Advice for New Faculty Members

Nihil Nimus

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Dedicated to a researcher/writer
whose potentially useful efforts to improve human welfare
created more heat than light,
more political than practical interpretation:

Francis Bacon

even as I took early retirement from academe to heal a jaw and back injury: Ann Austin, Jim Cooper, Ken Feldman, Donald Jarvis, Lisa Lenze, Ann Lucas, Bob Lucas, Raymond Perry, and Maryellen Weimer, among others.

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My current respite from academe, after 30 years as a professor of psychology and as director of two large faculty development programs, is proving timely. I needed a break from the political intrigues surrounding faculty development programs and from their sudden changes of climate as higher administrations came and went. Now I understand that I needed time alone, away from it all, to see more clearly the kind of manual of advice I've wanted this to be. Here, in the remote mountains of western North Carolina, I've had a pleasant time rethinking and redrafting this book from its predecessor.

Introduction

Why New Professors Need Timely Advice

If you're beginning (or even planning) a professorial career, I congratulate you. I can't imagine a lifestyle with more opportunities for satisfaction and growth.

Think of it: Professors work mainly at their own pace and on their own schedules; they generally do the things they like most, such as reading and thinking. They have many days off and long vacations, including entire summers, if they wish. Their involvement as teachers and as scholars provides a self-education that can surpass all expectations. Their interactions with students and colleagues can be stimulating and fun; indeed, the depth and worth of such friendships may be unmatched in other professions. And few professors, once settled in, would trade their careers for any other. Nor would I.

Even so, this idyllic career poses hazards; its attractiveness is matched only by its risks of failure—especially at the outset. Innocence of those perils is an invitation to disappointment and despair. Moreover, naivete about the socialization process of the professoriate is wasteful. One fact stands out in my 20 years of studying new faculty: Almost all the failures and miseries of these new hires owed to misunderstandings about effective ways of working and socializing. Never, in my close observations of over a thousand novice professors, did I see someone falter for reasons of inexpertise in his or her area of scholarship. Or from lack of desire. Instead, the most telling mistakes were easily correctable problems such as not understanding how to moderate student incivilities in classrooms, not knowing how to manage enough writing for publication in modest amounts of time, and not learning how to elicit effective collegial support. Something else marked the career beginnings of new hires who would struggle and suffer. The immoderation and excessiveness with which they worked—with far more misdi-

rection, busyness, and disruptive distress than for their successful peers who simplified their work and their lives.

This book, *Advice for New Faculty Members,* never loses sight of the upside of professorial experience, but it remains firmly grounded in reality. Its admonitions are based on long and systematic observation of what distinguishes new faculty members who excel from those who struggle and disappoint, and on careful experiments about which habits and attitudes of exemplary newcomers are most readily mastered by struggling new faculty. *Advice for New Faculty Members* offers simple, practical information for making a good start in your own career—information that too often remains unwritten and untold. It reveals how academic culture customarily winnows its "successful" members from its "failures." And, more important, it focuses on how newcomers can thrive, basically by way of practicing constancy and moderation—what our predecessors in the professoriate, still conversant in Latin, would have termed *nihil nimus* (loosely translated, "everything in moderation"). The idea is anything but new:

> *The [person] who works so moderately as to be able to work constantly, not only preserves his [or her] health the longest, but in the course of the year, executes the greatest quantity of work.—ADAM SMITH,* Wealth of Nations, *1776*

But even if all this is true, why attend to it now, when you are busy with graduate work or enduring the overscheduled first few years of a novice professor? Why not wait until you are caught up and settled?

Why This Usually Tacit Advice for Survival/Success Needs Early, Explicit Communication

The first few years in the careers of professors, beginning at the time they interview for their initial positions in academe, are an enormously critical period. Then, applicants and new hires *most* need useful advice but are least likely to receive it. Then, lasting patterns of success or failure develop with astonishing rapidity. And then, oddly, initiates to professorial careers are *least* receptive to advice.

Too often, novices begin inquiries about survival strategies after their careers are unsalvageable. When that happens, thwarted novices give a uniform reason for not having consulted proven advice such as this earlier: *Busyness.* Only when it is too late do they admit that a few hours a week spent learning and practicing constancy and moderation would have been a wise investment.

You may already sense three other common reasons for resisting advice books (in addition to whatever aversion I've induced with the moralistic warnings previously mentioned):

1. The professoriate attracts self-starting, self-reliant individuals who place high value on solving problems on their own. To seek or accept help, to take direction that might encourage conformity or submission, could signal unsuitability or weakness.
2. The professoriate quietly subscribes to a kind of Social Darwinism that supposes those of us without the "right stuff" will weed ourselves out of the profession. Perhaps because we experienced and survived the same unspoken arrangement in graduate school, we accept its continuation into the professoriate.
3. Usual advice for new faculty is sporadic, anecdotal, and unproven—no matter how well intentioned. In the midst of often conflicting and confusing advice, you may be tempted to ignore all of it.

Harbingers of Change

But there are signs that academe is at last offering useful advice to its new hires; orientations, for example, grow increasingly common and substantial. Indeed, you can spot a traditional Social Darwinistic campus by its absence of orientation programs for new faculty, or in orientations that offer little more than a parade of administrators delivering forgettable depictions of who they are and what their offices do (old-timers call this exhibition a "dog-and-pony show"). You can just as easily tell if a campus has embraced recent research by exposing new faculty to at least some of these aids:

- Introductions to peers in their cohort of new hires, in part to provide possibilities of friendship in what can ordinarily be a socially isolating job
- Meetings with junior faculty who have been on campus from 1 to 10 years and who offer useful, optimistic advice about good beginnings and hidden agendas
- Interactions with selected senior faculty experienced at noticing which new faculty most easily and satisfactorily navigate the socialization ritual
- Introductions to just the few administrators who need to be known from the outset (e.g., one's chairperson and dean)
- Direct contacts with campus faculty developers who provide long-term coaching in domains such as teaching, scholarship/research, and collegiality (e.g., workshops on cooperative learning/teaching)
- Written advice about how to find one's way amongst bureaucrats and regulations, about the local community, about campus and classroom demographics and customs, and about the hurdles of reappointment

Given usual budget constraints at colleges and universities, this ideal set of circumstances may not happen to you. If it does not, you can arrange equivalent experiences on your own or with the help of a book like this one. (I suggest alter-

native books in the Appendix, supposing that by then you will already own mine.) *Advice for New Faculty* provides first-order solutions to predictable hurdles (e.g., finding time for *both* teaching and writing amidst a busy schedule); it also emphasizes general strategies of planning and working that prevent most problems (e.g., starting manuscripts early and working at them in brief, daily sessions, instead of procrastinating and then rushing them in great binges). If that sounds too annoying or time consuming, compared to usual starts in professorial careers, keep this in mind: These simple strategies help produce more and better work in less time and with less strain. They characterize new faculty who succeed with ease. And they help newcomers survive and thrive. It's a fact.

Said another way, these fundamentals help simplify academic work. Here are several examples:

- Clarifications of generally unspoken rules for novice professors and specifications of instances (e.g., expectations that a newcomer will demonstrate independence from graduate school collaborations)
- Dilineation of common career "fault lines" that novice teachers should avoid (e.g., student incivilities in response to a fast and uninvolving pace of teaching)
- Advice from controlled studies about optimal ways of writing with ease, productivity, and acceptance (e.g., writing in brief, daily sessions, even before feeling ready)
- Directives for amplifying the benefits of mentoring (e.g., the necessity of confidentiality in interactions with mentors)

You could look it up, as James Thurber and Casey Stengel used to say; the literature in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, higher education, communication, composition, and engineering now teems with writings on new faculty experiences.

What Makes This Guidebook Unique

The sort of research-based information I've just overviewed, some of it new to the field of faculty development, is the substance of what follows in *Advice for New Faculty*. Its directive format—first about teaching, then writing, and then socializing—represents decades of empirical study as well as careful revision in handouts I once used in workshops for new faculty (and even in manuals for participants in my research-based programs). In a way, I'm saying the same old things over again because they work; but to an extent, I've simplified the advice and exercises ahead. You could find much of the same information in my separate publications about teaching (Boice, 1996a), writing (Boice, 1994), and socialization (Boyle & Boice, 1998). This book, as you might hope, pulls those efforts together.

In an important way, the book does less than before. Where I once interlaced my materials with every relevant bit of advice and expertise I could find from other faculty developers, I now limit such mentions to those consistent with empirical data about new faculty experience. The result, according to new faculty who read and used earlier versions of this book, is less distracting, less tedious, and more useful. I now focus on things proven to matter to new faculty in terms of what to expect, what to try to change, and what to accept.

Each strategy for constancy and moderation in the chapters ahead has four foundations:

1. Each has been documented as consistently distinctive and desirable in the new faculty I call "quick starters"—those 3 to 5 percent of novices who perform in exemplary fashion during their first few years on campus, without apparent help. Briefly, I have identified 21 exemplars—defined in terms of independent ratings of student approval of teaching, scholarly productivity/acceptance, and social approval from gatekeeping colleagues—among the 415 new, tenure-track faculty I gradually tracked through their first years on campus.
2. The exemplars' habits and attitudes became models for normal new faculty—once those strategies were selected in repeated field studies as most helpful to the whole diversity of new faculty. While nontraditional new faculty were underrepresented amongst exemplars as I defined them, they were, without exception, just as able to adopt and benefit from exemplary practices as were White males.
3. Each exemplary strategy has been demonstrated to help novice professors, even those who had been identified by campus administrators as "in trouble," through R/P/T (retention, promotion, tenure) decisions with consistent success.
4. Each tactic has proven economical and enjoyable in long-term use.

Moreover, the broad, practical directives that comprise *Advice for New Faculty* have been verified as helpful for diverse new faculty at a variety of campuses. I first derived its principles at research/doctoral universities and at comprehensive campuses. (Comprehensive universities usually have large enrollments, public funding, and few, if any, doctoral programs. Examples are the California State University system and Appalachian State University, near my retirement home.) More recently, I've observed and interviewed new faculty at liberal arts colleges, technical campuses, and community colleges. Newcomers to the latter two sites benefit just as much as do others from advice based on their own "quick starters."

I've arranged the three sections of this book of advice and information in the order new faculty have told me they want them to appear. Section I explains proven ways of easing the surprisingly hard work of teaching, even at the most elite research campuses with the smallest teaching loads. Its strategies for action over the long run provide novice teachers with comfort, competence, and acceptance in the classroom at a critical juncture—during the first semester or two, when they might otherwise be overwhelmed and demoralized by teaching demands, including disaffected undergraduates and too little time for class preparations.

Section II reflects the first section in its similar principles for writing productively and painlessly. As a rule, these broad habits of writing overlap with those of teaching, but these more productive ways of writing reinforce an often shaky sense of scholarly competence in the nick of time—especially for those of us suffering from postdissertation trauma (a high-priced psychotherapist, as I once was, might label it *PDT*). Finding time for writing amid the busyness common to most new faculty helps in the domain that may count most toward reappointment/tenure: Scholarly productivity.

Section III centers on socialization of novices to professorial careers and it advises new hires about necessaries such as finding direction, mentoring, and collaboration before windows of opportunity close. Although these guidelines for socialization come last in the "preferred" sequence, their messages may apply first in professorial careers. So it is that I encourage you to look ahead to Section III early, before you feel ready.

The underlying principle of this common theme—about working/interacting with constancy and moderation—can be appreciated in another way: The advice in Sections I through III is more about *processes* of working as a professor (e.g., doing the right things in a timely manner and solving the essential problems first) than about *products* (e.g., how to format manuscripts for submission to editors; what, specifically, to include in grant proposals; how to make sense of end-of-semester teaching evaluations). Still, Section III extends practices of constancy and moderation to the fundamentals of "nuts-and-bolts" advice (e.g., what effective mentors can do to help you past the three most dangerous pitfalls just after arrival—social isolation, overpreparation of teaching materials, and an impatient pace that blocks writing).

And while I generally stay on course, I pause occasionally to make an aside like this one: You might wonder why my book isn't centered on the more specific advice found in most written directives for new faculty (e.g., "Don't become buddies with students"; "Don't plagiarize your manuscripts"). The reason owes to a realization I came to while studying exemplary new faculty: The most useful advice begins with general ways of *working* in the professoriate with constancy and moderation. After new faculty learn *how* to work, they more likely benefit from specific advice such as *what* to do in constructing a classroom test or writing a well-formatted grant proposal. Once new faculty learn to work with constancy and moderation, they feel less busy, less threatened, more inclined to try new specifics. And because they slow down to notice the effects of how they work, they grow more likely to see how specifics can be put into practice broadly. So it is that I save most, but not all, "technical" advice until Section III. First things first.

A quick glance at the section and chapter titles and their brief descriptions can help prepare you for what lies ahead, most of it about moderation/*nihil nimus:*

Section I: Moderate Work at Teaching

Chapter 1, Rule 1: *Wait* actively, instead of rushing into tasks like lecture preparation, by practicing patient ways of slowing to notice alternatives and simplifications in what you can say and do. What usually undermines timely waiting? That great enemy of new faculty: Impatience. The same problem about holding back also undermines the moderate pacing of teaching necessary for student involvement and comprehension.

Chapter 2, Rule 2: *Begin Before Feeling Ready.* Once you are waiting actively, patiently, reflectively, you will be primed to begin early on necessary tasks, such as class preparations, before the work actually feels like work, before the work is rushed by looming deadlines. Preteaching can be done largely in spare moments. It generates surprising succinctness and creativity, and it saves time, compared to traditional ways of preparing classes.

Chapter 3, Rule 3: *Prepare and Present in Brief, Regular Sessions* instead of binges. That is, work in a pattern that not only affords a sense of being caught up but also allows time each day for other important things such as exercising, socializing, and writing.

Chapter 4, Rule 4: *Stop,* in timely fashion, both at preparing and then at teaching in class, before diminishing returns set in.

Chapter 5, Rule 5: *Moderate Overattachment and Overreaction* by assuming a more playful and tentative stance, by learning to seek out and learn from criticism while reacting less emotionally to it.

Chapter 6, Rule 6: *Moderate Negative Thinking and Strong Emotions* by working with an inclination to notice, dispute, and supplant disruptive and demoralizing self-talk; by preparing and teaching amid mild emotions to help moderate rushing and superficiality while working.

