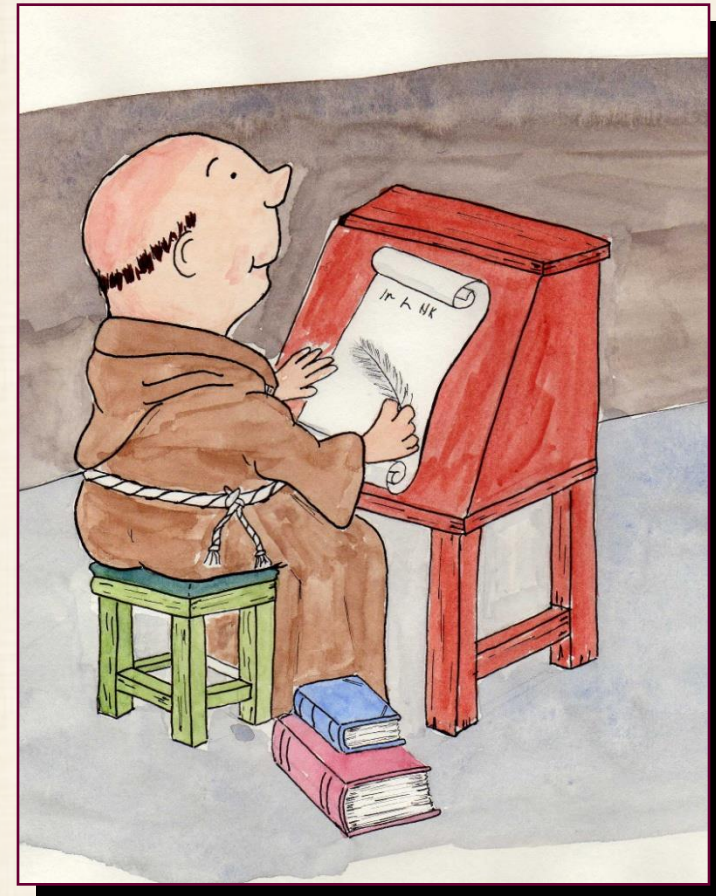
❖ I'll write when I feel ready.

And I don't feel ready yet!

❖ You may never feel ready.

❖ You have to write before you feel ready.

❖ Writer's diseases!



❖ The belief that reading one more article will solve all your research problems.



- ❖ The problems with reading too much
- ❖ Time consuming
- ❖ You get confused
- ❖ You forget





# Experimentitis

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❖ The belief that doing one more experiment will solve all your research problems.



# The Readiness Myth

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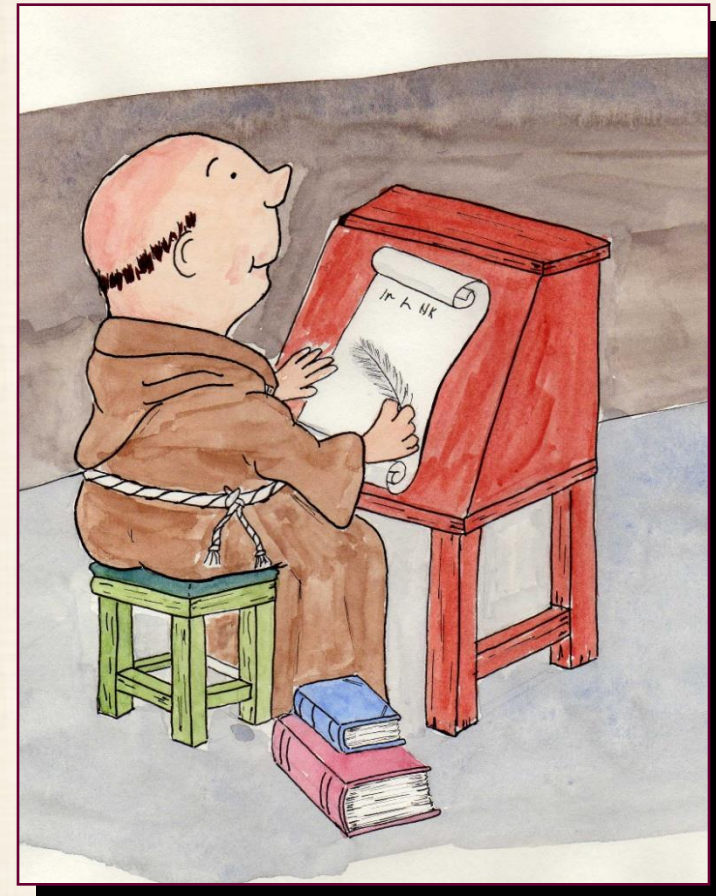
## MYTH ONE:

❖ I'll write when I feel ready

## REALITY:

❖ Start before you feel ready

❖ Finish before you feel ready

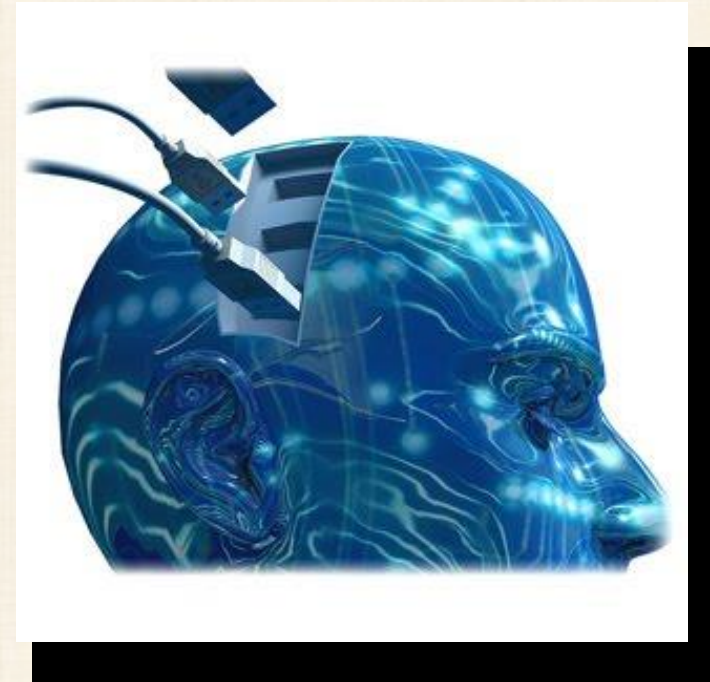


# Writing is not recording

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## MYTH TWO:

- ❖ I'll get it all clear in my head first and then write it down
- ❖ Writing is not recording
- ❖ Writing is creative
  
- ❖ Writing clarifies your thinking

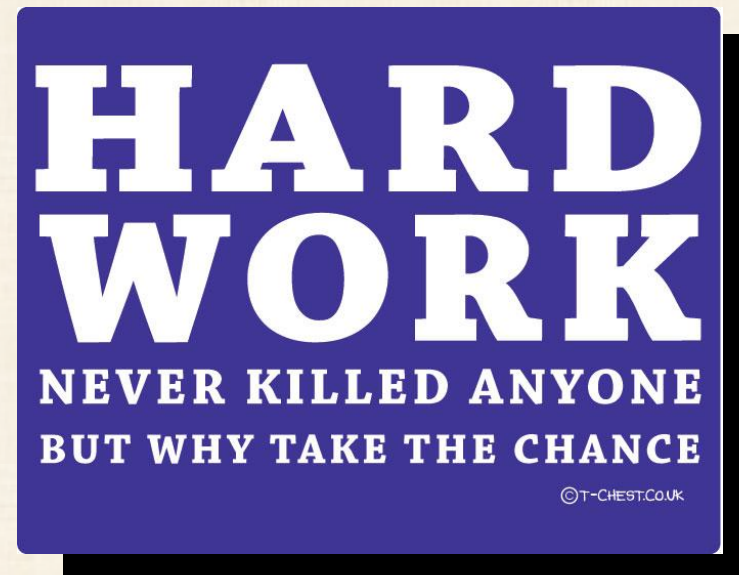


# Writing is often hard work

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## MYTH THREE:

- ❖ Writing should be easy. It should flow.
- ❖ It's not like in the movies
- ❖ You have to show up even if the Muse doesn't!



