

MENTORING **SPARK**

Quick ideas to light up your doctoral conversations.

► WRITING



SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENTS

The final degree stages can be the loneliest. Students are immersed in a topic where they have become experts, but still face a final examination to demonstrate having met degree requirements. As students approach degree completion, the written product can feel bigger and bigger, and more and more important, since it is the culmination of years of work. Because actually writing a thesis or dissertation is challenging, finding strategies to stay motivated and get the work done is important.



FACULTY FYI

A surprisingly large number of students do not complete their thesis or dissertation because they get stuck in the writing phases. Writing challenges are universal. Regardless of demographic background or discipline, students face similar challenges in academic writing, dissertation/thesis structuring, and completing the written document. Faculty should be aware that these challenges are common, and not indicative of a student's potential or ability. This **Spark** focuses on helping students avoid getting stuck in the thesis and writing phases. Since the number of students graduating can be a metric of success for faculty, it is beneficial to the student and the advisor to avoid students getting stuck in the writing phase.

*Make writing manageable
by breaking it into parts
that are doable in smaller
amounts of time.*



► LEVEL 3

LEVEL 1: GETTING READY TO WRITE

LEVEL 2: WRITING MECHANICS

LEVEL 3: GETTING WRITING DONE



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Incorporate conversations about challenges—skills and/or motivation—into advising practices that are designed to help students improve their skills. This may require faculty to develop these skills.
- Revisit feedback processes (*how the student asks and how the faculty provide it*) to align with the current writing tasks (*setting up the structure, content, polishing, etc.*). Discuss the feedback process including timing, format (*written/verbal*), and avoiding repetitive suggestion loops.
- Establish clear expectations for writing products (*e.g., timelines, formats*) so that the student knows what “done” looks like and what they are working towards.

CONTINUED ...

A RESOURCE FROM:



Use this QR code
to access this and
other Mentoring
Spark tip sheets:





DIGGING DEEPER

- Writing support groups, either in-person or online, can be helpful, and often involve setting goals and celebrating accomplishments.
- The Pomodoro (*and other methods of writing during set times and taking breaks*) technique can be helpful.
- Leverage time management strategies to accurately account for how time is being spent and adjust focus to writing time. (See the *Time Management Sparks* for additional details.)
- Make writing manageable by breaking it into parts that are doable in smaller amounts of time. The smaller parts are less overwhelming to start, but add up to the overall completion.

Please visit the RDI Mentoring Sparks website for examples and links to these tools and resources!



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Offer encouragement on writing and give students time to write. Be sure you are not distracting the student from writing with tasks such as ordering supplies, training new researchers, etc.
- Recognize that students can have emotional barriers to writing (fear, perfectionism, exhaustion, doubt) and talk about ways to mediate those barriers.
- **GOAL Setting:** Set a timeline for degree completion as well as check points for revisiting the timeline.



EXERCISES FOR STUDENTS

1. Create a backward timeline. From the desired completion date, identify critical checkpoints and set writing goals to meet those checkpoints. Be sure that goals are realistic and doable. Consider aggressive goals vs necessary completion timelines.
2. Break the idea of “*writing the dissertation*” into manageable tasks—chapters, sections, even paragraphs for tougher sections.
3. Ask your students to develop a common set of writing times, and establish shared expectations around conducting those sessions.
4. Have your students try different environments for writing, track what works under what conditions, and generate a document as a reminder that getting writing done takes different approaches. For example, sometimes being around other people is helpful, but sometimes quiet is needed. Needs can change depending on the writing task.
5. When discussing what is working or not for students during writing sessions, also ask them about the emotional barriers to writing. Help them name what they are carrying emotionally and turn it into an action plan that can work for them.



REFLECTION & NEXT STEPS

- **Faculty:** Is the student setting realistic writing goals? Do they need adjustment?
- **Student:** What makes a successful writing day, and how can that be replicated? What writing challenges are you facing?

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