Chapter 7, Rule 7: *Let Others Do Some of the Work* as collaborators, even as critics.

Chapter 8, Rule 8: *Moderate Classroom Incivilities.* Quick starters show how to moderate classroom incivilities—partly defined as students who arrive late, noisily, and persist in talking aloud when someone else has the floor—with simple strategies of openness, pacing, and patience. This exemplary

move is important because classroom incivilities often start with teachers' own incivilities, however unconscious.

Section II: Mindful Ways of Writing—Same Old Rules, New Perspective

Chapter 9, Rule 1: *Wait, Mindfully* by pausing reflectively to begin work in the moment and to resist old habits of rushing impulsively into prose.

Chapter 10, Rule 2: *Begin Early (Before Feeling Ready)* by way of freewriting and conceptual outlining that soon become prose and complete manuscripts.

Chapter 11, Rule 3: *Work with Mindful Constancy and Moderation* in brief, daily sessions and, after each, with ongoing awareness of what you will write the next session.

Chapter 12, Rule 4: *Stop, in Timely Fashion,* before a product orientation and its rushing subverts your process mode of working.

Chapter 13, Rule 5: *Balance Preliminaries with Writing* by spending as much time and energy on prewriting as on prose.

Chapter 14, Rule 6: *Let Go of Negative Thinking,* by noticing disruptive, distracting thoughts while writing and moderating them until you can write directly from mental images, without much intermediate thinking.

Chapter 15, Rule 7: *Moderate Emotions,* particularly the strong euphoria of writing in binges (and the depression that follows it).

Chapter 16, Rule 8: *Moderate Attachments,* chiefly by way of seeking out and listening mindfully to criticism; secondarily by learning to work with a sense of humor and mindful distancing.

Chapter 17, Rule 9: *Let Others Do Some of the Work* by learning from their criticisms, by employing their suggestions for improvement, by collaborating with them.

Chapter 18, Rule 10: *Limit Wasted Effort* by noticing whether you are solving the right problems, by seeing the savings in terms of time and energy, and by arranging more "success experiences" and their resulting resilience.

Section III: Socialize with Compassion

Chapter 19, Rule 1: *Learn about Academic Culture Early and Patiently.* And so, arrange realistic expectations by understanding customs, eccentric faculty members, and usual faux pas of novices in academe. Extend that inquiry to brief interviews with experienced colleagues, at first as casual then as more formal advisors.

Chapter 20, Rule 2: *Let Others Do Some of Your Work.* Do more than connecting regularly; accept direct help, even mentoring, from colleagues. Extend this social stance to cooperative learning and classroom research approaches in your own teaching.

Chapter 21, Rule 3: *Extend Self-Service to Service for Others.* Exemplary new faculty say, "Not until you take adequate care of yourself should you begin to perform service on and off campus" and "When you do begin to serve others, start close to home, where you are most readily qualified, by collaborating with other new faculty who need constancy and moderation in work." This exemplar-based approach to service begins with reading, observing, and interacting to understand new faculty experience, in general, then the special challenges faced by nontraditional new hires. I've abstracted some crucial readings about that latter experience, and then a pioneering study on the special pitfalls for women and minorities to illustrate how extremes educate and sensitize us. That experience, if carried out in exemplary fashion, often extends to service as cooperative collaboration with other new faculty most in need of help.

Feeling overwhelmed at the prospect of covering all that? Then please notice what I've just implied in the preceding schematic: For one thing, all three sections revolve around simple, proven ways of working at professorial tasks; every way of working is about moderation, about saving you time while enhancing your performance, survival, and happiness. Second, I've prepared all this advice and information with general brevity and directness, always based on tests of what is most effective for new faculty over the long run. And third, this book is *not* designed to be read and put into practice in a single sitting. Or even a few. In advising you how to read and use it, I repeat the advice of one of the greatest teachers of efficient ways of working and playing:

Be quick, but don't hurry. —JOHN WOODEN

All you need do is suspend your impatience with a book that tries to teach patience and moderation— during what may be the most impatient and immoderate period of your life. It's not as difficult as it sounds.

Section II

Write in Mindful Ways

Rationale for a Mindful Approach to Writing

Why does usual advice for new faculty exclude writing? Tradition assumes that professors already know how to work as writers; new faculty, after all, have almost always written a thesis or dissertation. So, custom limits most advice for new faculty to teaching because teaching seems less sufficiently mastered (or less examined) than writing during graduate training. Academe further justifies this narrowness by claiming that writing grows at the expense of teaching (and vice-versa); it even assumes that advice about teaching and writing depend on very different and contrary kinds of expertise. Add to those another fact, that most books of advice for new faculty are written by academics who value teaching over research, and the conventional emphasis is understandable.

How well does that customary and one-sided approach—of help for teaching but not for writing—work for most new faculty? In my studies of hundreds of novice professors at a variety of campuses, the result is disastrous. According to resumés submitted periodically to departmental files, the great majority of new faculty struggle as scholarly writers; during years 1 and 2, over two-thirds of them produce virtually nothing that "counts," despite their earlier plans for substantial new output during that critical period (Boice, 1992). For many newcomers, especially those caught up in busyness, this silence continues into years 3 and 4, often well beyond. Meanwhile (as depicted in Chapter 8), most novice professors, even those who read traditional books of advice, make awkward and time-consuming starts as teachers.

Reasons Why Most New Faculty Struggled with Writing in My Studies

1. *They did not learn how to write with fluency and constancy in graduate school.* Instead, most worked on proposals and dissertations erratically and

painfully, often procrastinating their writing far longer than they imagined possible. The mean length of time for dissertation completion in most disciplines—once courses and qualifying exams are completed, once the research proposal is accepted and the data are collected/analyzed—stands now at 4 years, depending on discipline, and is ever growing. Shameful numbers of graduate students remain ABD (all but dissertation) for 10, even 20 years before finishing. Disproportionate numbers of nontraditional graduate students never finish.

2. *They too often learned to work in isolation.* In my own direct observational studies of graduate students during the dissertation stage of their careers, one reason stands paramount for the miseries and delays: Dissertation writers are traditionally left to work alone with little day-to-day direction, and with the expectation they will not bring written materials to committees until the work is essentially finished and perfect. For better and for worse, that pattern of working at writing alone and with high demands for perfectionism tends to persist into professorial careers.
3. *Writing, by nature, seems more difficult.* Its scheduling in academe is often left open ended, with few clear directives or deadlines in the short run (or, in the case of dissertations, in the long run). Not only is writing more easily put off than teaching but it is also, because of old associations with uncertainty and pain, more tempting to procrastinate. Writing—at least at first—cannot provide the quick relief from the feeling of not doing enough that teaching can.
4. *Writing usually remains mysterious.* Indeed, writing offers peculiar challenges that few of us have been helped to understand. Only a handful of scholars (e.g., Weissman, 1993) have usefully explained the roots of those difficulties, such as (a) expectations, apparently left over from the days of inspired poetry, that we should await Muses and the opportunity to produce the writing in a single, brilliant burst; and (b) brain mechanisms that commence the writing process by way of nonverbal images and that require either strong excitement or else profound calm (plus, ideally, some conceptual outlining or other prewriting on paper or screen) to help translate those images into linear prose. In the absence of that information, we all too easily suppose that writing works in magical ways, without explicit rules or understanding.
5. *Most of us were imprinted with mistaken ideas about the nature of writing, probably during our school years.* Dominant among those is the misbelief that writing is best done in large blocks of uninterrupted time, when writers are at last motivated and inspired, when production can be spontaneous and brilliant. The problem is that writers who wait for such ideal circumstances usually wait a long time. A second popular fallacy is that good writing needs no outlines or other careful preplanning, that it happens best in a single and spontaneous sitting.
6. *New faculty approach writing with all-or-none thinking.* Once we are rushed and stressed, we too often believe we can *either* master teaching *or* scholarly writing during our first few years, but not both. So it is that some books of advice (e.g., Rheingold, 1994) counsel new faculty to put off writing until teaching is mastered. Without effective practices of working at teaching, that could take too long.
7. *New faculty who do little of the writing they had planned for years 1 through 3 have so ready and sincere a defense that they can see no alternative explanation.* They are, they almost always say, too busy to write. In the main, they feel too overloaded by teaching—preparing class materials, grading papers and tests, keeping office hours—to attend to writing in proper fashion. They complain that ongoing demands of teaching and committee work leave few of the large blocks of uninterrupted time they supposedly need for apt writing, or that when they've worked all day at other things, they have no energy or interest left for writing.
8. *New faculty often reject simple, efficient ways of writing as counterintuitive, even as insulting.* That is, they prefer to do what they imagine geniuses do as writers: Struggle and suffer but nonetheless do their best work without constraints such as rules. In fact, though, the simple efficiencies of constancy and moderation produce far more creativity and better writing than rule-free spontaneity. I present data to this effect in the chapters ahead.

What else happens when writers shun these efficiencies? They feel disappointed about not being able to develop and communicate exciting ideas, and about lost opportunities for professional visibility and portability (even at teaching campuses). Stress is associated with writing that is delayed and then forced under deadlines. And, eventually, dislike for scholarly writing evolves when we write because we must and without time for reflection or preparation. (Imagine sex under similar circumstances.)

How many new faculty in my observational studies found constant, creative output as writers while relying solely on mindless spontaneity? None. How many survived the tenure/reappointment process at campuses that require writing of publishable manuscripts and fundable grant proposals? Virtually none. No wonder that the number of us who actually write for publication is the square root of those who want and intend to (Boice, 1993c).

Exemplary new faculty, as in Section I on teaching, model better ways of working at writing. They get writing underway by learning to work in brief, daily sessions that seem impossibly brief at first. They learn ways to simplify and clarify writing, even to enjoy it. And their constancy and moderation produce more manuscript pages with more likelihood of publication in refereed and prestigious outlets.

One more thing distinguishes thriving new faculty from struggling peers. These quick starters work efficiently; they do it in an even deeper way than we have yet to discuss in this book. Exemplars are "mindful" about their work at writing.

What Mindfulness Has to Do with Writing

On first reflection, mindfulness and writing might seem worlds apart. Mindfulness means a calm attentiveness to the present moment. Its basics—of being here, now, with clear seeing and compassion—are commonly practiced in a meditative state. And mindfulness practice often aims consciousness away from thinking and external doing:

> *In practicing meditation, we're not just trying to live up to some kind of ideal—quite the opposite. We're just being with our experience, whatever it is. . . . Just seeing what's going on—that's the teaching of awakeness right there.—PEMA CHODRIN*

> *Mindfulness practice means that we commit fully in each moment to being present. There is no "performance." There is just this moment. We are not trying to improve or to get anywhere else . . . [but] to dwell in stillness and to observe without reacting and without judging.*
> *—JON KABAT-ZINN*

Writing, on the other hand, usually gets portrayed as hard work that strains the intellect and overstimulates the emotions. Even some of its most celebrated practitioners struggle and suffer at writing:

> *It was not an instant or easy process, and throughout [Charles] Dickens's writing life the symptoms at the beginning of a new novel are the same. "Violent restlessness, and vague ideas of going I don't know where . . ." Dickens becomes irritable, solitary, preoccupied. . . . At the close of each book he was almost as irritated as he was at its beginning, and he would go wandering once more in a "sorrowful mood."*
> *—PETER ACKROYD*

> *When things were not going well and the characters did not spring into being, [Joseph] Conrad became tormented by neurasthenia, which crippled his attempts to write: "My nervous disorder tortures me, makes me wretched, and paralyzes action, thought, everything! I ask myself why I exist. It is a frightful condition. Even in the intervals, when I am supposed to be well, I live in fear of the return of this tormenting malady . . . before the pen falls from my hand in the depression of a complete discouragement."—J. MEYERS*

Even less artful or renowned writers expect their practice of writing to be anything but the calm and patience of mindfulness. Why? Because they, like us, learned to write in mind*less* binges where our mania temporarily outraced our fears and doubts, and because most of us have associated writing with deadlines, exhaustion, and criticism.

Why haven't more of us found attractive and productive alternatives to writing in such mindless, joyless ways? The methods for writing in mind*ful* ways have not been obvious. But then, neither have ways of mindful living. So it is that too many of us live as we try to write: Amidst the constant busyness, anxiety, and fatigue of mindlessness. Mind*ful* ways are simpler, healthier, and more amiably rewarding.

You may already know mindful ways of working, in preliminary fashion, from practicing patient, reflective, and socially sensitive ways of teaching (Section I). How else can you learn about mindful ways, especially in regard to writing? As a first step, look to the extraordinarily fluent writers who have made mindfulness central to their work, and then to the intriguingly serene writers who explain mindful practice.

What Exceptional Writers Hint about Mindful Practice

Indications that mindfulness helps writers write are anything but new, just uncommon and usually unknown. One old insight about mindfulness is shared by writers who have managed both productivity and health in their work, the one by Adam Smith that we saw at the beginning of this book: Constancy and moderation lead to the most output and well-being in the long run. In effect, he argued that workers, including writers, would profit by being consciously present and patient in their efforts, by working regularly and enjoyably but without strong emotion.

The normal experience of writers is quite different, as typified by this comment from an author, Stanley Karnow, appearing on the television program for prominent writers, *Booknotes* (Lamb, 1997):

> *I don't know any writer who thinks that writing is fun.*

Indeed, folklore teems with macabre jokes about writing being no more difficult than opening a vein, submitting to torture, or contracting with the Devil.

Among the prolific and healthful novelists who practiced constancy and moderation was Anthony Trollope (1883). He not only found time to write during an innovative and full-time career with the post office (he invented the corner dropbox); his consistent and serene style made the writing relaxing, renewing, and voluminous.

Even some writers who don't quite find serenity and sanity in their work use writing to change and better themselves. E. B. White, for instance, surmised that we would do better to write mindfully as a means of organizing our "character" than to try to improve ourselves before writing (Elledge, 1984). Teddy Roosevelt, among others, wrote when depressed, to clear his mind of pessimistic thoughts and maladaptive emotions (Morris, 1979). Otto Rank, once a favorite disciple of

Freud, first wrote to find creative ways past his neuroses and then renounced public writing to put that creativity to work in the exclusive service of simplifying his personality (Lieberman, 1993).