# The Shuttle-launch Myth

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## MYTH FOUR:

- ❖ All the conditions need to be perfect before I can write
- ❖ If you wait for everything to line up perfectly you will not write very often
- ❖ You need to learn to write even if the conditions aren't perfect



# Creativity

## MYTH FIVE:

❖ Writing to a schedule will kill my creativity.

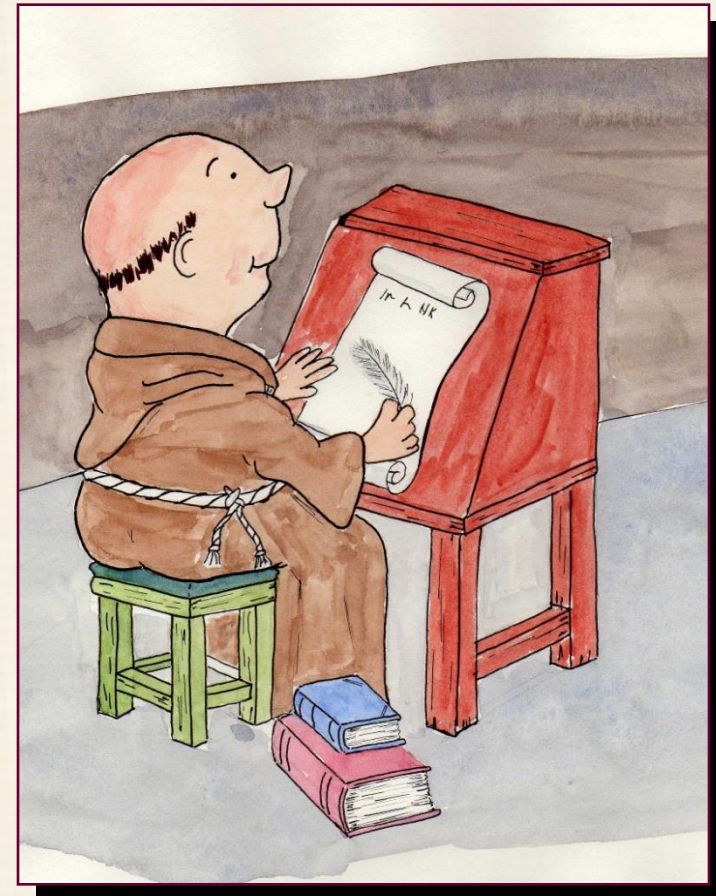
❖ Writers who write regularly have more ideas



# The Myths

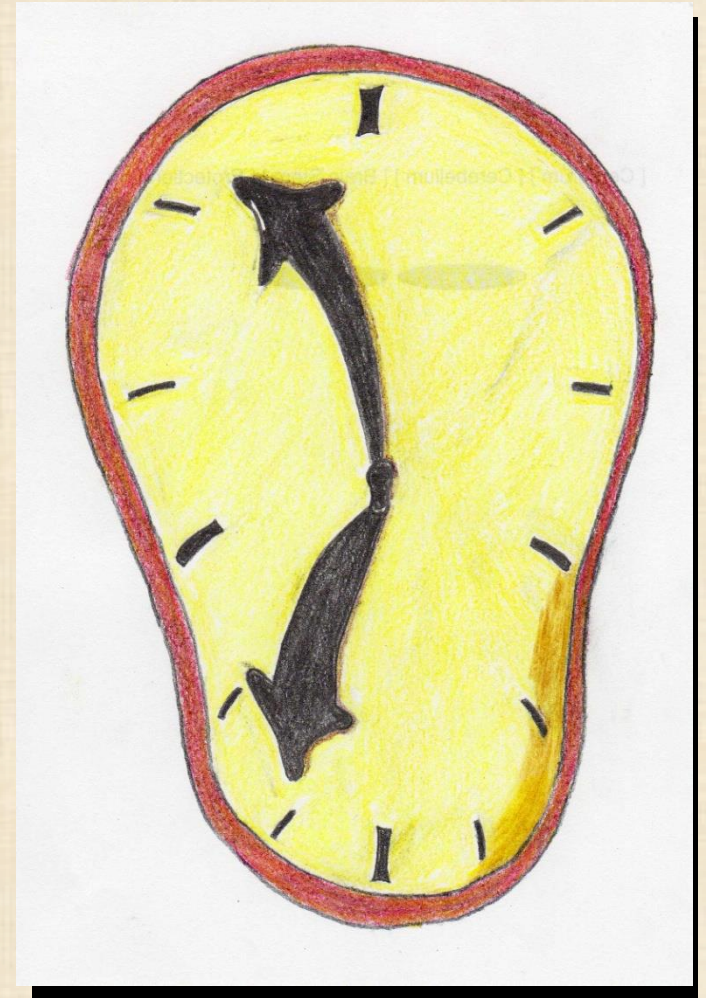
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1. The Readiness Myth
2. The Clarity Myth
3. The “It should be easy”  
Myth
4. The Shuttle-launch Myth
5. The Creativity Myth



## When to write

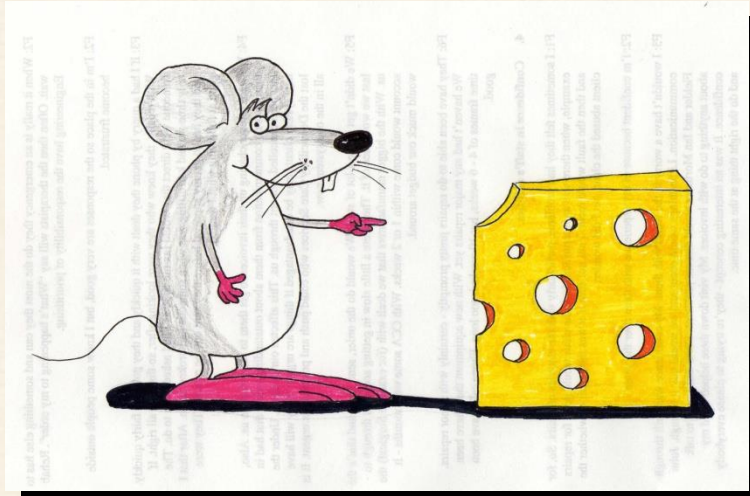
- ❖ Set specific times in your diary
- ❖ A schedule
- ❖ A writing diary/chart





- ❖ Binge writing
- ❖ Regular snacks
- ❖ The 2 golden hours

Write little and often



## ❖ What counts as writing?

### ❖ It's not:

- ❖ Editing

- ❖ Formatting

- ❖ Surfing the net

- ❖ Emails

- ❖ Referencing

- ❖ Photocopying

## Two Golden Hours

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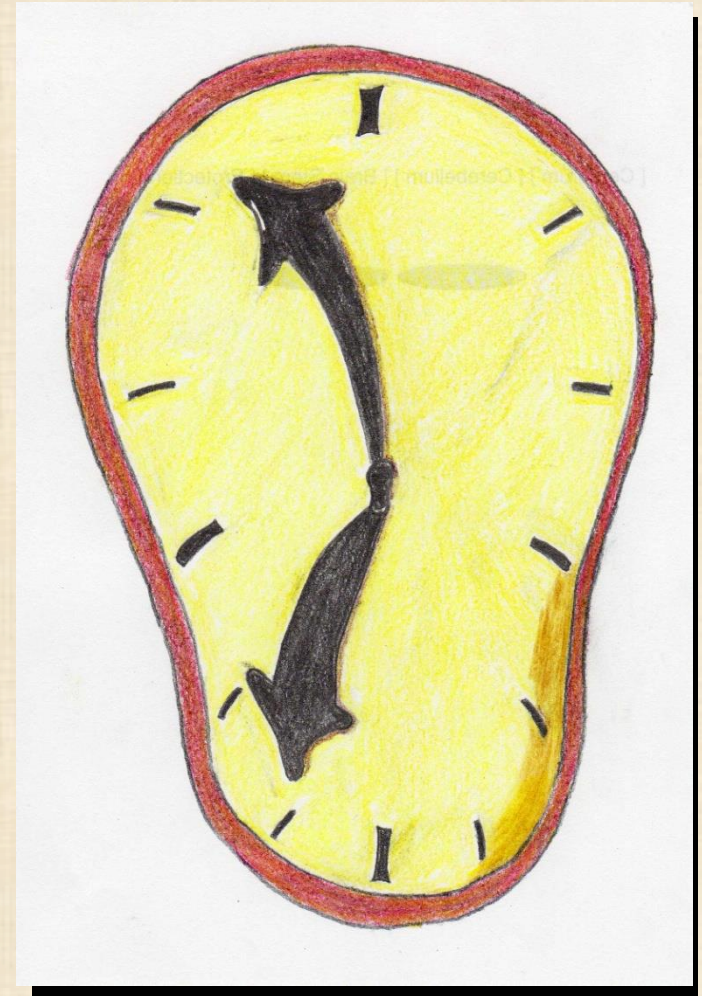
- ❖ Nailing your feet to the floor

- ❖ Assume the position

- ❖ 90% of success is just turning up!

