

Tips for Moving Through your Div III work

These are tips I have learned from many faculty and staff over the years. Hope some help!
--- Laura Wenk

Break the ideas into chunks

If you are struggling with crafting your argument or putting your ideas together, focus on the idea level instead of the section or chapter level. Write about specific ideas and eventually you will be able to write across those ideas to create an argument or narrative arc. Writing when the ideas are new (while you are reading) will give you more detail in your writing, which is important to creating a cogent argument.

I suggest you read a paper/chapter and write about it right away – even stopping during reading when you hit a new idea to freewrite about that idea. Keep a separate file for each piece you read, tracking the bibliographic information and your thinking about the ideas in the piece including such things as:

- What is interesting and why
- How are the authors' arguments or theories similar or different from what you read elsewhere?
- What is convincing here?
- What did the authors do to get them to their claims?

Discuss with your committee and produce an agreed upon number of these pieces each week – then try to increase the number you can do in a week (depending on how much time you have for this part of the process). Periodically stop and try to write across the pieces, putting the “micro” pieces into the “macro” argument.

Break the work time into chunks

You might feel “I have to just sit and write.” This is unreasonable and can even be paralyzing. Think about writing in manageable chunks. Schedule your time, thinking about such things as:

- At what time of day do you do your best writing?
- When do you best get reading done?
- When are you able to get creative work done?

Make a schedule for your time. Each day schedule something fun, but time limited (e.g. coffee or a meal with friends or a hike, etc.), block out the things you have to do (class time and paid work). Then schedule the remaining time around your Div III work.

Many students find that working in small chunks (say 20 min or a half hour), getting up to stretch, and then getting back to work is helpful. Consider watching the short video at <http://pomodorotechnique.com/> about just such a technique. Try working for a reasonable number of “pomodoros” (25 min chunks measured on a tomato timer). When you are under a deadline, you would need to do more pomodoros. It gets easier to work longer once you see you can get things done!

Change the stakes

As nice as faculty can be, you might fear their judgment or the judgment of peers when you share writing, which makes turning things in feel high stakes. Try not to think about writing your Div III, instead get writing done by lowering the stakes. Here are 2 examples of low stakes writing:

- Changing the audience as you write a section that is giving you problems. For example, as a letter to someone you know and trust outside of Hampshire (a kindly relative or supportive friend). How would you explain their ideas to them?
- Keeping the audience, but changing the expectations of the piece. Write a quick and dirty version for your committee. Agree that the paper is designed to be rough. Spelling and grammar don't count and organization is not so important. The only feedback you will get is on the idea level.

Once the lower stakes writing is done, you can edit it for the appropriate audience and genre.

Change the organization

Sometimes you don't know how to fit the disparate ideas you are considering into a coherent whole. Don't be wedded to a linear outline if it feels constraining or somehow too rigid or even illogical. Break out of the linear mode and create a concept map (sometimes called a mind map) of your work. This can help you focus on what the different ideas are and how they are related to one another. Once you have a concept map, you can tell the story of the map in a linear fashion – but with a clearer understanding of the relationships. Sometimes you might decide you are trying to do too much and it would be better to focus on a part of the map. See

<http://sites.hampshire.edu/ctl/concept-mapping/> for more information on concept mapping

Change the product

If you are constrained by the format and style of a typical analytical paper for an academic audience, you might be able to negotiate a shift with your committee to something more creative and/or practical. For example, students in education might write a practical guide for practitioners that is still well cited and includes their arguments. Or you might produce side-by-side pieces. That is, in addition to an academic paper, you have a creative piece. Be careful not to choose a medium in which you have no experience – that could cause the same or even greater anxiety, just in a different direction.