What Contemporary Writers Hint about Mindfulness

In her best-seller *Bird by Bird,* Anne Lamott (1994) describes how her father, by coaching himself to work at writing each day, learned to "pay attention" (i.e., be mindful) and take charge of his own life. Mindful ways of writing not only taught her father (and presumably her) to finish things but to see how writing surprises, enlivens, and educates the writer. How, exactly, can her readers achieve a similar result? There are clues but no specifics—for example, Lamott's delightful sense of humor and self-deprecation could be the result of mindfully distancing herself from taking writing too seriously, too personally.

Natalie Goldberg's (1994) *Long Quiet Highway* comes even closer to explaining a mindful path for writers. She supposes that meditation and writing complement each other because both depend on allowing ourselves to "let go" and settle within our minds. Writing, in her experience, connects us with what we really feel and think; staying with that connection, patiently and persistently, could become our daily practice of mindfulness—in place of mindfulness practiced as meditation without external doing.

There are still more clues. Consider just a few from popular books by experts on mindfulness. In this preliminary look at how mindfulness and writing interact, I draw most on three current favorites: Sylvia Boorstein's *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There* (HarperCollins, 1996); Pema Chodrin's *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* (Shambhala, 1997); and Jon Kabat-Zinn's *Wherever You Go, There You Are* (Hyperion, 1994). Additionally, I rely on more scientific works such as *Mindfulness* by psychologist Ellen Langer (Addison-Wesley, 1989). I've chosen to limit the categories of mindfulness to seven relatively uncomplicated and conventional practices. And in each I move boldly to expand what these writers have said to suggest ways that mindfulness applies to writing:

1. *Mindfulness as being awake:* The experience of awakeness begins with the elementary act of stopping to notice our customary reactions to ongoing experience. Awakeness alerts us when we are caught in blind thinking or impulsive action, unaware of why we are doing what we are doing. Once awakened, we become more aware and involved. We might even begin to sense that we ordinarily use the blind rushing of busyness to escape and avoid threatening tasks like writing for public consumption.

2. *Clear-seeing:* The more we stay awake by remaining in the present moment, nonjudgmentally, the more clearly and objectively we see. With clear-seeing, we begin to notice how our usual struggles lead to suffering. Perfectionistic myths about geniuses who create masterpieces in a single session are a good example, once we notice how these misbeliefs unnecessarily pressure and complicate work. This clear seeing of what matters in our work helps us unlearn dependencies on the short-term emotional relief of speeding or perfectionism and their kin, procrastination and blocking.

3. *Calm efficiency:* With wakefulness and its clear seeing comes an efficacy that does not need severe disciplines. Just by noticing when and where to focus mindfulness, we experience more freedom, more initiative, more resolve. By staying in the present and noticing the effects of our experience, we learn to spend less energy on needless struggling or on its equally inefficient opposite, impulsivity. As we aim our minds to see what needs doing and what can be done, we are less often trapped in mindless acts of panic, doubt, conflict, or misdirection. By calmly accepting the moment for what it reveals, we help make work like writing more contemplative and creative.

Restated, mindfulness in work is tantamount to a process orientation—the opposite of a product orientation where we work principally for productivity, public approval, external reward. A *process* mode of working centers on staying and learning in the moment, the only time we can work efficiently. Process awareness, with its calm, reflective centering in the present, enhances decisiveness and lessens dependence on moods or surrounds. Its efficiencies include a surprising sense of reality about timeliness (e.g., the realization that important practices like writing need to be addressed now, not at some vague point in the future when we hope for better circumstances such as more free time).

4. *Freedom from excessive emotions and busyness:* Mindfully slowing down to the present calms us by way of a moderate pace. Its clear seeing encourages contemplation and patience in decisions and actions that might otherwise be impelled, blind, exhausting. And as we notice the long-term costs of rushing and bingeing at tasks such as writing, we undo old addictions to speed, even to chronic hopes that a better circumstance or self must lie ahead if we just work harder and faster. Without the usual blindness and busyness in work (e.g., writing), we can replace impatience with loving kindness for ourselves, even for our critics.

Freedom from chronic extremes in emotions, from ceaseless haste and its disillusionment, means more serenity and cheerfulness in working. It means less dependence on the emotional rushes of near-mania for motivation, and less exposure to the debilitating depression and pessimism that follow the immoderation of bingeing. Most clearly, it means freedom to work at important, worthwhile tasks without having to fight off distracting moods and noisy self-doubts. Moderation of emotional reactivity also fosters a useful distancing from fear of criticism. And ironically, this same distancing from fear helps us connect with ourselves, our audiences, and our critics; the less we fear, the more patiently and tolerantly we listen and see.

5. *Connectedness and compassion:* When we practice the clear seeing of how others are hooked to mindless actions in patterns much like our own, we show more patience and understanding for their foibles and criticisms. And as we feel more connected, we let go of the pessimistic feelings of separateness and victimization so characteristic of mindlessness and of writing blocks. Connectedness helps us deal with rejection and criticism more compassionately because we less readily blame others when our communications do not bring immediate approval. The more connected we are, the sooner we see where we could be misunderstood.

6. *Letting go:* The clear seeing and compassion of mindful practice help us relax. They encourage letting go of blind obedience to ego and its process orientation—no small matter for writers, including me. Letting go of ego means distancing ourselves from its contentious demands for universal respect and affection; as we stop grasping for the certainty and predictability that ego wants, we work more easily and contentedly in the moment. Not trying to relive the past or to control the future frees us to work in a process mode. That, in turn, brings more confidence, more playfulness and involvement, more risk taking and creativity, more love of mastery in work, more consistent fluency. And all those, finally, teach us to enjoy the work for its own sake, the very root of healthy industriousness.

7. *Self-discipline:* We've just seen suggestions of mindful ways to create calm, patience, clear seeing, efficient actions, connectedness, and tolerance. These processes include the discipline of self-stopping to awaken ourselves from mindless rushing or stultifying inhibition. They include the will and compassion to pause and reflect, to stay in the present, even to stop work in timely fashion when diminishing returns or fatigue set in, or when something else important needs doing. So, discipline builds as we stay in the moment, patiently, with no intent but to experience what happens and to notice which actions meet or change goals. One of its results is a process style of working that helps us unlearn impulse-based compulsions to rushing, bingeing, and overattachment.

Fortunately, none of these disciplines demands the painful measures beloved by tradition (e.g., having oneself locked in a cool room, unclothed, until a daily quota of writing is met). The self-discipline of mindfulness is more gentle. It depends, in the main, on staying in the present to caution ourselves from reverting to blind thinking, loss of hope, impulsive action, or product orientation. Like all sorts of self-discipline, mindfulness needs regular practice to become effective and effortless. So does writing.

How can we gauge our own self-discipline as practitioners of mindfulness? By the readiness with which we return to awakeness once we notice ourselves caught in mindlessness. And by the constancy with which we work and live in a process mode (and, so, enjoy the work and the moment for their own sakes).

What's still missing in this list of seven mindful practices? We've yet to see more than hints of how these practices are mastered. And so far I've only asserted that such mindful practices help writers find fluency and comfort. To begin to move toward specificity and proof, I summarize the observations that awakened me to mindful ways of writing.

What Already Mindful Writers Do That Makes Them Distinctive

When I began helping new faculty as writers some three decades ago, I had no idea how widely and deeply they suffered in their work. I had read about the dramatic effects of writers' blocks and I knew that writing problems sometimes led to loss of careers and lives. But not until I studied new faculty who sought no help from me did I sense the general inefficiency and pain of writing. Writers with seeming success and clear acclaim were generally no less likely to agonize over writing than writers with spectacular blocks.

I was just as amazed to discover that almost all those hundreds of writers expected to suffer at writing. More so, that many of them supposed pain essential to good, creative writing. (I'll address the validity of this assumption, often labeled *creative madness,* later in Section II.) But I was relieved to find writers, some 3 to 5 percent of the total, who already worked with comfort and productivity. I soon concluded that the key to their success is mindfulness. See if you agree, at least in a working way:

1. These exemplary writers (and teachers) *work patiently.* As writers, they don't rush impulsively into prose writing; instead, they calmly prepare and rearrange preliminary materials until the accumulation of ideas compels prose writing. As a result, they generate more healthy motivation and useful imagination for writing than do normal new faculty.
2. Exemplars *work regularly and constantly* at writing but with moderation. They spend far less time and energy, overall, than do normal writers who work in great binges and under deadlines. Exemplars also produce more and better writing than do others in the long run.
3. Exemplars' *emotions while writing tend to be gentle and stable,* punctuated by occasional bouts of peaceful "not-doing" or of mild euphoria; their writing outputs are similarly stable, even though the process mode in which they work creates little anxiety about productivity.
4. These mindful writers, compared to others, *suffer far less uncertainty and pain at writing.* Indeed, exemplars like to note how much they revel in its fun, discovery, and mastery.
5. These quick starters are rather unique in *welcoming criticism.* They even let other readers and writers, especially critics, do some of the hard work of writ-

ing, by getting them to specify places where it does not communicate completely, plainly, compassionately.

6. Most distinctively, these exemplars concentrate on aspects of mindfulness that could be called *efficiencies*—such as getting to work in timely fashion and doing more and better writing in less time overall. While mindful writers display a sense of good-humored detachment from their writing, they strive to write simply and unpretentiously. Why? Apparently because their love for writing brings enjoyment in its mastery.

I didn't quite make sense of these exemplary styles of working until I compared them to the similar messages in writings about mindfulness. When I juxtapose the two lists—the first of mindful practices, the second of exemplary writing habits—you may begin to see the resemblances as I do:

Seven Simple Practices of Mindfulness

- Awakeness and staying in the moment
- Clear seeing of what needs doing and can be done
- Calm efficiency in doing it, including timeliness
- Freedom from destructive emotions
- Connectedness and compassion with self and others
- Letting go
- Gentle self-discipline

Exemplary Writing Styles Restated

- Awareness of the need for preliminaries before rushing to prose
- Patience for timely stopping (and, in turn, for timely starting)
- Seeing what needs doing and doing it with constancy/moderation
- Calm emotions and low levels of suffering
- More compassion for self and critics
- Self-disciplines focused on pleasant efficiencies

In the chapters of Section II, just ahead, I translate mindful ways of working at writing into simple, memorable rules and practices. Why do I make explicit this usually tacit knowledge about writing—what some of my critics suppose should be self-evident to those of us who "deserve to write" (those few of us who, as a favorite censor of mine put it when she was president of the American Psychological Association, have something worth saying)? First, because I've found that too many writers with things to say, especially nontraditional new faculty, learn to work as writers amid pain, by way of trial and error—if at all. Second, because I continue to notice that few teachers of writing make explicit the prescriptions for working at writing with comfort and fluency. And, third, because I've learned that almost all new faculty as writers, even the advantaged, can employ mindfulness to find more ease, joy, and productivity than they had imagined possible.

Ten Mindful Ways of Writing

The 10 chapters in Section II (Chapters 9 through 18) outline what I've learned and applied from exemplary writers. In each chapter I present some mindful ways of writing, such as calming and slowing for awakeness. I also depict the struggles and successes that lie along the way for normal writers who follow this path. Just above, I overviewed some of the reasons why I see these simple but effective methods as mindful; as we move along, I'll link mindfulness with healthy and productive writing by way of experiential and experimental results. The benefits include life and work without busyness, rushing, and never quite catching-up. That, in my experience, is what new faculty need most.

9

Wait

Most of us already know how to wait as writers, in much the same way we once waited for teaching improvement—passively, mindlessly. We put off writing in favor of something easier while awaiting Muses and hoping for magic. And we try to delay efforts to write until the sudden appearance of brilliant ideas and compelling inspirations will make writing spontaneous. Sometimes these marvelous things happen, but not frequently enough to sustain most writers. More often, passive waiting is spent doing things that postpone the real work of writing. Passive waiting is the child of mindlessness and the parent of procrastination.

Passive waiting works unreliably because it operates blindly and depends on mysterious, irrational, unpredictable forces such as spontaneity. Passivity misleads with its short-term relief from reality because it eventually leaves writers feeling hopelessly behind, incompetent, and trapped. In the long run, passive waiting exposes writers to a pair of cruel and inefficient oppressions—the forcing of deadlines and the discomfort of contritions. Passive waiting undermines writing by occasioning too many poor starts (e.g., prolonged procrastination followed by rushed beginnings under deadlines) and troubling outcomes (e.g., writing that is blocked and hindered by pain and doubt; writing that remains superficial or unfinished because its goals were not clearly and realistically outlined beforehand).

What Makes Active *Waiting Different?*

At first glance, active waiting seems much the same as the passive kind. Active waiting, too, means putting off prose writing when we might feel pressured to begin and finish now. But active waiting is more than avoidance. It does things to set the stage for planned work in the meanwhile (much as efficient sleepers quiet themselves well before bedtime). With active/mindful waiting, things like writing and sleep come painlessly, almost effortlessly.

Said another way, mindless waiting often amounts to *doing nothing*, whereas mindful waiting is *not doing* (as in not keeping busy, externally). So it is that Sylvia Boorstein, a foremost teacher of mindfulness, entitled her book *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There.*

Active waiting requires patience. This is another crucial difference between passive and active waiting: Active waiting, at least until you are used to it, seems to require more work. Foremost, it involves that most difficult skill of writing skills: patience.

That patience is necessary for slowing and preparing for writing while we would rather do other, more immediately comforting things (like first cleaning our offices). We need it to work largely in the present moment, to hold back from the hurrying that owes to worries about finishing quickly enough, to let go of the distractions that come in dwelling on past disappointments.

Active waiting requires suspending disbeliefs. Active waiting, for most writers, is a new and counterintuitive stance: "It's hard to imagine that I will get more done eventually if I start out so slowly, patiently, planfully . . . by kind of waiting around. That doesn't seem possible." So to begin to benefit from it, you may need to question your usual ways of doing things: Said one of my program participants, right on cue, "My old methods haven't worked all that well and I might as well give this a try."

Active waiting means pausing reflectively. Reflective pausing is the opposite of plunging impulsively into firm decisions and formal prose. Active waiting and its awakeness temper impatience by putting off pressures for quick results. Active waiting brings an observant and wakeful tentativeness, often of a playful sort, while we get the writing organized. Its clear seeing helps make sure that the right question will be answered once the formal writing is underway, and its patient compassion helps writers forgive themselves for inevitable missteps. At its best, writing is first a process of discovery, then a communication of discoveries. Finally, if necessary, it demonstrates a writer's brilliance. When we put the last goal first, we court writing problems.