# Write first thing

- ❖ Write early in the day (most people)
- ❖ Distractions
- ❖ Tiredness
  
- ❖ Write when you are awake!



# Where to Write

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- ❖ A dedicated place
- ❖ Close the door



## Where to Write

---

- ❖ A dedicated place
- ❖ Close the door
- ❖ Do not disturb
- ❖ Pull out the internet cable!



**DO NOT DISTURB**  
I'M DISTURBED ENOUGH ALREADY



You've assumed the  
position!

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# **“You’re never alone when you write”**

- ❖ What if it’s not good enough?
- ❖ But what if I’m not inspired?

## The Writing Demons

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# Perfectionism

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- **Situation:**
- You've been working on a difficult part of your thesis for a couple of weeks. You've got a draft but it's not finished. It's due next Friday.
- Your supervisor comes along and says she'll take whatever you've done now as she has some time before her meeting with the Research Committee.
- **Feelings:**
- As she puts her hand on the papers how do you feel

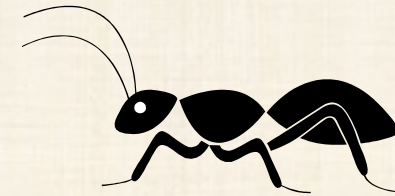
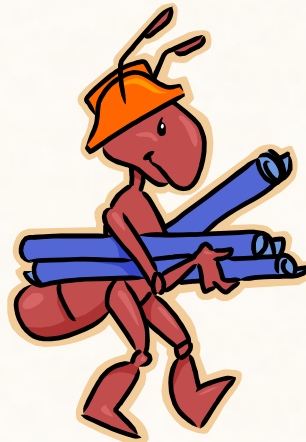


# Perfectionism

Situation:	Handing over a draft
Feelings:	Nervous, anxious, worried

## ANTS

Automatic Negative Thoughts



Situation:	Handing over unfinished chapter	
Feelings:	Anxious, worried	
<b>ANTs</b> <b>Automatic Negative Thoughts</b>		
<b>It's full of mistakes. It's rubbish</b>		
<b>What is she going to think of it?</b> <b>What is her boss going to think of it?</b>		
<b>What is she going to think of me?</b> <b>What is her boss going to think of me?</b>		
<b>It's not fair. They shouldn't do this to me.</b>		
<b>This is terrible. It's a disaster.</b>		

<b>Situation:</b>	<b>Handing over unfinished chapter</b>	
<b>Feelings:</b>	<b>Anxious, worried</b>	
<b>ANTs</b> <b>Automatic Negative Thoughts</b>	<b>AND SO</b>	
<b>It's full of mistakes. It's rubbish</b>	<b>It's going to look like I'm stupid.</b>	
<b>What is she going to think of it?</b> <b>What is her boss going to think of it?</b>	<b>She'll think its stupid. No good. Sloppy.</b>	
<b>What is she going to think of me?</b> <b>What is her boss going to think of me?</b>	<b>She'll think I'm stupid. No good. Sloppy. So will her boss.</b>	
<b>It's not fair. They shouldn't do this to me.</b>		
<b>This is terrible. It's a disaster.</b>	<b>Everyone will find out how stupid I am</b> <b>I'll never get my PhD</b> <b>I'll be kicked out of uni</b> <b>My family will be so disappointed</b> <b>I'll never get a decent job</b> <b>I knew it – I'm a failure!</b>	

# The Imposter Syndrome

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❖ That feeling that you're just one step away from being found out as a complete fraud!

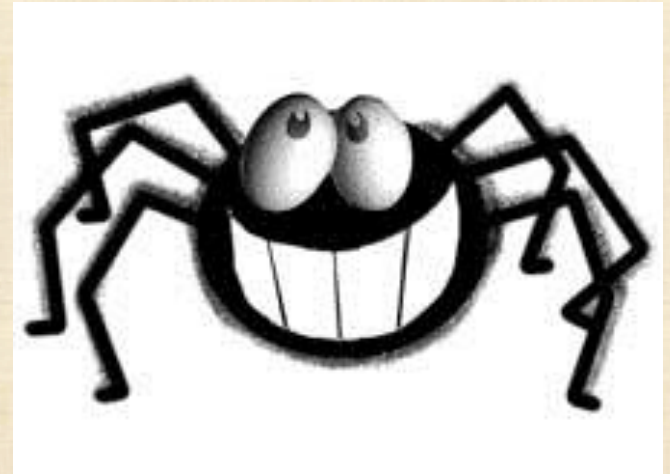
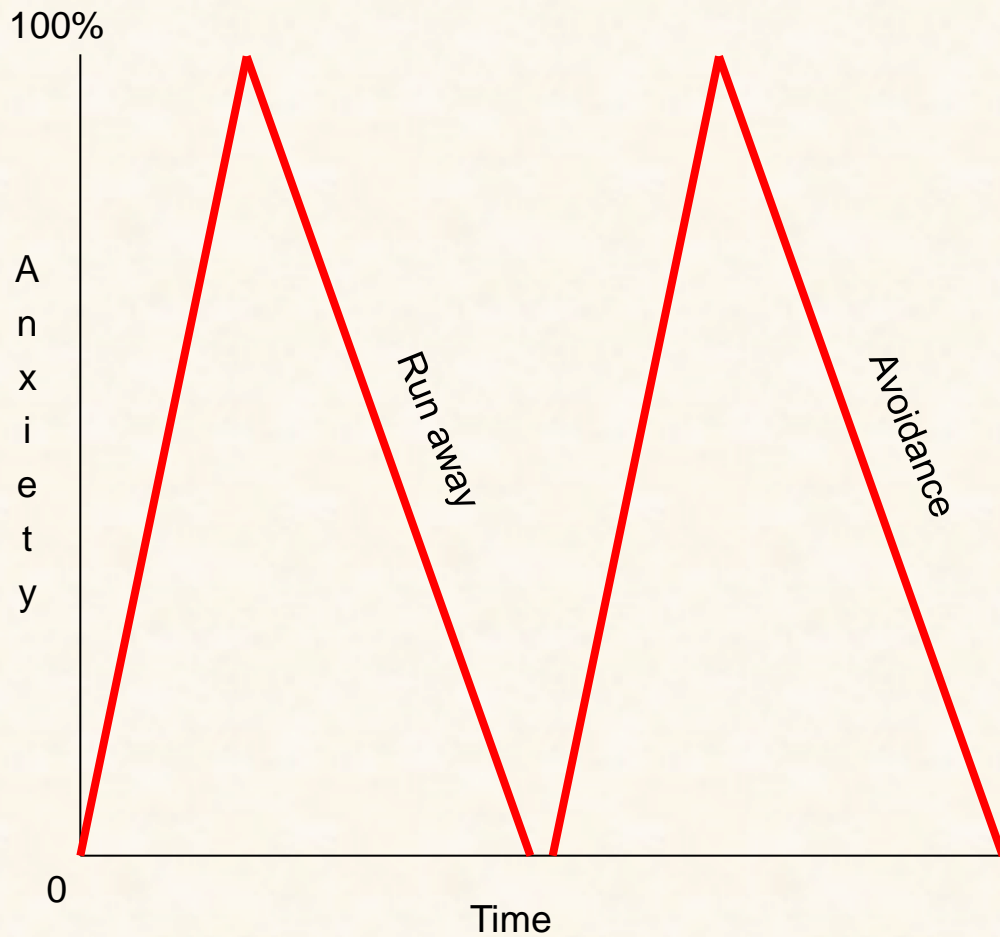
❖ The Fraud Squad



Situation:	Handing over unfinished report	
Feelings:	Anxious, worried	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ANTs</b> Automatic Negative Thoughts</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>AND SO</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MATHs</b> More Accurate Thoughts</p>
It's full of mistakes. It's rubbish	It's going to look like I'm stupid.	It's a draft.
What is she going to think of it? What is her boss going to think of it?	She'll think its stupid. No good. Sloppy.	I've explained that it's not finished.
What is she going to think of me? What is her boss going to think of me?	She'll think I'm stupid. No good. Sloppy. So will her boss.	In the past I've done good work. They know that.
It's not fair. They shouldn't do this to me.		These things happen.
This is terrible. It's a disaster.	Everyone will find out how stupid I am I'll never get my PhD I'll be kicked out of uni My family will be so disappointed I'll never get a decent job I knew it – I'm a failure!	My supervisor said I was going OK They probably would have told me by now Unlikely. They might be disappointed but they would get over it Lots of rich people don't have PhDs Not really!

