

Writing from the heart, working with the clock: A practical system for steady academic papers based on my personal experience

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Abstract

Writing is not one activity. It is a set of tasks that draw on different kinds of attention, energy, and emotion. This paper integrates my personal experience and history of my painful writing with an evidence-informed workflow. The approach is simple. Match the task to your energy. Protect long, quiet blocks for analysis and figures. Let mood be a source of momentum. Run multiple uncountable drafts of manuscripts with a clear two-week revision rhythm and transparent credit. Use proverbs to anchor habits: small steps make long journeys, a good beginning matters, and steady pace wins. I conclude with a daily and weekly template, a priority ladder that protects students and university work, and a short Malay *Pantun* that captures the spirit of regular practice.

Keywords Academic writing, chronotype, deep work, contributorship, proverbs

1. Why I Write

Writing is a need in academic life. If we do not write, we are not justified to be working in any university in the world. I began writing diaries in Remove Class during secondary school. In primary five and six my Form Teacher, a retired educator in her sixties, often read my weekly composition aloud during the class time. My vocabulary was limited, yet she valued how I wrote from what I felt and saw. That is where my love for writing began. As a university lecturer I still read to learn. I often draft titles on topics I enjoy with no immediate intention to publish. Some drafts sit until the mood returns. Sometimes I write two or three papers driven by strong emotion. Sometimes I finish a draft that waited for years in a single day. I always *menjiwai* (feel with feelings and souls) what I do, embodying the work, and that comes through in my writing. I am not AI. My energy and focus rise and fall and my writing follows.

2. Proverbs that Anchor the Practice

Malay wisdom says “*Berdikit-dikit, lama-lama menjadi bukit.*” (Small deposits become a hill.) [1]. Another Malay proverb, “*Alah bisa tegal biasa,*” reminds me that what first feels difficult becomes easy through habit. Practice changes how effort is felt [2].

From the Chinese classics: “不积跬步，无以至千里；不积小流，无以成江海。” Without accumulating half-steps, one cannot reach a thousand *li*; without gathering small streams, one cannot form rivers and seas ([http://edu.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0621/c1053-](http://edu.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0621/c1053-31173412.html)

[31173412.html](http://edu.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0621/c1053-31173412.html); Accessed on 13 October 2025). The line appears in Xunzi’s “Encouraging Learning” and is a precise analogue of regular writing and incremental revision [3].

In English letters, Aesop [4] reminds us that ‘Slow and steady wins the race’, and the old saying ‘Well begun is half done’ nudges me to open each day with the hardest paragraph while my mind is fresh.

3. Match the Task to Your Energy

Use your best hours for your hardest thinking. Morning types tend to excel earlier at analytic, attention-heavy work, while evening types peak later. Insight problems can even benefit from non-optimal hours when inhibition is lower, which is why some people solve creative problems better outside their usual peak [5-7]. In practice, I schedule argument framing, the Introduction, and the key moves in the Discussion for my peak; I reserve Methods prose, Results narration, referencing, and formatting for lower-energy windows.

Recent studies on writing motivation and self-regulation support this alignment. Intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and regulation strategies are consistently associated with steadier progress and better outcomes in writing courses and graduate contexts [8-11].

4. Protect Deep Work and Reduce Switching

Analyses and figure building thrive in long, quiet blocks. Interruptions push people to work faster but raise stress, frustration, and time pressure, and task switching itself carries measurable performance costs [12,

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13]. I treat one or two deep blocks per day as meetings with myself. I begin with a brief plan, silence notifications, and stop when the block ends. When I need a starter motor, I use short timed sprints. This practical scaffolding pairs well with scheduled writing routines and even writing retreats, both of which the evidence base recommends for productivity and self-regulation under constraints [14-16].

5. Let Mood Work for You

Mood varies and writing varies with it. Positive affect has modest links with creativity; activated moods can energize fluency or persistence depending on tone [17]. This helps explain why anger or urgency sometimes pushes a stalled draft to completion, while a light, hopeful mood helps in reframing a Discussion. I use the mood I have for the task it serves.

6. Feedback, Social-Emotional Support, and Steady Progress

Quality improves when feedback is timely and concrete. Syntheses show rubric-based feedback, exemplars, and peer review can enhance revision quality and self-efficacy, especially when tools are integrated thoughtfully into the writing cycle. At the same time, steady writing over semesters depends on emotional regulation and social support that buffer burnout in graduate writers, including reassurance-seeking, interest enhancement, and environmental structuring.

These findings fit the lived reality I described above. On tougher days, I lean into structure and supportive collaboration rather than forcing inspiration. On better days, I let mood and momentum carry me further, then close with concrete edits and checklists.

7. A day that Moves Two Papers

Morning focus window: conceptual writing or difficult revision on one paper. Midday long block: analysis or figure building on a second paper. Late afternoon: Methods prose, Results polishing, references, and light editing. Evening or lowest-energy window: proofreading, email triage, light reading. Pomodoro-style sprints can help you start and stop cleanly. Deep work rules help you defend the quiet [15, 16].

8. A Week and a Fortnight That Prevent Stalls

Monday to Thursday, protect two deep blocks per day. Friday is for consolidation and sending things out. Use a two-week revision rhythm for coauthors in which each responsible author has a defined window, then passes the draft to the next person. Before submission, confirm who meets authorship criteria and publish contributor roles so students and junior collaborators receive explicit credit [18-20].

9. Priorities You Can Defend

Give first priority to manuscripts tied to students or junior colleagues. Second comes paid or contracted work with external deadlines. Third is what you most want to write. During any given day, pair one high-

creativity task in your peak window with one low-creativity task later so you can advance more than one paper without sacrificing your best hours. This ordering aligns with authorship responsibilities and time-of-day effects described above [6, 18].

10. Conclusion: Closing Rules I Keep

Write from the heart, then revise from the head. Respect energy. Mood is a signal, not a master. Move a paper one concrete step each day. Protect students by moving their papers first. Let emotion start pages. Let structure finish them.

My reflection on this note can be summarized in the following *Malay Pantun*:

*Embun menitis di hujung meja,
Secawan teh menenangkan hati;
Sedikit demi sedikit menjadi kerja,
Ilmu ditulis, maknanya pasti.*

{Dew gathers softly along the table,
A cup of tea comes calming the heart;
Bit by bit it becomes steady work,
Written knowledge gives meaning made sure.}

Author Contributions

The author did all the research work for this study.

Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest exist.

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