More gradual, planful beginnings prove enjoyable because of their calm, reflective, and engaging nature. They also bring a reassuring sense of having something worth saying before trying to write it formally. Stated another way, active waiting helps make writing an act of broad self-education; it proves to be so much fun that it hooks writers on writing. Moreover, motivation based on active waiting and its patience/readiness works far more reliably than drive rooted in impulsive impatience, in anxious shame, in looming deadlines. It's a fact.

Experimental Evidence for the Benefits of Waiting

Something else helps make active waiting attractive—examination of what typically happens to writers who work with and without it. The most impatient writers in my studies not only rushed into prose, they made it a chore of trying to do several things simultaneously. All at once, they struggled to devise a significant plan, to conjure motivation, and to write fluidly, coherently. The result is called *cognitive overload* and it is a common reason why writers suffer, procrastinate, and block (Hayes & Flower, 1986). Here are some of my data to support the merit of active waiting.

Ten dissertation writers evidenced the highest levels of impatience in, first, their comments (e.g., "I've got to get moving here and get the thing finished as soon as possible; I'm very busy and I usually don't have enough time to write") and in, second, their actions (e.g., they more often attempted to begin formal prose writing almost immediately after seating themselves in their writing sites). They, compared to 10 highly patient writers of dissertations, were far more likely to display external evidence of long hesitations and blocks while writing (i.e., periods of staring at screen or paper for 15 minutes or longer with no writing, or periods of an hour at the writing site with no more than one sentence of output). These most impatient writers were also more likely to put off scheduled writing in lieu of something easier (e.g., making phone calls or answering electronic mail) that consumed the time set aside for writing. And these "impatient" writers far more often described themselves as blocked and miserable when asked how soon they planned to resume writing.

More specifically, impatient writers were about five times more likely to block/procrastinate and suffer in the first three months after they began writing their dissertation proposals than were patient writers. The 10 patient writers, in contrast, were nearly unique in both waiting actively (i.e., spent time patiently thinking about writing and making notes/diagrams before beginning) and in prewriting before prose writing. Perhaps because of that, they were:

- Almost two times more likely to express confidence about the worth of the writing before they undertook it
- Over three times better able to specify useful creative ideas once writing
- About three times as likely as their impatient counterparts to mention experiences of joy and self-discovery during the first few weeks of writing dissertations

Why Isn't Practical Information Like This Presented More Commonly?

We already know part of the reason: Mindful ways of working at writing have gone unnoticed, unappreciated in a culture that encourages rushing at writing; tradition supposes the best and brightest writers work quickly, spontaneously, enchantedly. It's a lovely romantic idea that genius manifests in a flash, without much effort or preparation, but it's simply untrue (see Perkins, 1981; Simonton, 1994), except, perhaps, for the truly inspired poets of past centuries (Weissman,

1993). The facts, like them or not, link genius with constancy and moderation—and with the same old rule of this book: *Nihil nimus.*

[I apologize for sounding a bit like Thomas Gradgrind, the man who loved facts in Dickens's book *Hard Times* but, as the little circus girl could have told you, Mr. Gradgrind was also little given to explanation or repentance.]

Something else makes it hard to give up passive waiting: Many writers, even successful sorts whose writing I admire, commend it:

> *The first thing a writer should be is—excited. He should be a thing of fevers and enthusiasm.—RAY BRADBURY*

But what if you, the writer relying on such expertise, are not ready, not already excited? You could wait for exhilaration, not quite sure how to summon it except by bingeing. You might, if the waiting for inspiration seems interminable, decide you lack the gift of writing. (If so, you would help confirm that already familiar fact about traditional ways of teaching writers how to work at writing: Only the square root of those who could write and who want to, do.)

You would fare better to listen to writers who counsel more *active,* mindful forms of waiting, who model patient ways to motivate themselves effectively before getting into prose. Here is a reasonably well-known example of such advice:

> *As for my next book, I am going to hold myself from writing it till I have it impending in me: grown heavy in my mind like a ripe pear; pendant, gravid, asking to cut or it will fall.—VIRGINIA WOOLF*

The key is holding oneself back from the actual writing. It means "not doing" in explicit ways while getting prepared anyway. The action is simple but uncommon because of the same old problem: Impatience.

An even better way to learn about active waiting may be to observe what exemplars (as I defined them in the introductions to Sections I and II) do that makes them distinctive. And to check which of their ways are most readily and beneficially modeled by other, more normal writers. That approach is the basis for the proven exercises that follow here and in ensuing chapters.

Writing Rule 1: Wait, Actively.

Informal Exercises for Writing Rule 1

The first exercise is beginning almost every writing session by pausing for calm and reflection. It means waiting and "not doing" (externally), even arbitrarily at first, instead of rushing, impulsively, into formal writing. Its pause for awakeness (the first step to mindfulness, you might recall) is one of the least complicated but hardest practices. Impatience is, once again, the culprit.

As you might expect, I advise a bit of active waiting *now*—before you launch into the exercises that follow. Try spending a whole minute in mindfulness simply by staying here in the moment and seeing how you react to a respite from doing. [Surely, I say—in the wonderful style of guilt-induction I learned as a psychotherapist—you can spare a mere minute for the sake of experimenting with new practices in writing. Eh?]

How should you do it as part of writing? Sit comfortably at your writing site, at ease but with awakeness (i.e., awareness of being in the moment, without, say, blind and impatient thinking about the future). For now, attempt little more than attending to your breathing as it moves in and out. Let your exhalations take as long as they need. Watch for tendencies toward "breath grabbing" that keep exhalations from reaching full completions (and that discourage a mere, brief pause at the end of each expiration). Look out for breath stopping. And ask yourself if your need to hurry is real or imagined. (See Farhi, 1996, for more yogic exercises on breathing—arguably, you write as well as you breathe.)

Then notice that the act of attending and noticing slows, calms, and frees your mind for clear seeing. Whether you're novice or expert at this exercise, you'll sense the patience that mindfulness requires and forges. With practice at this clear seeing, you may begin to understand the wisdom of patience, of letting your thoughts collect, of first seeing what you want to do and what can be done realistically.

> *To find our way, we will need to pay more attention to this moment. It is the only time that we have in which to live, grow, feel, and change.... There is nothing passive about it. And when you decide to go [after waiting and attending to the moment], it's a different kind of going because you stopped. The stopping actually makes the going more vivid, richer, more textured.—JON KABAT-ZINN*

Mindfulness practices can seem difficult in the short run. You, like me, might get locked into the impatient product orientation of an almost irrepressible ego ("If I'm as smart as I think, I'll breeze through this"). Slowing down enough to simply stay in a process mode—in the moment, without immediate concerns for external results or rewards—can seem overwhelming and unpalatable at first.

How do the writers who learn mindfulness usually manage this beginning? They merge acts of mindfulness meditation with acts of writing. This is a typical sequence:

- First, mindful writers pause in getting off the edge of their beds to plan to write that day. Psychologists call this *precommitment* (Logue, 1994) and it consists of little more than a calm, clear decision about what to write that day

—along with a lucid visualization of how and when it will occur. Mindful writers like to point out its value in reassuring them that at least something worthwhile will be accomplished that day, whatever else. They also note that this habit—of clear seeing what needs doing and what can be done—often generalizes to other plans for the day. Once in the process mode of simply doing the necessary, they end up with more free time for other things, including play. My dog, Wiley the Basenji, favors this move.

- Second, mindful writers pause for a moment of meditation at the beginning of writing sessions, almost, as many like to term it, prayerfully. They follow their breathing, they settle into a comfortable but alert posture, they calm and slow themselves while almost getting to work. Some even ask for a bit of divine guidance.
- Third, mindful writers keep these bouts of mindful meditation brief—and, too, as a rule, the writing (or its preparation) for now. The most mindful writers work in brief, daily sessions that neither fatigue them nor keep them from other important activities. And when they're getting underway on a project, they commonly suppose that, say, 5 minutes a day are better than no practice at all. They've already precommited to the notion that no matter how busy they feel during the day, they can afford at least 5 minutes for some mindfulness about writing. As they begin a daily session, they usually do something else to help let go of inhibitions and inertia. They calmly allow themselves to be content, at least for awhile, with these slow, imperfect, and playful preliminaries.

Still, writers on this path sometimes see such starts as frighteningly small. Spending a week or two, often more, doing little more than 5 or 10 minutes a day of active waiting can seem, as one of them put it, "about as weak a solution as homeopathic soup." But with lots of practice and a bit of coaching, they come up with a crucial insight. This very struggle and its patient resolution are the essence of this first writing exercise.

What do writers who become mindful find most helpful in that struggle? Appreciating that they can afford a week or two with small outputs (indeed, most confess to many weeks with no product or progress in their recent pasts) and seeing that the long-term effects of active waiting are what matter. How do they confirm this optimism? By way of less blocking and procrastination at starting times; by way of accumulating more ideas, confidence, and themes for writing; and by seeing that mindfulness practice costs little time and effort in relation to its benefits.

> *Using the breath to bring us back to the present moment takes no time at all, only a shift in attention. But great adventures await you if you give yourself a little time to string moments of awareness together, breath by breath, moment to moment.—JON KABAT-ZINN*

The more formal exercise for writers, just ahead, needs only regular, brief practice. Even here, I'll ask you to wait before launching into external action. Patience, patience, patience!

For the moment, make a mindful commitment to look for two things as you begin practicing:

- First, notice that active waiting is less a matter of time management than of emotional management. The demand in this exercise on your time is minimal; the changes in how you emote while spending that time are large. So instead of supposing you must set up a new, comprehensive rescheduling of your life to manage enough writing (the sort of time-charting that time management experts cherish), look instead for benefits of simple, mindful practices of slowing and calming during the brief openings for writing you squeeze into your days. And expect your dark side to continue to tell you that you are too busy, too overscheduled to write. May the force be with you!

  These are ways you can see how the process of emotional management works: In the slowing and calming for more reliable, comfortable starts on writing days (compared to the moodiness and hurry that might previously have been customary), and in the letting go of the need for feelings of control that impatient rushing brings in the short run. Again, mindfulness isn't so much about finding lots of time for writing as it is about working more patiently, calmly, and wisely.
- Second, notice that you need *not* be tense or hurried to be in control. You will be more in control if you learn to wait, actively, mindfully. (Any Zen practitioner could have told you that; you probably already knew it yourself.)

A Formal Exercise for Writing Rule 1

Schedule a week or two, starting now, for doing *nothing else* as a writer but *pausing, holding back from writing.* Schedule brief, daily sessions of this active waiting each weekday, for perhaps 5 to 10 minutes, no more. Find this time, preferably, amid an otherwise busy morning; remember, it only needs to be 5 to 10 minutes—not a whole hour of your schedule. Spend this brief time at your writing site, with materials—such as notes, references, and old manuscript pages—already on hand. (Writing sites can be portable so long as they become somewhat constant.)

Begin with a moment of meditative mindfulness by just staying in the present moment, following your breathing in and out. This might last a minute or two, for now. Then use the remaining minutes, without hurrying and without leaving the present, to mentally sketch ideas about your intended writing.

Suggested Goals

You might aim, consciously and gently (i.e., mindfully), for the following:

- Patience: Calm yourself so that you increasingly experience beginnings of writing projects (and of daily writing sessions) with the *patience* of feeling content to stay in the moment. That, according to mindful writers I've studied, needs a few minutes of not doing, of just sitting with your experiences, nonjudgmentally, and not trying to accomplish anything in particular as a writer—for now. And it means tolerating frequent "slips" into impatience and mindlessness, including worries about whether the writing will be good enough. In particular, it means forgiving ourselves for slips while learning from them.

  This very moment is the perfect teacher. Generally speaking, we regard discomfort in any form as bad . . . but feelings like disappointment, jealously, anger are actually very clear moments that teach us where it is that we're holding back.—PEMA CHODRIN

- Slowing and clear seeing: Congratulate yourself about becoming more patient, no matter how small your progress. Pause to notice how the constant and regular practice of patiently waiting (as opposed to blindly, impatiently rushing) begins to foster a readiness to write every day. Then deliberately use pauses to slow down, calm down, and induce a nonfatiguing pace of working, one that persists from the earliest involvements in a writing project.

  You might look for something related to happen now: Generation of clear plans and of interesting ideas for the writing, without really trying. This is where the real magic of writing enters the picture—by way of patient discipline, not via Muses or inborn genius.
- Look for generality: Remember that you have (if you've read Section I first) already practiced and learned from similar ways of working at teaching, such as the holding back of patience and the reflection basic to discovery and readiness. And then reconsider a fact I presented at the end of Section I: New faculty in my programs who practiced constancy/moderation with teaching *and* writing fared better at both than did peers who immersed themselves in just one (Boice, 1995). Why? That generalization of mindfulness to a new context revealed more about basics, such as working largely in the moment, in a process mode.
- Be patient with yourself: If you are like most writers I've known, at this point, you may still feel vaguely unready to write. Participants in my programs say something like this: "OK, I'm slowing down. I may have some good ideas for writing; I'm not sure. I am sure that I still don't feel fully ready to write. What next?"

I refer them, as I do you, to the next chapter.

10

Begin Writing Early (Before Feeling Ready)

How does this second rule for writing (begin early) jibe with the first rule (wait)? The active waiting of Rule 1 is a process for getting on task early.

To get on task here early, consider the ways that active waiting sets it up. First, active waiting not only calms a writer, patiently and mindfully, but it loosens inhibitions such as blocking. Second, active waiting lends itself to daily repetition because it gets you started at writing effortlessly, before you realize you're working.

The next step follows naturally from active waiting. You'll see the ideas and images you've begun to generate as meaningful starts at writing. For now, though, the writing remains mostly imperfect and preliminary; composition teachers call it *prewriting* (Murray, 1995). Writers who rely on it before moving to formal writing fare much better than writers who rush ahead with few preliminaries (Hayes & Flower, 1986). I first appreciated the importance of patient, playful preliminaries when I worked in a sex clinic; most of the male patients I saw were impatient practitioners of foreplay.