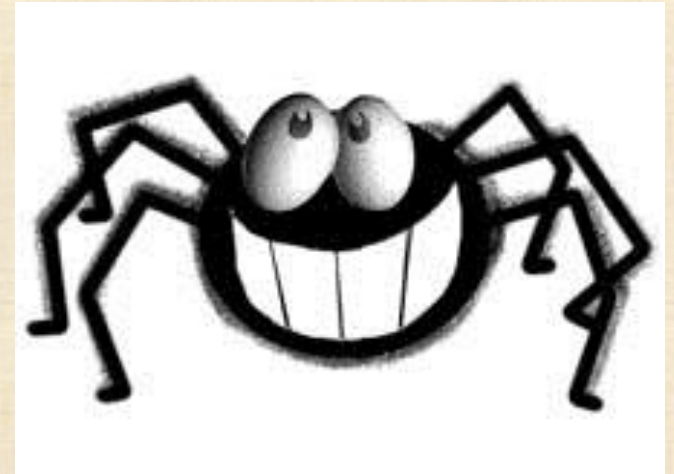
# The Anxiety Model

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# The Anxiety Model

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- ❖ Get something down
- ❖ Drafts
- ❖ Work in Progress
- ❖ Just get the words down

**“To write well  
you first  
have to  
write -  
badly!”**



## ❖ Writing

- New words

## ❖ Editing

- Spelling
- Grammar
- Formatting

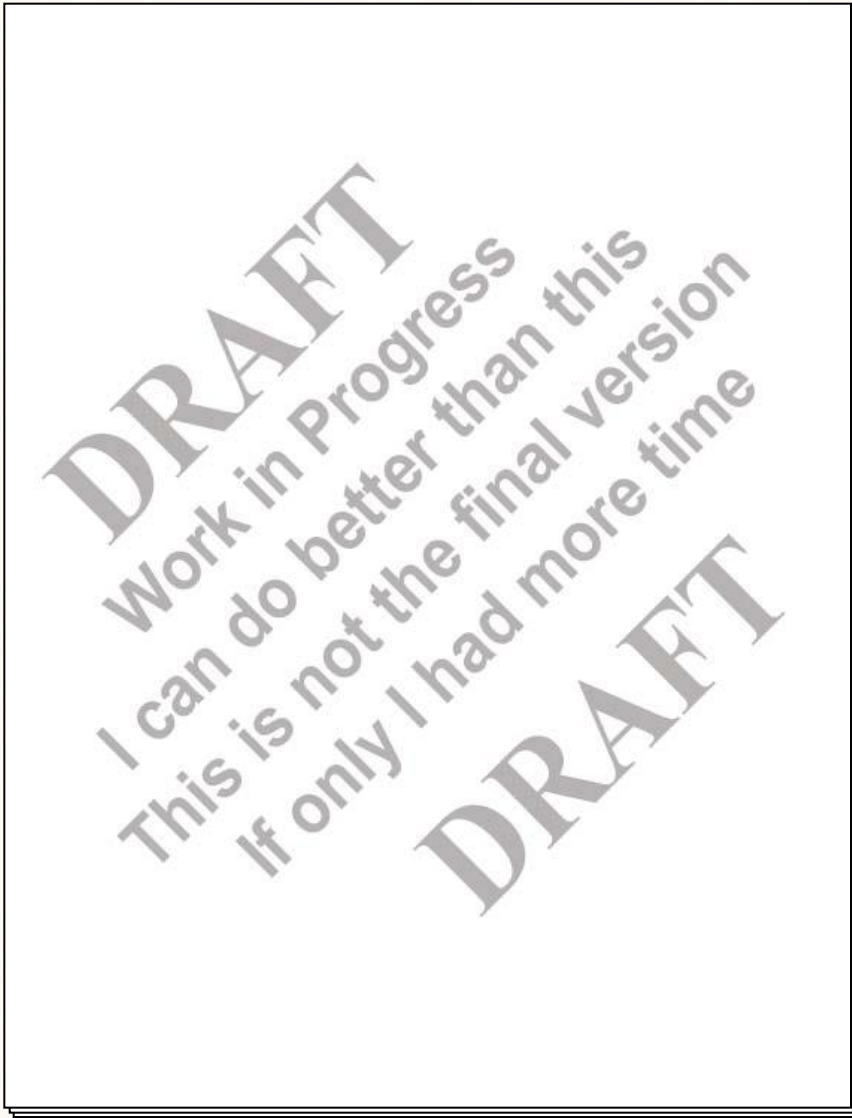
# Writing v Editing

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**Editing  
is  
not  
writing**

# Write rubbish

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- ❖ Zero Draft
  - ❖ Outlines
  - ❖ Brainstorms
  - ❖ Verbal dumps
- ❖ First Draft
- ❖ Second Draft
- ❖ Other Drafts
- ❖ Final? Draft

## COLUMN

# The care and maintenance of your adviser

Graduate students bear as much responsibility as their mentors for ensuring that they are well guided through their degrees, say **Hugh Kearns** and **Maria Gardiner**.

Ever since the advent of graduate school, students have complained about their advisers. It is almost an article of faith. The adviser is never available or is too available; gives too much feedback or not enough; is too critical or isn't providing enough direction; and so on. Exchanging horror stories with other students is a great way to bond. But advising goes both ways — and if, after careful reflection on their own studies and progress, students determine that they are not getting the guidance they require, they must address the deficiencies.

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A proactive approach is necessary. If your adviser isn't looking after you in the way you need, then you need to look after them. At some point in the PhD journey, most graduate students come to an important realization: "This is my thesis. My name is written on the front of it. I need to become the driver." The sooner the

candidate does this, the better. If you're not getting feedback, clear direction or the necessary resources, then you must do something about it. What does this mean in practice? Let us take some examples.

## MEETINGS

A comment we often hear at our workshops is, "My adviser is lovely but he/she is just so busy that we never get to talk about my thesis". And our response is, "Yes, your adviser is busy. All advisers are busy and will continue to be busy. Regardless, you need to organize meetings where you can get real face time and talk about your thesis." We're not recommending a quick chat in the coffee room or a brief word in the lab. Nor do we mean a lab meeting.



We mean regularly scheduled meetings focusing on your thesis. You will probably have to schedule them and follow up to make sure that they happen. And when a meeting is cancelled, you will have to reschedule it and persist until it happens.

In our experience, just scheduling the meeting isn't enough. You can't assume that your adviser hosts productive meetings or can intuit what you need to know. You need a specific, uncomplicated agenda that could include such action items as what you've done in the past two weeks; feedback on written work; what you'll

do in the next two weeks; the next meeting.

This all sounds very straightforward. But if more students followed these steps, many adviser-student issues could be resolved.

## FEEDBACK

Again, in an ideal world, your adviser would be skilled at providing supportive comments, delicate in pointing out areas for improvement and deft at intuitively knowing the level of feedback you seek. But this is a fantasy. One student described her feedback experience as similar to being a victim in a drive-by shooting — she handed over her work, it was riddled with bullets and she was left with a bloodied mess as the shooter drove off.

To be fair, e-mailing a chapter to an adviser and saying "Give me feedback" is like walking into a restaurant and saying "Give me food." You need to be a bit more specific. When handing over your work, identify the type of feedback you are looking for. You might say, "This is an early draft, so I just want feedback on the overall direction," or "Please focus on the discussion on page six." If the feedback you get isn't helpful, ask for more detail. Maintaining your adviser means asking for what you need rather than hoping that he or she will know what to provide.