Prewriting is a kind of foreplay, of taking time for preliminaries that prime the best results. In writing, it often begins with getting some of what you are thinking about your writing project out into speech or onto paper, well before you consider it a final product. The crucial step is getting started before you feel at all confident about the worth of your actions.

Even some famous writers lend credence to preliminaries (but without being as specific about how to manage them as I'd like):

When inspiration does not come to me, I go halfway to meet it.
—SIGMUND FREUD

Work brings inspiration if inspiration is not discernable in the beginning.—IGOR STRAVINSKY

Beginning Early Can Be Difficult Until It Becomes a Habit

Beginning early—well before you usually do or want to—requires constant, patient practice. It benefits from mindfulness meditation that keeps you in the moment, ready to work and supplied with ideas. But even with those supports, its practice demands a great leap of faith. Only trust allows us enough patience to experience these preliminaries called *prewriting*. Trust helps us wait and see how prewriting generates ideas and momentum as we:

1. Talk aloud what we *might* write.
2. Read aloud what we've begun to write.
3. Take notes about what else we might write.
4. Begin to see the project more wholistically.

Moreover, trust (i.e., active waiting) metes out enough tolerance to abide the tentativeness, imperfection, and slow, seemingly wasteful, pace of preliminary work. Patience begets tolerance, and vice versa.

Problems of trust are so common that society has a host of labels for their varieties of mindlessness:

- *Procrastination:* "I'm way behind on lots of other pressing things and I can't afford the time to deal with this project at all until the deadline forces me to work on it."
- *Perfectionism:* "I don't want to be in the habit of producing a lot of second-rate material, not even as so-called preliminary writing; I want to write well or not at all."
- *Elitism:* "I believe that really brilliant writers write quickly, in a single draft, without much of a struggle or a plan; they are born-writers and I doubt that they need to waste much time on preliminaries."
- *Blocking:* "Want to know why the begin-early rule won't work for me? I'm the kind of writer who can't write at all until I am in the mood and then I write as much as I can and try to finish in one sitting because I may never write again."
- *Oppositional:* "I don't like rules; I need to be myself, unfettered, to be a good writer; rules are for robots."

Notice the similarities among resistances to beginning early. Struggling writers of all sorts wish for spontaneity and quick, easy results. They base their hopes in blind thinking that can help them escape reality for the moment (e.g., by assuming that forcing under deadlines and with binges will work well-enough in the end). And they mistakenly equate freedom and brilliance with working in rule-free fashion. What typically happens to writers who maintain these beliefs and habits? They don't begin early, if at all. They wait passively. They work sporadically. They struggle to begin and to stay with it. They continue to see writing as difficult, perhaps even as something mastered only by a gifted, pained few.

An analogue provides another way to appreciate writers' usual reluctances to begin early. People who display the most resistance to being hypnotized display obvious commonalities; they are most unwilling to go along with suggestions, to suspend suspicion and disbelief, to trust themselves and the hypnotist. These 'low-susceptibles' also struggle the most as writers. Why? They have not learned to trust general images and rough wordings that could be put on paper or screen in advance of formal writing. Instead they work cautiously, looking for perfect sentences to begin with, listening too soon to internal editors (those voices of authority figures who remind us of rigid rules and standards about writing), and doubting too readily (Hilgard, 1977).

In contrast, highly trusting, suggestible (and hypnotizable) writers are more fluent. They tolerate ambiguity because they welcome vague images as a useful first step, because they most readily appreciate the lowered pressure of beginning early and informally, because they produce more and better writing in the long run. Moreover, they are less stressed in their work because they begin early to put some of cognitive load of planning what to write outside their heads.

Our knowledge is not just in our heads...but in accessible notes, knowing how to consult references, in having friends to call for a steer.
—DAVID PERKINS

Writing Rule 2: Begin Early.

Exercises for Writing Rule 2

A caution: These are the most extensive and demanding exercises in the book—as well as the most productive. They, more than most exercises, reward pauses from daily activities to practice.

As usual, take a moment of holding back to anticipate by way of review (in the chapters on teaching, I called this *setting and resetting context*):

Early starts mean practice at launching a project without quite having figured out what you will say (much as in mindful teaching preparations).

Missing page

Calmly ask and re-ask yourself what the point of your data is and how you could portray your message most simply.

But what if you, the professor, at this point, begin to panic and lose your mindfulness? Get back to it by pausing and following your breathing in and out. Even by adding what she did, a yoga posture of breathing calmly while standing and stretching until you calm and resee what you need to do now.

With the patient mindfulness of staying in the moment and of just talking aloud and then outlining, you (as she) might begin to notice a few main ideas that appeal to you. (In the case of the sociology professor:

1. Until recently, marital violence was underreported and underemphasized for women.
2. The low profile of women as violent may be due to a sexist tendency to suppose that men alone would initiate such interactions in physical fashion.
3. More objective reporting of womens' role in marital violence may help provide a more realistic basis for treating violence in couples.)

How might you have drawn out two or three main points if you began, as she did, by feeling blocked? By imagining yourself just telling someone like me about the things that impress you most as you look back at what you have read and noted. By actually saying it aloud to someone else (to me, in the case of the sociologist). By tolerating its initial imperfection (as in the excerpt from an early outline, above). And by jotting it down again and again, until it clears and reassures. By this point, as you grow more excited and confident about what you have to say, your outline will probably compel more writing in list-like or diagrammatic format.

But what if you, like her, want to continue revising your compact outline until it is perfect? Practice the holding back of mindfulness that can moderate temptations to excessiveness. And what if you, too, find my insistence on saying what you will write aversive to tolerate? Practice tolerance and just do it. The doing will get you past one of the most challenging points of beginning: Clarifying what you can say, aloud, before you write it.

Or what if you worry that you are beginning without having completed your scholarly searches? Tell yourself that one purpose of early outlining is the clarification of places where you need more searching of a specific sort, as opposed to the general and often wasteful sort that precedes most writing projects.

Then, like the professor, use the next sessions to revise and expand your outline by adding supporting materials to each main point. Some of these additions you will have already spoken aloud; they may be most apparent when you pause and reflect, remember, and, in particular, talk about what you might have said. Others additions are cued by perusals of your notes. If your notes are too comprehensive, too detailed to make this latter move easy, set aside brief periods for nothing more than drawing out the essentials that pertain to your plan, perhaps in the margins of your notes. As you begin to arrange these most memorable subpoints alongside (or under) your main points, write them as you would talk them, informally but to the point.

When you build more conceptual statements into your outline, see if there is a logical flow in your scheme by asking yourself questions like these:

- Does it make sense to begin with *this* point? Am I answering the right question?
- Do the next main points follow from the first and each other; do they say all that I need to say?
- Am I trying to do too much; could I make my essential message clearer by abbreviating or removing some of the points around it?
- Do the same subpoints appear in two or more places?
- Are some essential subpoints missing or underdeveloped?

Carry out these things with patience and tolerance, not with impatience and perfectionism.

But what, for example, if you suppose your initial versions do not cover everything you want to say? Congratulate yourself; this is, after all, just an early, informal beginning. Wait before trying for comprehensiveness, before worrying much about having missed something vital, even before fretting about someone else having already said what you've just put on paper or screen. Remind yourself that every writer essentially rewrites things written some where, some time, before; exemplary writers aim less for novelty of topic than for new and better ways of connecting and presenting ideas. Yes, I know there are exceptions where writers conjure new theories or clever proofs, but they are just that, exceptions. And let go of customary objections and focus on making sense of the two main points (or three or four, but probably not more) for now.

Then decide, somewhat playfully, that you will limit yourself to developing your initial points, and little else, as you participate in this scheme for the day and week. Mindful writers almost always look to simplify/clarify their work here more than anywhere else—at the outset, when plans might otherwise become grandiose or confusing. Procrastinators and blockers, in contrast, tend to try to do too much too soon (Boice, 1996c). So it is that they struggle and complain when asked to state their plan for a manuscript simply.

Finally, ready or not, assume you now have a working sense about what, specifically, to look for as you scan to make marginal notes as possibilities for expanding your main points. Pause to make sure you are being economical and clear while reminding yourself of your mission (e.g., write, "I only need to write

a brief but useful review/rationale to which I'll add some new data I've collected, not another dissertation. The point I have to make is worth making and I can make it best with directness and brevity").

As you let go and trust yourself, notice again what to look at in filling out your main points in the outline: Your notes. Just as important, begin to see what you can neglect and omit in your reading. Good writing is as much a matter of figuring what not to say as of what to say. That's why it needs so much awakeness and clear seeing about what communicates most clearly, helpfully—and what doesn't.

Pause, at least every 5 minutes, to see where you are in this second exercise (generating and organizing tentative ideas/directions) of Writing Rule 2 (begin early). Writers profit, in my experience, by staying here for a while, by continuing to revise their expanded and conceptualized outlines until the result impels them to prose-write what they've already prewritten.

This patient strategy of beginning early works nicely for making early starts at all the kinds of prose writing I've encountered: Formulating dissertation problems or storylines for novels; starting complete revisions of short stories and other pieces once or more rejected; reviving abandoned ideas for a funding proposal; and, of course, getting scholarly writing underway in timely, imaginative ways.

Exercise 3. Throttle Down, into the Moment.

Throughout these preliminaries called prewriting, pause to return to your breathing. Remind yourself to be calm and relaxed, to deliberately slow your pace and lower your tensions from what they might be if you were impatient. And notice that, for now, no harm comes in struggling at writing without much apparent product.

Many writers at this point in my programs are writing and rewriting just a page or two; some soon switch to prose. Others turn to formal prose only when their conceptual outline is as long as the manuscript will be. "I'm leaving it up to you," as Dale and Grace sang it in their R&B classic.

Other things matter more than traditional measures of productivity for now: Clear seeing of what can happen, confidence that it will, and returning again to work at writing the next day.

Goals for This Exercise 3

- *Use brief pauses to comfort and reassure yourself as you make your task harder.* For example, mindfully notice whether you can sit and work with nearly effortless grace, without much strain. That may require looking at yourself, almost from outside yourself, at times. And aim to acquire the habit of sitting (as mindfulness meditators call it) with yourself and with your writing each weekday, not only in the beginning but during pauses throughout the writing. This simple but difficult accomplishment will turn out to be as important as anything else you do as a writer—even if it only approaches the ideal.

  Energies which formerly were squandered in compulsive drives and purposeless actions are reserved and channeled into a unity through correct Zen sitting.—PHILIP KAPLEAU

- *Use some prewriting to do one thing at a time and to do it well—but not perfectly, for now.*
- *Get at least some of your thoughts about what you can/will write out onto paper each day.* Write something, anything—even that you can think of nothing to write. Talk aloud, no matter how silly it may seem at first, to generate material that can be transcribed into prewriting. Employ this useful exercise of prewriting (i.e., first talking and then writing what you have to say) as a warm-up for another one.

Exercise 4. Extend Patient Beginnings and Discovery via Freewriting.

Oddly, this seemingly automatic, mindless task can help make you a mindful observer of yourself at work. You'll need that attentiveness just to manage the usual instruction for freewriting:

- Write whatever comes to mind; better yet, write whatever appears on paper or screen without judgment.
- Don't correct or edit; ignore ongoing and anticipated criticisms.
- Push ahead, patiently and with tolerance, for *im*perfect writing—without rushing.
- Don't apologize for the product, not even to yourself.

Freewriting is just as easy and substantive as something you already know how to do—freetalking. (Freud started by having his patients freewrite but found freetalking easier to elicit and sustain.)

If you find your impatient, perfectionistic ego demanding immediate corrections, or pushing for a fast and productive pace, remind yourself of a pair of relevant truths, one familiar and one not. First, you'll have time later—in the revision stage after the prose draft has been written—to manage thorough revisions and near-perfection. Second, you'll work less painfully in the meanwhile if you tolerate a modicum of mistakes in prewriting stages. That means leaving flaws on the page or screen, and not letting their continuing presence bother you for now; this is, after all, early and informal work.

Begin by interspersing bouts of freewriting among routines you are already practicing—to help transform what you could say into approximations of writing.

Return to the Real-Life Example

The sociologist writing on the role of women in marital abuse next tried freewritng the two subpoints under the first main point this way:

1. Until recently, marital violence was underreported and underemphasized by women.
   a. Here are the studies and reviews that make that point.

No, wait, I don't like that. Too unimaginative. It misses the point I want to make up front. What I might really need to say here, now that I notice that what I just wrote is all-too-well-known in the field, is that the real proble [sic] in the oversight lies in prior research, because of that limitation, not having generated useful treatments/interventions. The poor outcome record of existing interventions supports that idea.

So, I'm going to revise the outline of the three main points, like this:

1. Usual oversight about women's role marital violence has led to ineffective & one sided treatments of spousal abuse.
   a. Very brief review/reminder of the studies that note the oversight and the reasons for it; I may just describe just three recent reviews, beginning with _____, which may be the best known because it has the first solid data base to draw on. . . .
   b. Beginnings of realizations in the literature, some as yet unpublished (e.g., _____) on how this imbalance in reporting undermines treatments. One thing I want to say for sure here is. . . .
2. Existing theories of how a more balanced appreciation of marital violence will turn into more effective treatment plans.
   a. The usual suspects, put in order of their apparent usefulness, beginning with _____. . . .
   b. My own superior (ha!) theory and supports for it in my pilot research.
      — What makes my approach different is (what?) its weighting and sequencing of how violence typically occurs in abusive couples. The essential patterns, three of them, suggest an intervention that reflects the basic interactive problems in each escalation. . . .

What did this writer and I conclude about the more written-out version abstracted above? That it was suitably imperfect but directive. That it regenerated initial main points into a tighter, more manageable and meaningful scheme. And that the expansion of those focal points into conceptual statements helped her stay on track as she generated more prewriting.

In the next session, those subpoints were freewritten again (re-freewritten?) after a brief revisit to her notes (some of them new) to clarify and simplify them. Why did I not encourage her to move more quickly to real prose? Because soon enough the revisions become real prose without having to struggle.

Consider how writers of 18 pages (typed) of journal articles usually worked at this aspect of prewriting: They spent 2 to 3 weeks adding briefly and freely written concepts to their outlines before moving to more complete and freewritten approximations of prose writing. As they completed that transition, they retained outline points only as headings and subheadings. Yet, not until beginning to write the first prose version, did they edit after writing (even then, casually). They put off serious editing during writing until final revisions, much later on.

The following things, in particular, are worth keeping in mind about this exemplary way of working at writing: It keeps the work simple, mostly by having the writer do one thing at a time (e.g., just adding freely written concepts) instead of many (e.g., trying to approximate conceptual points while editing them). And it makes the work painless by way of patient revisions where each reordering or rewrite is a little more complete. In these ways, the hard work of writing gets done before the writer fully realizes it. Donald Murray, one of the heroes I keep referring to, likes to cite the instance of a writer who took meticulous but focused notes and who kept rewriting/rearranging those notes on a huge expanse of floor until, at last, the manuscript had written itself, without struggle.

Exercise 5. Add Mindfulness to Freewriting.

By itself, freewriting is simple to practice but narrowly limited and given to excess; conventional advice directs freewriters to work hurriedly and in binges, without pauses to keep writing on track. Uninterrupted freewriting can even be dangerous when its mania of rushing leaves writers drained, dysphoric, and dissociated from work that needs doing now (Boice & Myers, 1986).

What makes freewriting so potentially productive but underutilized? Freewriting, compared to usual writing, relies less on conscious verbal thinking and more on mental images. So it is that freewriters like to say, "How do I know what I think, until I see what I write?" And so it is that freewriters develop a striking tolerance for surprises and ambiguity.

Freewriting has the potential to conjure powerful images—and to frighten conservative writers; its imagery is a form of altered consciousness that can seem uncontrollable. But reliance on calm mental images helps make the freewriting comfortable and containable. The more deliberately and reflectively you use wholistic images to direct writing, the better you can represent their affective overtones, the more compelled you will feel to write regularly, and the more imaginatively you will write.

Why does image-influenced freewriting work best with mindful moderation? Regular pauses to switch back and forth, from the generation of writing to reflection on the imaged pattern behind it, foster the clear seeing that underlies clear writing. That clear writing, in turn, helps clarify the image. New faculty who practice those shifts—from the generation of writing back to thoughtful analysis and revision of what is being generated—demonstrate impressive results, including:

- More succinct but interconnected writing, even in the freewriting stage
- Quicker realization of what needs saying and what doesn't

- Better/faster completion of both prewriting and writing
- More direct translation of images into writing, without as much verbal mediation

There is, as you might expect, an initial difficulty among writers unaccustomed to working with awareness of writing images. They've rarely noticed them and they doubt their value. One corrective is somewhat familiar; recall our exercise amid the teaching chapters to pause and notice the self-talk that may earlier have gone largely unheard. Here, in noticing the initially faint images that accompany and, ideally, direct writing, you may need to add more direct practice of imagining a thing and writing about it solely from the image. Another corrective is, of course, the practice of mindful freewriting to encourage more and clearer imagery.

Or you may choose not to develop your imaging now, while you simply need to write enough to survive in academe. A problem in delaying is that the absence of an image for writing leaves more room for telling yourself other, often negative, stories.

How Exemplars Experience Mindful Freewriting. They eventually model the very procedures I've been mentioning, often not with proficiency until their sixth through tenth years on campus. And when they describe mastering this more complex form of freewriting, exemplars like to note two things about the experience: First, mindful freewriting slows the pace enough to optimize the rich material in images. Second, the unexpected joy of slowing for clear seeing stimulates contemplative ways of working, including temporary returns to handwriting. Some of the most mindful writers I have known occasionally write with a calligraphy pen to keep their work reflective, clear, and attractive; authors such as James Michener type with only two fingers to keep the work slowed and mindful.

More specifically, exemplars report alternating between:

> Periods of letting mental images find expression within and then without onto paper or screen
>
> and
>
> Bouts of conscious attention to what has been written, in part to further clarify it on screen or paper, in part to put more order and usefulness back into the mental images that direct writing at its deepest level.

How, in their experience, does the verbal thinking represented in writing find its way back into images? Automatically. Visual images can not only anticipate, organize, and direct outward actions but they can also reflect what is learned in ongoing, outer acts.

What do exemplars do when they have no ready, helpful image? Again, they coax it by talking it aloud until it makes sense, so much that they can say it implicitly and even begin to visualize the action it could induce. They also work patiently. While this circular process of shifting between (1) image and generation and (2) reflection and revision brings immediate benefits, hoped-for improvements in ability to produce/clarify images can take longer.

Why, if mindful freewriting takes so long to master, bring it up now? Because new faculty in my programs have said they like to keep some long-term goals in mind. Also, because this information helps shortcut the path to fluent writing. Imagery can be put to use early and with little extra time; indeed, you are probably using more of it now than you realize.

Exercise 6. Broaden Prewriting the C. Wright Mills Way.

This step could have come earlier, like almost everything else in this book. Exercise 6 takes us back to processes of generating motivation and imagination. I've put it here because it helps cultivate the initial images we need for fluent and enjoyable writing.

Here, for a change, I got the idea from someone other than an exemplary new faculty member: C. Wright Mills (1959), the pioneering sociologist, was one of the first writers to share this mindful way of working. We saw him earlier, in Section I, in regard to collecting and filing ideas for teaching in order to draw out and organize their implications. Because the same first-order principles of collecting and filing apply just as well to finding imagination and organization for writing, I'll remind you of them here:

- Rearrange files to look for general themes, then for interconnections.
- Maintain an attitude of playfulness by casting ideas into categories and types to help make sense of them.
- Consider extremes or opposites of important ideas.
- Find comparable cases by way of brief revisits to the literature.
- Arrange the materials for public presentation as a way of bringing closure to prewriting.

Working the C. Wright Mills way is the epitomy of prewriting. It has you constantly collecting and organizing ideas amidst daily life, using freewriting to shape themes into linear copy, reexamining core ideas to rework writing creatively and succinctly, and doing most of the hard work of writing before you get to formal prose. It, once again, gets you started early, before you feel fully ready.

A Pause to Set Up an Ending

I trust that you've found prewriting interesting, but I wonder if you believe it worth your while. So I end this chapter with a brief account of a study that proves

prewriting beneficial. At this point in so long a chapter, these data might be a dessert or a soporific.

Experimental Evidence for Benefits in Beginning Writing Early

In a study of 14 writers about to attempt their first completely new manuscripts at their new campus, 7 followed Writing Rules 1 and 2 (in Chapters 9 and 10), including the Mills approach. The other 7 new faculty worked in their own support groups and without exposure to those rules. By the end of the first month, the 7 "prewriters" in the program were working 1 to 2 hours a day at prewriting their manuscripts. At the end of 3 months, 6 of those 7 had produced at least 18 new pages of conceptual outlines intermixed with revised freewriting and arranged the C. Wright Mills way. Those writers expressed confidence that the writing ahead would consist largely of rewriting what they had already collected, arranged, and simplified. They were correct. All 7 of these prewriters finished first drafts that they submitted to refereed outlets within the next four months. I verified these outcomes directly, by examining parts of manuscripts as written, and by seeing letters of manuscript receipt from editors.

Of the 7 other writers, all of whom wanted to rely on nothing more than weekly meetings with each other to somehow impel writing, none displayed the kinds of prewriting practiced in the program they shunned. And none had come close to completing a rough first draft of their manuscripts after 7 months (1 had done virtually nothing; 2 writers still had little more than 10 pages of new notes and analyses that had not been transformed into prose; and of the other 4 writers, none had more than 12 pages of any kind of writing). Instead, they reported spending much of their time for writing feeling discouraged or blocked, waiting for better writing times, looking again at the literature and data for new directions and overlooked details, or trying to begin anew by writing or rewriting a single, isolated section of their manuscripts to near perfection. So, in a way, they were trying to prewrite, but only in spurts and not until they were mired in premature prose.

Prewriters, again, not only waited actively and began well before feeling ready but they also emphasized working with constancy and moderation far more than did the other writers. And prewriters, like exemplary/mindful writers I've studied, anticipated the next rule (in the next chapter).

11

Work with Constancy and Moderation

What else, besides prewriting, distinguishes the most fluent and successful writers from the rest of us? They work at their craft daily. Donald Murray, the most mindful writing teacher I know, states the principle in his usual, deceptively simple, way:

Writers write.

Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, the most mindful (and soulful) song writers I know, make the point in a more explicit way:

The more you write, the better you write.

Recent studies of expertise and greatness confirm the importance of constancy. Outstanding writers, scientists, and artists work regularly, day in and day out, at their craft—for years and years of constant practice. They rely on coaches and on social networks (even critics and detractors) to direct and hone their patterning of skills. And they learn to limit practice sessions to periods brief enough to minimize fatigue. They know that long, exhausting practice sessions not only persist beyond the point of diminishing returns but that those excesses associate working and performing with mindless rushing and sloppy habits (Simonton, 1994).

Constant writers simply produce more output, overall, than most other people. They also demonstrate clear benefits in this great fertility: They generally work with modest perfectionism. They open themselves to risks, to criticism, to discovery. And they produce far more products of value than do less prolific writers. Why? Their failures inform them as much as their successes and their successes carry them past their failures.

Writers who manage this sort of fruitfulness are surprised that other writers do not do the same:

> *Nine out of ten writers, I am sure, could write more. I think they should and, if they did, they would find their work improving even beyond their own, their agent's and their editor's highest hopes.—JOHN CREASY*

> *Most academic writers don't write enough to get up to speed... they don't know the craft.—DONALD MURRAY*

The seeming contradiction in this prolific output is the moderation with which it is produced. Exemplary writers, as we have seen, work a lot, typically every day, but in brief, daily sessions (BDSs). Consider their own explanations for this moderation:

- When writers work daily on projects—even very briefly—the ideas stay fresh in mind from day to day; so, less warm-up time is needed before writing the next day.
- Brief, daily sessions allow time and energy for interludes of "near-writing" at other times of the day—for noticing things that relate to writing, for collecting and noting things that induce more imaginativeness and clearer organization.
- The habit of writing every day helps make the work more welcome, less a struggle.
- Brief, daily sessions mean shorter, less fatiguing sessions of work.
- Because they eventually provide a realistic sense of doing enough and of progressing fast enough, BDSs help reduce pressures to write quickly and perfectly in first drafts.
- Brief, daily sessions help writers learn how to work proficiently, like real writers, and to feel like real writers.
- Because they are brief, BDSs fit into already busy schedules.
- Brief, daily sessions are more productive, creative, and successful in the long run than writing in spurts and binges.

Said simply, moderation allows for optimal persistence and joy. And for more mindfulness.

Writing Rule 3: Work with Constancy and Moderation.

Exercises for Writing Rule 3

The following practices for establishing and maintaining BDSs (brief, daily sessions) are new but they were presaged in the initial chapters of Section I, on teaching—and in the first two rules here, in Section II on writing:

Exercise 1. Arrange a Regular Time for Writing and Do It in the Same Facilitating Location.

The most fluent, healthy writers not only work every day but they generally put great value on doing it at the same time every day. The most efficient writers I've known choose to write in the mornings, when they are most awake and clear. They also work in surrounds that encourage writing. They set aside a room or location where *nothing but writing* is done (i.e., with few distractions such as magazines or televisions nearby, often not even phones or electronic mail). And they unashamedly, unapologetically, close their office doors and post a sign that asks potential visitors to limit interruptions to true emergencies. They'll tell you that this posting does not offend most people; instead, it enlists them as collaborators in keeping writing times sacred. (The same happens with periods set aside for meditation and/or prayer.)

Equally important, exemplary writers make their writing spots comfortable and comforting. They display favorite artwork and other decorations and mementoes. They most often work facing a window—which not only allows an occasional glance at pleasant things like the sky but also affords distance focusing, an important preventive of eye strain. Or, if they have no window, they gaze on something pleasant during pauses (e.g., a large scenic poster). And, most shocking of all, they often work in comfortable chairs that allow back, neck, arm, and leg support. (Yes, it is possible to write competently on paper or a keyboard while sitting decadently in a Barcolounger! John Updike is among those who do.)

Incidentally, no exemplar I have yet discovered writes much with music in the background. Although no exemplars felt strongly about keeping it out of their writing sites, all of them supposed that music took space and attention away from their nonverbal systems of imaging for writing. The essential thing, they told me, was to keep the writing context as simple and serene as possible.

Exemplary new faculty in my studies also displayed the most comfort at writing. They evidenced the most changes in seating posture and the fewest complaints about stiffness or pain. And they talked about why working in an easy chair, even reclining in bed, doesn't induce sleep: Work done mindfully is comfortable and calm but also alert and focused. It is wakeful and clear-seeing. In that mindful state, sleep is about the last thing that will happen. (Incidentally, mind-

fulness meditators say much the same thing: If you're drowsy during meditation, you're not doing it mindfully, wakefully.)

Exercise 2. Make Time for Regular Writing

If you fret about how and where you'll find, say, an hour a day for regular writing sessions, let go of so intrusive a demand. Start small and flexibly, during brief openings already available on busy days. Struggling writers who suddenly schedule a whole hour a day for writing usually find themselves too busy to give up that much time in already busy lifestyles; instead, they suppose they must wait for a day that magically offers a whole and free hour, or else a day where they feel strong enough to arise at 5:00 A.M. to suffer a bout of writing.

Every newcomer to the professoriate I've tracked could find at least 5- to 10-minutes a day, no matter how seemingly busy. And everyone I coached found ways, gradually, to add more and more time for writing, usually by utilizing several brief openings during workdays. Why hadn't they already put those 5 to 10 minute periods to work? They supposed writing could not be done well in them.

Something related helps writers find time for writing. They notice that many routine activities can be compressed or eliminated, without loss of quality of life or loss of enough work at other important things. One of them put it this way: "It all began when I noticed that I normally laid abed after awakening for about 15 minutes. Before, it had seemed essential, nonnegotiable, until I simply got by with less and less. I'm content with a few minutes. Then I noticed that I spent 20 to 30 minutes sipping coffee and reading a newspaper. And that I often took time to run errands on my way to work in the morning. Those, too, I could see, took away time for writing in the morning." In response to my question about whether this was a hardship, this person answered, "Not really. No. What little comfort I thought I missed at first was soon made up by spending that time having fun at writing, feeling I was getting the most essential work of the day done before the usual problems arose. Now I read the papers in the evenings when I'm tired and little good for more."