## MANAGING UP

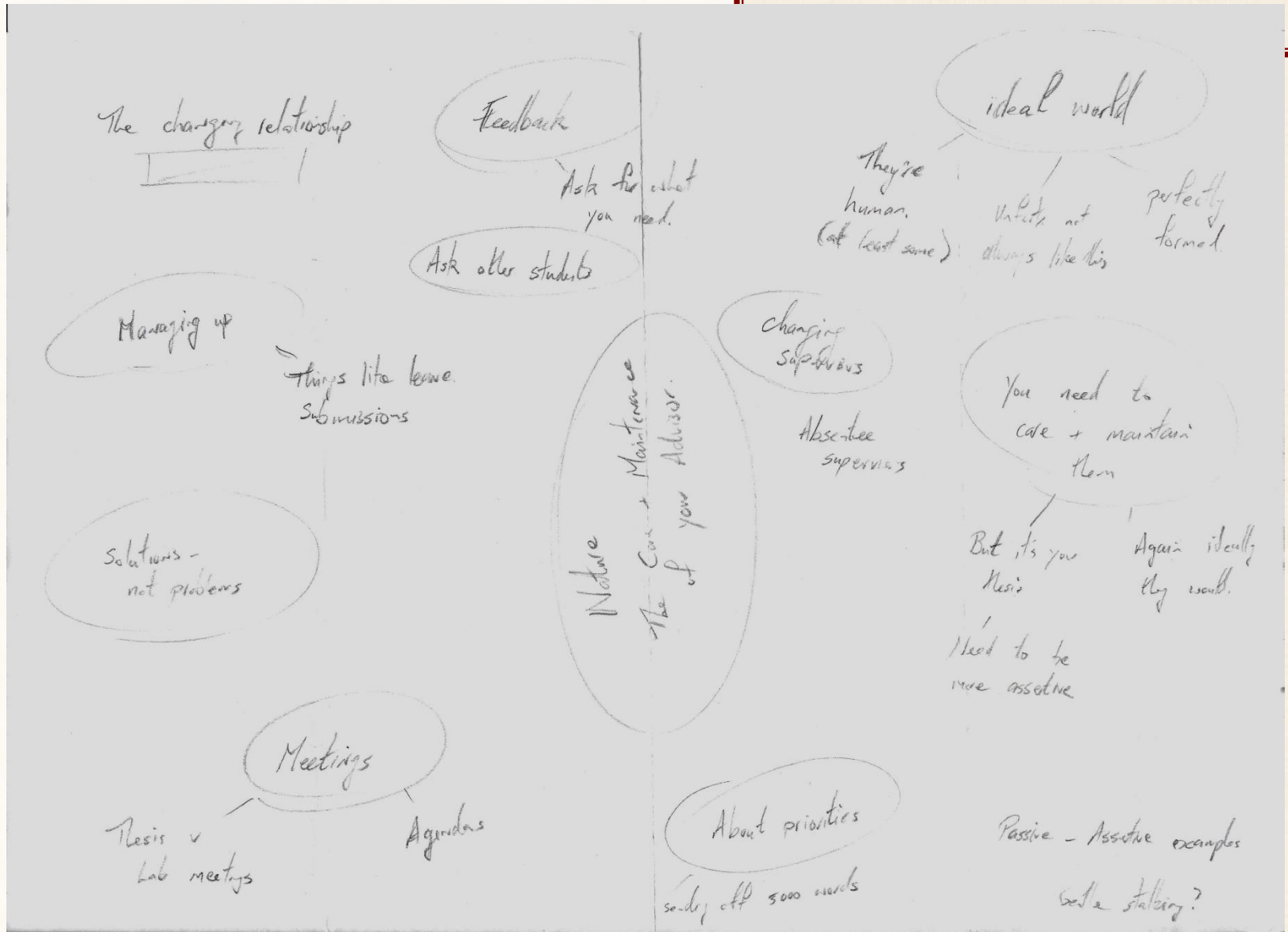
One of the secrets of looking after your adviser is working out what they want — and what most advisers want is a student who comes to them with suggestions and solutions as well as problems, gets things done and makes the job of advising easier. In business this is called 'managing up'. When we work with graduate students we call it the 'care and maintenance' of your adviser.

So although it is natural to complain about your adviser — and can even be cathartic — it is not enough. If your adviser is not giving you what you need, you need to go out and get it. ■

*Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner lecture and research in psychology at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and run workshops for graduate students and advisers (see [hstnkwell.com.au](http://hstnkwell.com.au)).*

# The Final Copy

❖ Nature. Volume 469, 27 January 2011.



Complaining

Opening

The assumptions

It will happen.

They know how 2 do it  
It's not my place.

What it means  
in practice

1 Meetings

2 Feedback

What turns  
them on

solutions  
v problems

what most S want is  
a student who solves problems  
& makes S look good.  
Solutions not problems.  
In business it's called  
managing up.  
In Grad School we call it  
the C+ in of you Adv.

Central  
Theme

You need to be  
the driver.

To be more active

To care + maintain

The Facts

Our experiences  
stories

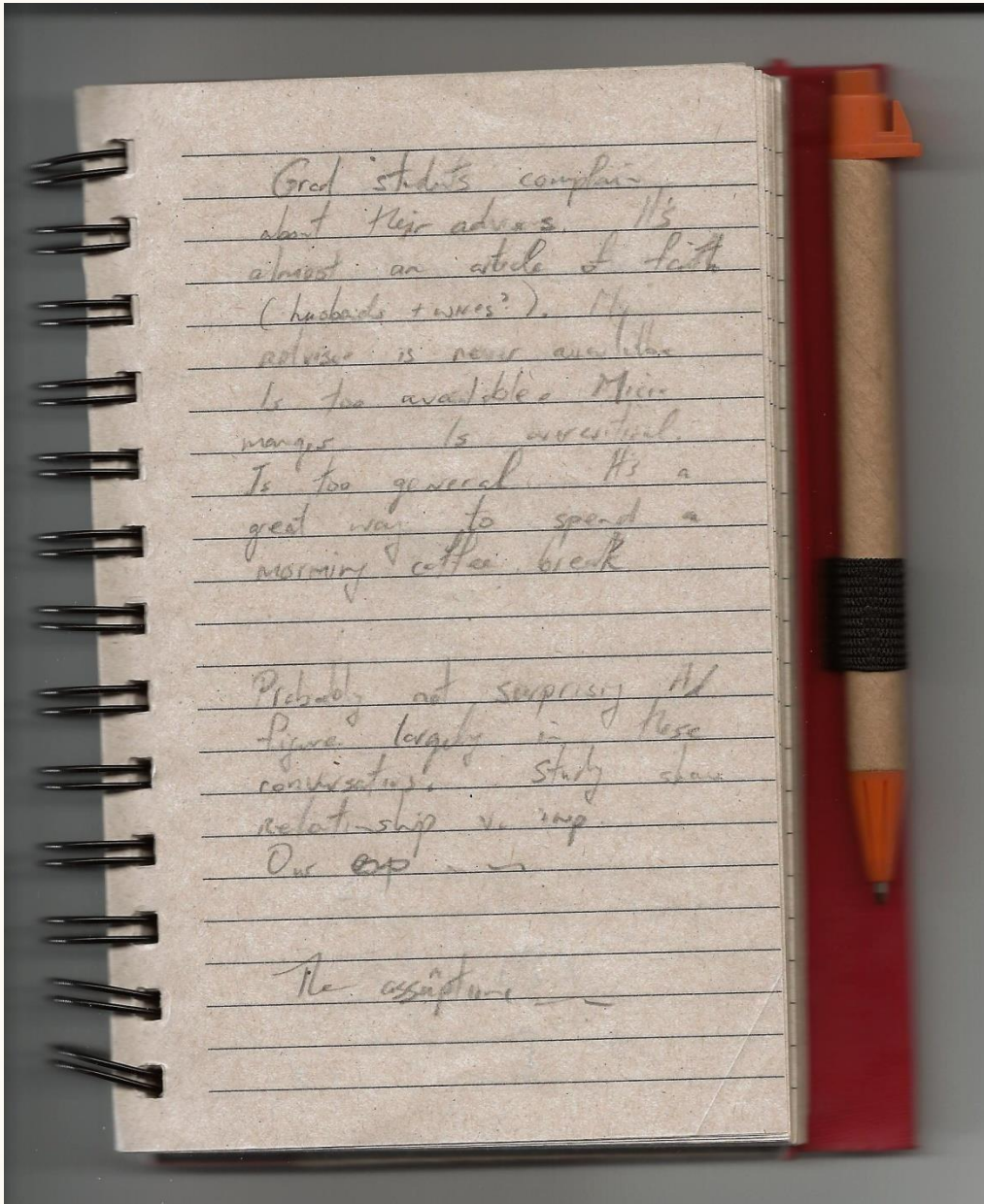
A bit about  
priorities?