Said another participant at this point: "It sounds self-righteous, I know, but I feel good now about getting my writing done before I go to campus. It puts me in a bright mood for the day and I've needed that."

This is the main message: Don't give up if you cannot manage hour-long BDSs with constancy in the short run, even the 5- to 10-minute variety. Settle for approximations. Try writing at times when you might suppose you could not, perhaps during commercial breaks on television, to do simple prewriting like making notes and filing/organizing them. If you distract yourself from the TV programs, what's the loss? Expect something else worthwhile as you free up time from unnecessary things—more occasions for family life and exercising.

Exercise 3. Force the New Habit of Brief, Daily Sessions, but Only in the Short Run.

To make brief, daily sessions a regular habit, try the proven strategy of what psychologists call *contingency management.* That means making something you would rather do (e.g., reading newspapers and e-mail) contingent on first doing your daily ration of writing. Stated more operationally: No writing for the day, then no reward, except in extraordinary circumstances.

You will see your contingency is strong enough when it induces you to write regularly, regardless of mood. You will know your contingency is too strong when it always makes you write and you hate it (e.g., having to sit, unclothed, in a cold room until you finish your daily quota). How long should writers employ the forcing of contingencies? Only in the short run, perhaps for a few months, until the habit of BDSs becomes automatic and welcome. Why not extend the contingencies indefinitely? Writers work better and more creatively, in the long run, without oppressive external constraints. Drop-dead contingencies such as writing to avoid punishment or to make a major deadline risk the association of forced and unpleasant work with the act of writing.

Social Contingencies. A related kind of contingency management may seem less constraining, more comfortable: Find someone with whom to share writing schedules, someone you will meet at a specified place and regular time. As a rule, you should work together, quietly, but on separate projects. You might make daily contacts via phone or electronic messages to your partner. Social contracts work because they make us feel guilty if we fail to meet or call our partner. And once we see our counterpart already writing, we are more likely to write.

Other kinds of social contracts also help. If you set appointments for showing others your ongoing work, even in its most preliminary forms, you help make writing something you do in more timely fashion. When you interest others in what you are doing, they help impel you to keep working at it because they expect to see progress, often. And when you show others your ongoing work, you are less likely to continue writing (or prewriting) past the point of diminishing returns. Why? Because readers/listeners are far better able than we to tell when enough is enough.

Exercise 4. Start without Inspiration.

Learn that even brief sessions generate momentum, motivation, and substantial amounts of output. Inspiration and motivation come far more reliably in the wake of working than in advance of it. The BDS principle works for all kinds of writers, including literary types, scholars, and pulpsters:

> *Authors like [Louis] L'Amour didn't wait for inspiration. . . . L'Amour wrote five pages every day. To the nonwriter this might seem like few—*

but the computation is simple—it multiplies out to 600 pages every four months, two or three books a year.—RUSSELL JACOBY

Why else are BDSs so productive? We have already seen some of the answer: Brief, daily sessions help keep projects fresh in mind; they lessen the fatigue often associated with writing; they establish a discipline of working regularly and productively through variations in mood. The rest of the answer is just as vital. BDSs help us break large tasks of writing into a series of small, manageable bits and, thus to moderate problems of cognitive overload. When all the sequential components of a project—the first, the last, and even the next to last—seem doable, we are more likely to undertake it and stay with it (Rachlin, 1995).

Exercise 5. Chart Your Progress.
This practice, too, is as essential as it is brief. It is also uncommon despite its proven value. The more a writer struggles, in my experience, the more he or she resists keeping logs and graphs of progress. One way that records can help is by reminding and chiding:

I started keeping a more detailed chart which also showed how many pages I had written by the end of every working day. I am not sure why I started keeping such records. I suspect that it was because, as a free-lance writer, entirely on my own, without employer or deadline, I wanted to create disciplines for myself, ones that were guilt-making when ignored. A chart on the wall served me as such a discipline, its figures scolding me or encouraging me.—IRVING WALLACE

Many other great writers, Hemingway among them, kept charts of their progress posted on their walls. But how did they tolerate this intrusion on freedom and spontaneity? Did the discipline repay the effort? Irving Wallace again:

How can a writer adhere to such rigid hours? Once, long ago, deceived by the instructors, professors, by an old romantic tradition, I had believed that a writer writes only when he feels like it, only when he is touched by mystic inspiration. But then, after studying the work habits of novelists of the past, I realized that most successful writers invest their work with professionalism. . . . These authors were uniformly industrious, and when they were once launched on a book they wrote regularly, day in and day out.

Charts and graphs also give feedback about how well we are progressing toward our goals, short and long term. Sometimes they indicate a need to readjust self-assigned outputs upward or downward. And, if we post them publicly, they usually elicit curiosity in other people who then monitor and reward our diligence. Always, in my experience, writers come to value their records as signs of accomplishment; visitors to their offices are often met with a smiling comment about their writing chart: "See this!?"

Charts and graphs, in combination with brief, daily sessions, encourage something else crucial to mindful ways of working: A greater awareness of time and of controlling it calmly. This experience is, whatever else, surprisingly new and effective:

Time is like a language and without mastery of the new vocabulary and grammar of time, no persuasion is going to change behavior.
—E. T. HALL

Structuring time without being tense about it helps writers stay mindful, and therefore find extra opportunities to work and play. When they work with a sense of structured routine, with a present orientation (rather than dwelling on missed opportunities), with effective organization, and with persistence, writers are more likely to display higher self-esteem, better health, more optimism, and more efficient work habits. It's a fact.

When they do not learn mindful ways of dealing with time, writers rush and risk depression. Then they doubt they have enough time and they induce psychological distress, anxiety, neuroticism, and physical symptoms of "time-illness" (Dorsey, 1982).

Neither willpower nor motivation will help students who don't know strategies including scheduling.—LINDA FLOWER

Evidence for the Efficacy of Brief, Daily Sessions

In an ambitious attempt to document the effects of BDS, I measured the writing habits and outputs of newly hired professors over six continuous years. I tracked two groups, each with 16 new faculty. The first group began and persisted with clear habits of binge writing. The second group started and continued as regular writers who worked mostly in BDSs. Figure 11.1 shows that self-described binge writers evidenced (1) more binges of writing in long, euphoric, fatiguing sessions; (2) fewer hours spent writing on average per week; (3) fewer manuscript pages produced overall; and (4) fewer total manuscripts submitted and accepted in refereed outlets through year 6 on campus.

Two output measures, pages of scholarly prose and hours of work at writing, were taken weekly; two measures, manuscripts submitted and manuscripts accepted, represent totals over the first six study years. Differences in these outputs between the two kinds of writers were highly significant statistically—and otherwise. All 16 binge writers failed to write enough to gain retention and tenure;

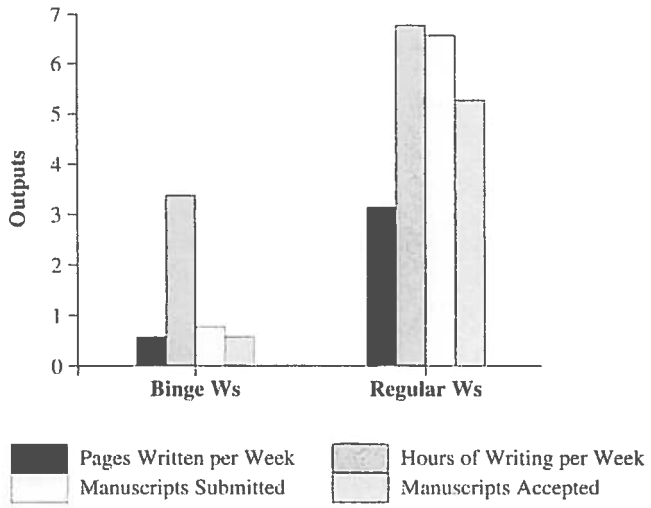

FIGURE 11.1 Effects of BDS

all 16 regular writers were awarded retention and tenure on schedule. So, the constancy and moderation of BDS associated with productivity and success at scholarly writing, while spontaneity and rushing did not. BDS also led to far less suffering (i.e., observable bouts of painful procrastinating and blocking). And its process was less often angry (e.g., comments about being victimized by writing pressures during writing times).

I've demonstrated this sort of effect for BDS in a series of published studies since 1981. Nonetheless, writers outside my programs seemed reluctant to adopt this sort of constancy and moderation until I combined its methods with mindful approaches to writing. Nothing characterizes the sort of thing better than the next writing rule.

12

Stop

Stopping is even more difficult and important than starting, as the massive literature on problems of impulse control shows all too well (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994). Chief among the causes for difficulties of stopping in timely fashion is a society that does little to teach patience and tolerance.

That same oversight applies to writing. So long as writers cannot hold back and stop on time, they do not become productive and healthful workers. Why, exactly? When they fail to hold back from busyness and avoidance, writers rarely end writing before diminishing returns set in, and so make the work aversive and the writing superficial. And so long as they run overtime at writing, other important things get put off and eventually supplant writing.

Failures to stop in timely fashion fortify that self-righteous enemy of fluent and comfortable writing: Busyness. When we cannot stop because of the short-term rewards of continuing, we binge. And when we binge, we usually get only one major task done per day. That often means that the next day or two must be devoted to work other than writing, or maybe a needed rest.

You might recognize the problem more readily among the teachers we saw earlier (Section I) who hadn't learned timely stopping. They waited too long to set off for class. They rushed to the podium and lectured at a rapid pace that left many students detached from the class. And, by running their classes past the bell, they tired themselves and their audiences. They got less from more.

What makes timely stopping so difficult in tasks like teaching and writing? When we have impetus in hand (especially when it was difficult to find in the first place), we dislike interrupting it; momentum can become a uniquely attractive state. Momentum seems to provide the chance to at last catch up when we are behind schedule. It tempts us to add that extra point or two that comes to mind. It

brings a seeming decisiveness and fluency that we are loathe to abandon; after all, we might wonder, what if momentum like this never comes again?

> *One of the laws of composition is that a pen in motion, like matter in Newton's first law, continues in motion unless it is compelled to change that state by forces imposed from without.—WILL AND ARIEL DURANT*

What really makes stopping difficult are the same old things that make all the efficiencies in the *nihil nimus* approach onerous at first: Deficits in patience and tolerance. Timely stopping requires the patience to put aside an uncompleted activity for another—as opposed to succumbing to the impatience that entices us to do more, preferably the whole thing, once we have momentum in the task at hand. And timely stopping needs the tolerance to overcome the temptation that otherwise inveigles us into supposing that having to stop and begin something else will squelch our genius and cause too much discomfort.

Learning to stop in timely fashion is basic to another essential skill of working at writing: Acts of omission. The practice of not saying everything you could, of not displaying all your expertise or imagination is no easy thing. Recall Jack London's comment about omission being the hardest to learn, and add this related bit of wisdom to your store of bon mots:

> *When I was twenty I was in love with words, a wordsmith. I didn't know enough to know when people were letting words get in their way. Now I like the words to disappear, like a transparent curtain.*
> *—WALLACE STEGNER*

Writing Rule 4: Stop, in Timely Fashion.

Exercises for Writing Rule 4

Exercise 1. Begin to Prepare Early for Stopping, Before Feeling the Need.

Here, early means really early! At its best, the habit of calming and slowing extends throughout whole days, beginning with awakening with awakeness. In the section on teaching, I overviewed ways to hold back from leaping out of bed and launching into old patterns of mindless rushing. More mindful ways of starting the day include stretching out and getting in touch with your breathing while still in bed, and then sitting, meditatively, on the edge of bed before moving on to other things. All this takes only a few minutes and it helps both teachers and writers set a calm pace that includes holding back and encourages stopping. This time for early planning also helps us visualize what needs doing and how much will be enough.

Exercise 2. Start on Time, but Patiently.

The most efficient and effective writers take care to begin writing sessions on time, even when not in the mood or when busy doing something else beforehand. This, again, needs precommitting, mentally, to stopping the prior task on time, perhaps even a minute or two early.

Keep this in mind, too, when talking yourself into stopping early: Once writing sessions are brief, and once regular progress is being made, you will make great headway.

Exercise 3. Continue to Prewrite Briefly, Planfully Before Moving to Prose.

This now customary bit of warming-up not only helps generate imaginative ideas and approximations to what can be written formally but it also brings more ease in beginning daily sessions. And when brief prewriting clarifies what needs doing for the day, it reinforces earlier commitments about how much will be enough and when it will be time to stop.

Exercise 4. Continue to Pause Regularly during the Writing.

Pausing is itself a kind of stopping. It, too, falls prey to impatience and mindlessness when we imagine ourselves too busy, too far behind, too inspired to hesitate for rest and reflection.

Pausing also demands the same basic components of mindful practice as does stopping in order to be useful: (1) regular practice until the habit becomes strong, automatic, and welcome; (2) external reminders like timers and partners to cue us when to pause; and (3) ongoing mindfulness of internal signs that help prompt pausing :

- Bodily tensions and discomforts, especially in locations where you commonly symptomize stress (e.g., neck and forehead, stomach, back)
- Eye strain
- Rushed, unreflective pacing
- Fatigue, evidenced not only in a sense of tiredness but also, externally, in errors such as mistyping

Exercise 5. Stop Most Sessions Early.

This act not only combats impatience and intolerance—neither of which condone stopping on time for ourselves, let alone early—but it also leaves time to prepare writing sites and materials for the next session.

One effective way to practice Exercise 5 is to make a habit of always stopping your writing for the day just as you did for teaching, in the middle of a sentence and a paragraph. That way, resumption of the sentence and paragraph will be easier when you get back to work—even on the next day—because uncompleted

tasks tend to remain fresh in mind and impel us to finish them. A related way is to stop while you still have momentum and sense of direction left over:

> *Hemingway said a long time ago—and I subscribe to it—that a smart writer quits for the day when he's really steaming, when he knows it's good and knows where it's going. If you can do that, you've fought half the next day's battle.—JAMES MICHENER*

Exercise 6. Record Your Successes at Stopping Early.
Not only should you chart, log, or graph your daily productivity (in terms of time spent and/or pages completed) but also record your progress at pausing and stopping in a timely fashion. Some of the justifications for this charting are familiar: It takes only a moment; the record can chide us to do better and it rewards us when we do; and, better yet, this act gets us to pause for a bit of mindful reflection about why timely stopping is both difficult and important. What may be surprising in this reflection is the special joy in seeing the effects of self-control that allow stopping on time: this is where writers in my programs report the realization that they can write enough without having their work interfere with other important activities.