Examples

Ass - Passive

Conclusion:

You can complain <sup>who doesn't</sup>  
Can be cathartic  
But if you're not  
getting the thing you need  
go + get it



Grad students complain  
about their advisors. It's  
almost an article of faith  
(Hubbards + Wines?). My  
advisor is never available  
Is too available. My  
manager is overcritical.  
Is too general. It's a  
great way to spend a  
morning & coffee break

Probably not surprising. All  
figure largely in these  
conversations. Study shows  
relationship vs. imp.  
Our exp. is

The assumption —

## The care and maintenance of your advisor

Your relationship with your advisor will have a big impact on your time to completion and whether you complete at all. And it will certainly have a major impact on whether you are still smiling at the end. And since the relationship is so important you'd assume people would spend a lot of time getting it right. But you'd be wrong. In our experience of working with thousands of graduate students across the relationship is left up to chance and the hope that your advisor will turn out to be one of the good ones.

In an ideal world all advisors would not only be intellectual giants but also well rounded human beings with a keen interest in the development of graduate students and highly developed interpersonal skills. Sadly that's not normally the case. Advisors generally turn out to be human beings with all the normal human traits. Just like you and me they have strengths and weaknesses.

And sometimes one of those weaknesses can be advising. After all most advisors learn to be advisors based on their own experiences of having been advised. If it was good they decide to copy that; if it was bad they decide to do the opposite. There's no guarantee either approach will provide you with the advice you need.

And waiting for your advisor to change personality is not a great strategy!

So a more proactive approach is called for. If your advisor isn't caring for and maintaining you then you need to care and maintain them. At the end of the day most graduate students come to the realisation that it is my thesis. My name is written on the front of it. I need to become the driver.

The first step in the care and maintenance is choosing your advisor. Many graduate students end up with an advisor because they are available or because of their name. You also need to think about whether you will be able to get along together. How do you find out? Do a bit of research. Ask other students. Have an informal discussion.

The next thing graduate students need to learn about is priorities. We all make a fundamental assumption in life, that is, that we are the centre of the universe and that what is important to us must be of great importance to everyone else as well and in particular to our advisor. For example as you sit there procrastinating about writing up your findings you might be thinking "my advisor will be wondering why he hasn't heard from me, he'll be waiting for these results". Having worked with many advisors the disappointing news for graduate students is that you are not on your advisors A list. You're probably not even on their B list. And if you are on the C list it is probably near the bottom.

And this has practical implications. You will be working away on your discussion and finally send off your email with 5,000 words attached thinking how excited your advisor will be to receive it. The reaction in reality might be quite different. It's probably a short groan as they see another task added to their list – their C list. And there it stays while they busily work through their very long A list. And several weeks later you are wondering why you haven't received feedback. And console yourself that it is slowly rising to the top of their A list. It isn't!

The care and maintenance of your advisor

Since the dawn of graduate schools, grad students have complained about their advisors. It's almost an article of faith. These range from the advisor is never available; the advisor is too available; the advisor gives too much feedback; not enough feedback; is too critical; isn't providing enough direction. And so on. It's a great way to spend a coffee break or two.

And it's probably not surprising that advisors figure large in grad students conversations. Lovetts and N reported that students who were happy with their relationship their advisor tended to finish faster. CHECK. In our experience of working with thousands of graduate students across the world your relationship with your advisor will have a big impact on your time to completion and whether you complete at all. And it will certainly have a major impact on whether you are still smiling at the end.

And since this relationship is so important you'd assume graduate students and advisors and graduate schools would spend a lot of time getting it right. But you'd be wrong. It's like we make the assumption that we're all adults and we know how to do relationships so it'll be all right. And because you advisor is the world leader in stem cell technology – well he/she must be able to advise. [MORE ABOUT ADVISORS](#)

In the ideal world all advisors would not only be intellectual giants but also well rounded human beings with a keen interest in the development of graduate students and highly developed interpersonal skills. Sadly that's not normally the case. Advisors generally turn out to be human beings with all the normal human traits. Just like you and me they have strengths and weaknesses.

And sometimes one of those weaknesses can turn out to be advising. And this shouldn't be that surprising really. After all, most advisors learn to be advisors based on their own experiences of having been advised. If it was good they decide to copy that, if it was bad they decide to do the opposite. There's no guarantee either approach will provide you with the advice you need. (Advising is private)

The assumption grad students tend to make is that advisors know what they are doing. That it's not their place to question. That if they wait it might happen by itself. The reality is that waiting for your advisor to change personality is not a great strategy!

So a more proactive approach is called for. If your advisor isn't caring for and maintaining you then you need to care and maintain them. Somewhere during the journey most graduate students come to the realisation that "This is MY thesis. My name is written on the front of it. I need to become the driver." If you're not getting feedback, if you're not getting clear direction, if you're not getting the resources you need you need to do something about it.

So what does this mean in practice? A couple of examples.

Meetings

The first thing is getting some real face time with your advisor where you talk about your thesis. Not a quick chat in the coffee room; nor a brief word as they pass through



## The care and maintenance of your advisor

Since the dawn of graduate schools, grad students have complained about their advisors. It's almost an article of faith. Complaints are wide-ranging – advisor is never available; advisor is too available; advisor gives too much feedback; advisor doesn't give enough feedback; is too critical; isn't providing enough direction. And so on. Exchanging horror stories with other students is a great way to spend a coffee break or two. [OK? I assume this is what you had in mind – i.e. coffee break chats among students themselves...] But advising goes both ways – and if, upon careful self-reflection of one's studies and progress, students determine they are not getting the advising they requires, they must proactively take steps to address deficiencies. [OK? Trying to clarify your thesis, as it were, right from the get-go]

It's not surprising that advisors figure large in grad students' conversations. As part of its PhD Completion Project, the US-based Council of Graduate Schools reported in a survey that in 2009 that 65% of the 1,856 respondents identified mentoring/advising as a main factor in PhD completion. We, as part of a careers centre [Is this accurate? If not careers center, then best way to identify? Just trying to very briefly identify your affiliation as it relates to the topic at hand...] at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, work intensively with thousands of graduate students across the world. It's clear that the advisor/student relationship has a big impact on time to completion and even whether the student finishes at all. It certainly influences whether students are still smiling at the conclusion of their degrees!

Because this relationship is so important, one might assume that graduate students, advisors and graduate schools spend a lot of time making sure the relationship is a fruitful, constructive, and advantageous for the PhD candidate. [OK? Trying to be more specific than 'getting it right'] On the contrary, the working assumption seems to be that once a student calls someone an advisor, he or she automatically becomes invested with all the skills of advising they'll ever require. After all, if your advisor is the world leader in stem cell technology, he or she must be able to engage in the seemingly simple task of advising. [OK?] This, despite the fact that a new advisor has virtually no experience advising and receives almost no preparation for the role. Often the success of the whole advisor-student relationship is left up to chance. In the ideal world all advisors would not only be intellectual giants but also well-rounded human beings with highly developed interpersonal who have a keen interest in the development of graduate students. Sadly that's not the case.

Sometimes advising is actually a weakness of an otherwise very accomplished scientist. [OK?] This is not particularly surprising. Advising tends to be a fairly private business and often the only model advisors have is their own experiences of having been advised. If it was fruitful they decide to copy that style and methodology [OK? Or: What exactly are they copying? Trying to be more specific...]; if it was bad they decide to do the opposite. There's no guarantee either approach will provide the student with the advising he or she needs.

Hence, a more proactive approach is called for. If your advisor isn't looking after you the way you need, then you need to look after them. At some point along the PhD journey most graduate students come to an important realisation along the lines of "This is *my* thesis. My name is written on the front of it. I need to become the driver."

See attached.

Overall, looks good. A few queries, some tweaks here and there.

One thing: There is a fair bit of throat-clearing before we get to the recommendations. It's generally justified (i.e. I get that you're basically saying "most grad students are in the same boat, and here's how you deal with that situation.")

But if we have to cut, that'll be the place -- any bits you'd consider more cut-able than others?

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Hence, a more proactive approach is called for. If your advisor isn't looking after you the way you need, then you need to look after them. At some point along the PhD

## COLUMN

# The care and maintenance of your adviser

Graduate students bear as much responsibility as their mentors for ensuring that they are well guided through their degrees, say **Hugh Kearns** and **Maria Gardiner**.

Ever since the advent of graduate school, students have complained about their advisers. It is almost an article of faith. The adviser is never available or is too available; gives too much feedback or not enough; is too critical or isn't providing enough direction; and so on. Exchanging horror stories with other students is a great way to bond. But advising goes both ways — and if, after careful reflection on their own studies and progress, students determine that they are not getting the guidance they require, they must address the deficiencies.

It is not surprising that advisers figure large in graduate students' conversations. In 2009, the US Council of Graduate Schools in Washington DC reported survey results showing that 65% of the 1,856 doctoral students who responded identified mentoring or advising as a main factor in PhD completion. Our own research at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and our experience at graduate-student workshops across the world suggest that the adviser-student relationship has a big impact on completion time. It certainly influences whether students are still smiling at the end of their degrees!

Students often assume that once they call someone an adviser, he or she automatically acquires all the skills of advising. After all, if your adviser is the world leader in stem-cell technology, he or she must excel at the seemingly simple task of advising — not to mention possess highly developed interpersonal skills and a keen interest in graduate-student development. Sadly, that is not the case.

Sometimes, advising is a weakness of an otherwise very accomplished scientist. This is not surprising. Mentoring tends to be a private business, and often the only model available is an adviser's own experience of having been advised. If it was good, they decide to copy that style and methodology; if it was bad, they do the opposite. There is no guarantee that either approach will provide the student with the guidance he or she needs.

A proactive approach is necessary. If your adviser isn't looking after you in the way you need, then you need to look after them. At some point in the PhD journey, most graduate students come to an important realization: "This is my thesis. My name is written on the front of it. I need to become the driver." The sooner the

candidate does this, the better. If you're not getting feedback, clear direction or the necessary resources, then you must do something about it. What does this mean in practice? Let us take some examples.

## MEETINGS

A comment we often hear at our workshops is, "My adviser is lovely but he/she is just so busy that we never get to talk about my thesis". And our response is, "Yes, your adviser is busy. All advisers are busy and will continue to be busy. Regardless, you need to organize meetings where you can get real face time and talk about your thesis." We're not recommending a quick chat in the coffee room or a brief word in the lab. Nor do we mean a lab meeting.



We mean regularly scheduled meetings focusing on your thesis. You will probably have to schedule them and follow up to make sure that they happen. And when a meeting is cancelled, you will have to reschedule it and persist until it happens.

In our experience, just scheduling the meeting isn't enough. You can't assume that your adviser hosts productive meetings or can intuit what you need to know. You need a specific, uncomplicated agenda that could include such action items as what you've done in the past two weeks; feedback on written work; what you'll

do in the next two weeks; the next meeting.

This all sounds very straightforward. But if more students followed these steps, many adviser-student issues could be resolved.

## FEEDBACK

Again, in an ideal world, your adviser would be skilled at providing supportive comments, delicate in pointing out areas for improvement and deft at intuitively knowing the level of feedback you seek. But this is a fantasy. One student described her feedback experience as similar to being a victim in a drive-by shooting — she handed over her work, it was riddled with bullets and she was left with a bloodied mess as the shooter drove off.

To be fair, e-mailing a chapter to an adviser and saying "Give me feedback" is like walking into a restaurant and saying "Give me food." You need to be a bit more specific. When handing over your work, identify the type of feedback you are looking for. You might say, "This is an early draft, so I just want feedback on the overall direction," or "Please focus on the discussion on page six." If the feedback you get isn't helpful, ask for more detail. Maintaining your adviser means asking for what you need rather than hoping that he or she will know what to provide.

## MANAGING UP

One of the secrets of looking after your adviser is working out what they want — and what most advisers want is a student who comes to them with suggestions and solutions as well as problems, gets things done and makes the job of advising easier. In business this is called 'managing up'. When we work with graduate students we call it the 'care and maintenance' of your adviser.

So although it is natural to complain about your adviser — and can even be cathartic — it is not enough. If your adviser is not giving you what you need, you need to go out and get it. ■

*Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner lecture and research in psychology at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and run workshops for graduate students and advisers (see [hstnkwell.com.au](http://hstnkwell.com.au)).*

❖ **Nature. Volume 469, 27 January 2011.**

Write rubbish

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# Academic ENGLISH

# Chapter Titles

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❖ Literature Review

❖ Methodology

❖ Results

❖ Discussion

❖ What I read

❖ What I did

❖ What I found

❖ What I reckon



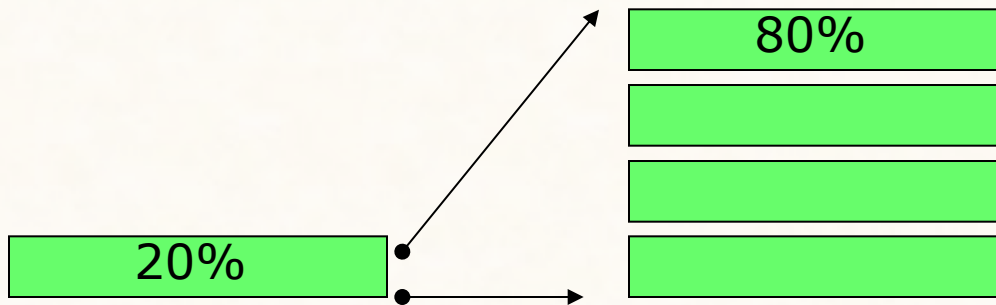
Ladybird



- ❖ Free advice
- ❖ Show your work
- ❖ Ask specific questions



- The Pareto Principle
- The 80/20 rule

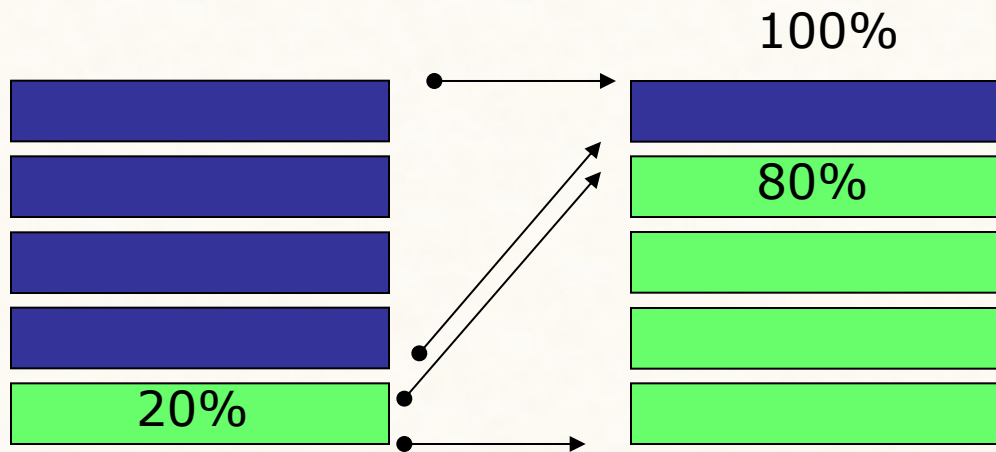




# Perfectionism

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- The Pareto Principle
- The 80/20 rule



# Handling feedback

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- ❖ Have an adult present
- ❖ Have your emotional reaction
- ❖ Then get on with it
- ❖ Comments v Instructions



# Instructions v Comments

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## ❖ Instructions

- You must do this

## ❖ Comments

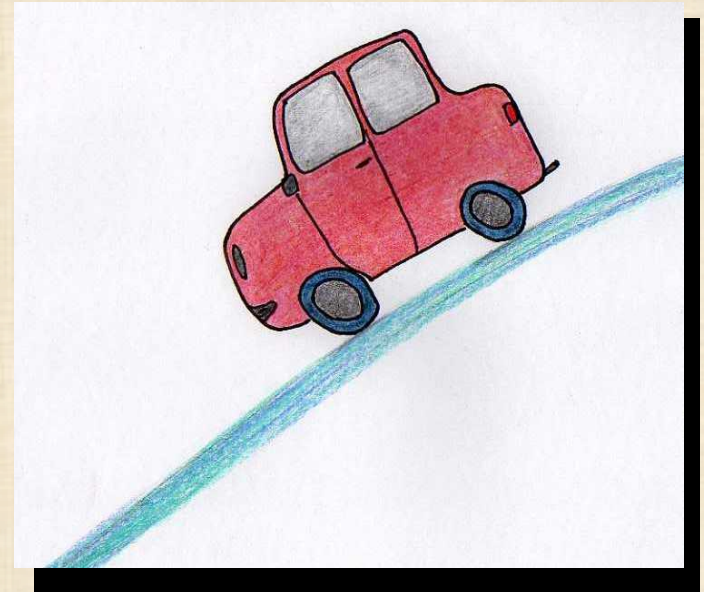
- You could do this



# Quick Starting

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- ❖ Parking your car on the hill
- ❖ Notes to yourself
- ❖ Example

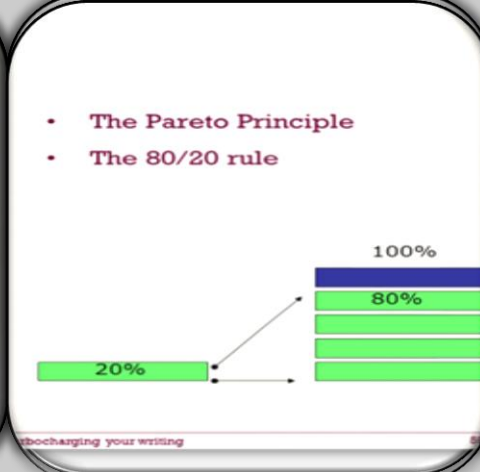
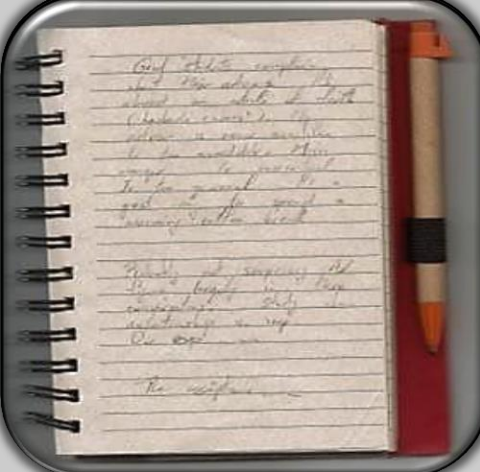


And so?

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- ❖ What action can you take?
- ❖ Small
- ❖ Soon

*I will make the  
changes to  
Chapter 3  
from 9-11am  
tomorrow.*



acknowledgements	Written	% Completed
Title		
Abstract		
Introduction: Everyone else thinks		
• Literature Review		
• Theory		
• Aims, hypotheses/research question		
Method(ology): I did		
• Materials		
• Methods		
• Participants/Matter		
Results: I found		
• Analyses		
• Results		
• Data		
• Discussion/Conclusion		
I think it means...		
References		



# Review



## Two Golden Hours

- When
- Where

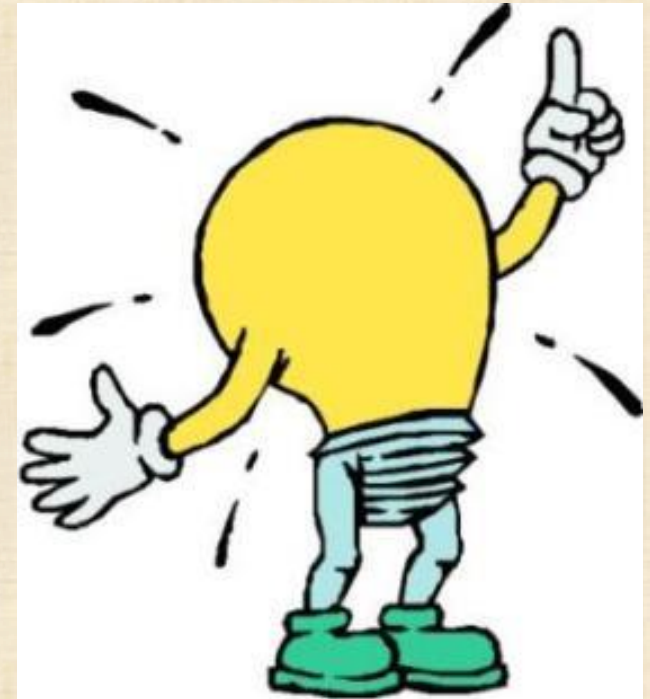
1. The Readiness Myth
2. The Clarity Myth
3. The "It should be easy" Myth
4. The Shuttle-launch Myth
5. The Creativity Myth



Useful?

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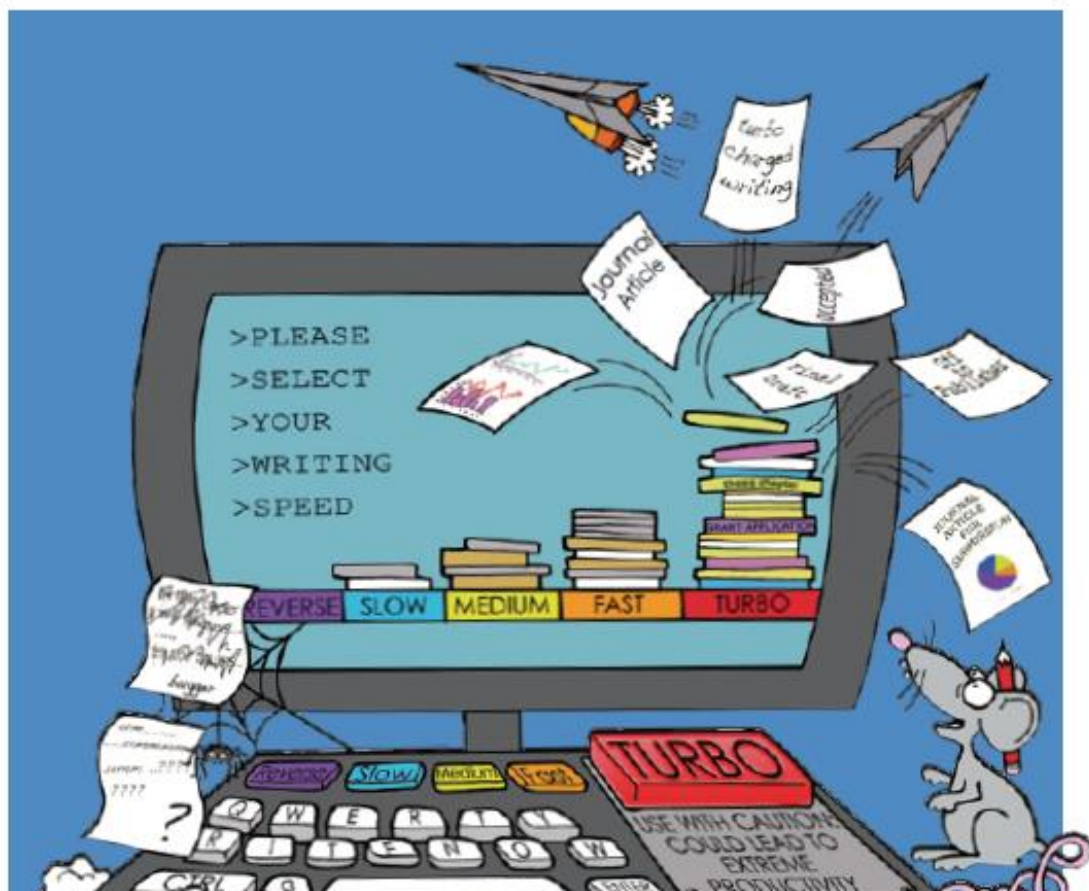
- ❖ What has been the most useful or meaningful thing you got from the session?



# TURBOCHARGE YOUR WRITING

How to become a prolific academic writer

Maria Gardiner & Hugh Kearns





Writers

Write