And that bit of progress, writers tell me, brings a fresh realization about the nature of freedom: It depends on efficient use of time and resolve—including a growing ability to say no to things they don't really want to do. Stopping and saying no are much the same. Freedom depends on getting enough done on the things they want to do to permit time for leisure and rest. And it requires clear seeing that they are doing enough for now: "Before," said one writer, "I always felt the nagging pressure of being behind, of almost never putting in sufficient efforts. I thought I was free because I did things when I wanted to, but I really wasn't. I was constantly frustrated and unhappy."

One more thing bears mentioning, just the sort of thing that should appear toward the end of this chapter on timely stopping. Knowing how to stop allows time to indulge something that works best just after writing for the day: Judging your work to see if it will meet your standards. Why then and not earlier? Judging too soon and too harshly can prevent you from getting to the end.

> *Finish, then evaluate. Perfect is the enemy of good.*
> *—DONALD MURRAY*

When you've practiced early stopping for awhile on a session-to-session basis, you may be ready to try two of its more extended applications.

Exercise 7. Finish Conceptual Outlining (COL).
A peril in the ease and joy of conceptual outlining is that it can become functionally autonomous (i.e., an end in itself). So stopping COL to move to the next mode of writing can be a difficult matter; but then, everything about holding back in the right places is.

The most mindful writers I've studied pause to remind themselves about the balance involved in deciding when to stop COL. First, they guard against premature ends to the prewriting of COL, sometimes by citing the experts who advise this move. This leader of composition research speaks succinctly to benefits of keeping plans simple and clear:

> *We respond to the problems we pose.—LINDA FLOWER*

Then, as exemplars proceed through revisions of what seem, increasingly, like enough of COL, they attend to the other side of the balance, turning to prose. Donald Murray specifies the gradual process that tells writers when it is time to turn to formal prose; each of his steps to that point is mindful, each could be already familiar from your practice of the teaching rules:

- You see possibilities for writing on something you have studied, noted, and filed.
- You have a definite, perhaps distinctive, point of view on the writing topic.
- You have listened to yourself prepare until you sense a "voice" in how you might present it; the writing will sound distinctively like you. (One writer put it this way, "I knew I had sounded too stuffy and remote before, but now I sound more natural, like I'm not straining and like I'm at ease.")
- What you have to says is news (e.g., somewhat novel information or a novel way of presenting it).
- You have a single line to begin the manuscript, one that informs and entices readers while giving you more sense of control as the writer (a modest example is "Call me Ishmael" from *Moby Dick*).
- You see a pattern in the subject, one that begins to suggest a shape for the entire piece of writing.
- You begin to see and hear images that will help guide that whole.
- You know, with some clarity, what problem you are going to solve in your manuscript and you are confident you can get it said in prose. You are, at last, ready to stop COL and start prose writing!

Now that you are, or will soon be, writing in prose, how will you know how much time to spend on it in the grand scheme of working? The answer is matter of mindfulness, specifically about moderation and balance.

13

Work with Balance

This rule, too, is based on the ways that mindful writers work. Compared to peers, exemplary new faculty spend moderate amounts of time preparing (i.e., prewriting); these mindful writers portion about the same amount of time for preliminaries as for more formal acts of writing over the course of a project. They exhibit this balance not only in obvious ways, such as investing as much time and effort overall in the COL (conceptual outline) as in the prose that mirrors it, but they also continue to intermix preliminaries and writing throughout the project. That is, mindful writers start with a dominance of prewriting and gradually reduce its role into the latter stages of working where they use it only to prime final drafting and revising. Prose writing, on the other hand, plays a small part at first but grows paramount as the writing project nears its end.

In a curious way, a reminder about struggling novice teachers (Section I) helps make the point. Beginning teachers too often spend many, many more hours preparing than in class—so long, that is, as they work inefficiently, somewhat mindlessly. The surprise in that general observation, you might recall, lay with the exemplary teachers who balanced time spent between preparing and teaching: Students rated them more highly in all dimensions of teaching. Students themselves evidenced better notetaking, more comprehension, and more civility in the classes of such teachers. And these uncommonly balanced teachers self-rated the following things more highly than did unbalanced teachers: (1) their teaching, (2) their enjoyment at doing it, and (3) their commitment to improving it. It seems inevitable, don't you agree, for a psychologist to label some people as unbalanced?

What about Balance Is So Valuable?

Balance, because it helps avoid excessivism, helps writers prepare only what needs saying and displaying (just as exemplary teachers tend to present fewer main concepts but more examples of each). And, because it makes room for preliminaries, balance frees writers to get underway while still less than perfectly prepared. It even eases the usually difficult transition from planning to prose because its gradualness of working through increasingly closer approximations to prose engages the writer in prose before she or he is aware of it. This patience in preparing also means that once in prose, writers can be more imaginative and spontaneous in writing. Why? They don't need to plan what to say and write it formally at the same time.

Constant but moderate practice of balance also means that writers are almost always doing preliminary work for new writing projects. While they finish one, balanced writers think of another project and begin to notice and collect, even to take notes and COL. Before they quite know it, they are already writing the next manuscript and are farther along than they realize:

> *If you're immersed in a project, by the time you sit down to write, you almost know the whole story.—PHILIP TAUBMAN*

Here, too, the balance of always keeping some prewriting in motion helps ease the writers past a common blocking point, the transition from ending one manuscript (with its post-partum doldrums) and starting another.

What Keeps Most Writers from Adopting Balance?

They're normal. They, like unbalanced teachers, are only following old customs. Moreover, the balance rule often seem incredible to them at first (e.g., "I would *never* believe it. I wouldn't have enough time for all that").

Mindful writers (and those on the path to becoming so) emphasize two ways of getting past this skepticism. First, they remind themselves that the evidence contradicts their doubts: The most productive, successful authors over the long run not only work in moderation but they also balance prose writing with preliminaries, including COL and mindful freewriting. Their second way of moderating skepticism amounts to practicing balance before it seems worthwhile—by trusting it (i.e., by actively waiting).

Balance Brings Harmony

This is how mindful writers describe the experience: Balance blends *excitement* with *patience* as the writing moves between focus on *discovery* to *resaying* things more clearly (i.e., what was described in Chapter 10 as the mindful interplay of imagery-based generation and of verbally-based revision). Intermixture of those two working moods and modes suggests new connections between ideas and themes for writing. And, as you know, it impels writing but in moderation.

When they at last find this deep sort of balance, writers in my programs talk about flow and its kin, mindfulness. Sometimes they cite experts with similar ideas:

> *Although flow appears effortless, it requires highly disciplined mental activity. . . . Jobs are easier to enjoy than free time because, like flow activities, they have built-in goals, feedback, rules, and challenges . . . all of which encourage concentration and losing oneself in work.*
> *—MIHALY CSIKSZENTMIHALY*

And sometimes they generate their own parallels: "Balance grows with mindfulness, and vice versa."

Writing Rule 5: Work with Balance.

Exercises for Writing Rule 5

While the experience of flow and mindfulness remain somewhat indescribable for most writers at this point, the urge it generates is expressed concretely. Writers seek more balance between time spent on prewriting and prose writing. They even want to balance writing, gradually, with time for sitting at mindfulness meditation or in other "not doing." Their busyness has, by now, decreased to the extent that daily schedules typically allow this luxury.

Exercise 1. Approximate the Time Spent Meditating to That Spent Writing.

This sort of balance works best when acquired patiently and gradually. It works well enough when the time for meditating is kept far briefer than writing—but still constant. Still, the more you practice the calm, focused attention of mindfulness meditation, the easier it becomes to stay mindful while writing. Similarly, the more you remain mindful while working, the more readily you regain mindfulness when you've regressed to mindlessness. Most important, mindfulness meditation helps you make your writing your "practice" of mindfulness because as the two become more balanced, they grow more alike. And this balance, perhaps because its combination brings strength and depth to mental action, helps build resilience:

Equanimity doesn't mean keeping things even; it is the capacity to return to balance in the midst of an alert, responsive life. I don't want to be constantly calm. . . . What I value is the capacity to be balanced between times. . . . Meditators in research studies show quicker return to calm, focused attention after a startle response.—SYLVIA BOORSTEIN

How does mindfulness meditation begin to teach/implant this sort of balance? The most fundamental way starts with the awakeness and clear-seeing of imbalances, then of how they detach what we do from our true selves:

Many of us are so alienated from our basic needs, so programmed to run after what the ego wants, that we have to relearn the basic mechanics of how attention and intention actually work. This is hard to realize when the mind sets up its own separate agenda for fulfilling other kinds of desires, ones that are loveless, without joy or satisfaction.
—DEEPAK CHOPRA

This potential for relieving the self-estrangement that lies within is so important that it has been a constant theme of psychotherapy (usually without quite being called mindfulness):

If aspects of the person remain undigested—cut off, denied, projected, rejected, indulged, otherwise unassimilated—they become the points around which the core forces of greed, hatred, and delusion attach themselves. . . . As Wilhelm Reich demonstrated in his groundbreaking work on the formation of character, the personality is built on these points of self-estrangement; the paradox is that what we take to be so real, our selves, *is constructed out of a reaction against just what we do not wish to acknowledge. We tense up around that which we are denying, and we experience ourselves through our tensions.—MARK EPSTEIN*

When we no longer rely on our hidden thoughts and their tensions to generate writing, we not only come to know ourselves better but we also write more directly and simply, in our own voice. Why? The mindfulness that keeps most interfering and irrational thoughts away also allows us to work with unified motivations and needs. Blocked writers struggle against themselves; exemplars connect with their healthy selves and thus fare better at writing what they know and feel.

When we integrate mindfulness with our work, a wonderful thing happens: Less interference between thinking and doing (and between intention and action) because mindfulness can put thinking out into the moment and to work in rational fashion—or else it lets the thought go for now. As mindful writers, we think about what needs doing and can be done now, while doing it (e.g., clarifying preliminary images and thoughts by stating them aloud and putting them in COL).

Hypomania. But what, some participants have asked me at this point, about rushing, bingeing, and euphoria as ways of generating writing, acts beloved by writers for their immoderation, imbalance, and genius? I agree that a similar transfiguration of image-into-writing can be managed with immoderation—but not in so reliable or heathy a way over the long run as with the calm and clear seeing of mindfulness.

Indeed, both mindful and frenzied writers occasionally report a remarkable juxtaposition of nonverbal imaging and writing, with no apparent intermediate actions. But only mindful writers, so far as I can tell, manage this congruence with calm and broad understanding of why it works, of how to make it work better, and of how to induce it during brief work sessions.

And while both kinds of writers report seeing themselves writing, even seeing what they write as though taking dictation, only mindful writers can reproduce that state with constant health and high output over the long run. Frenzied and hypomanic writers, as we will see in the next chapter, relish the experience of frenzy, excuse its general unproductiveness, and often avoid it for its aftereffects.

Exercise 2. Use Balance to Keep a Second Writing Project Going.
If, for example, you've begun your ongoing writing project with less than balance between the prewriting and prose than you now want, start another writing project with more deliberation, more mindfulness. Don't abandon your present project; just make brief openings each weekday for the patient, unrushed beginnings of a new one. If you set aside your current project, do so with moderation; the longer it sits idly, unseen and untouched, the harder it will be to resume. Constancy fosters finishing; inconstancy risks procrastinating.

Commitment to a second writing assignment, often a third (but no more, according to exemplary writers in academe), suffices. Among other things, it helps reduce the sameness of writing at just one project and it leads to interplay of ideas and working styles.

Exercise 3. Continue Preliminaries Once in Prose.
Prewrite, at least briefly, before almost any daily bout of writing, even once well into prose. One exemplary strategy consists of retyping the last half-page (or less) from the prior day's output. Do it mindfully, deliberately, patiently. Revise only if the changes can be made quickly, decisively. But do it even if you have to recopy everything without change. This helps you retain the two main rewards of prewriting: (1) momentum, and (2) awareness of what you were writing before and where you will probably go next.

As a rule, this exercise of rewriting a bit of what you've written the session before leads to painless starts and almost unnoticeable extension into the new writing for the day.

Exercise 4. Balance Prime-Time and Off-Time Work.
Don't let less important things such as writing of e-mail or remodeling your living quarters take more time than writing (or teaching). Do them in brief, daily sessions where possible.

Exercise 5. Balance Work and Play.
In case you suppose this point is obvious, I warn you that another distinctive quality of poor starters in my studies is an almost complete lack of hobbies put into action or of playing in ways that are unpressured and fun. Who was it who wrote, "All work and no play make Jack a dull boy"? That blocked and rather angry writer in *The Shining*.

14

Let Go of Negative Thoughts

The imbalances we've seen so far—including the usual dominance of generation over reflection in freewriting—amount to mindlessness. The imbalance we confront in this chapter is no exception. When we work mindlessly, we encourage an excess of tense and negative thinking that distracts and undermines our writing.

One of the first writers to describe this insight clearly and publicly was Joanna Field, a young psychologist in the 1930s struggling to find mindfulness on her own. She, sensibly, wanted to rid herself of the confusion and distress that dominated her days. Because she could locate few usefully directive books about finding happiness, she set her own course. She began by patiently observing her mind in action:

> *I was eventually able to gain a fair idea of how my thought behaved when left to itself. One of the first things that struck me was its inconsequence and irresponsibility. . . . I could never predict what would be in my mind the next moment, and I was often amazed at the way these thoughts completely ignored what I felt to be important occasions. . . . This chattering mind was an unreasonable mind: it seemed unable to escape from the narrow circle of its own interests; it recognized only itself and it was always trying to force the rest of the world to do the same.*

To lessen what she called her blind and mean-spirited thinking, she relaxed and lowered herself below the rising clouds of her chattering thoughts, to focus on the direct experience of being alive (what we might call mindfulness).

Even though Joanna Field never got much notice in a psychology then ruled by masculine demands for laboratory experimentalism, strategies similar to hers—of noticing, then calmly evaluating, and then replacing negative thoughts—eventually became widespread. Albert Ellis's methods of rational-emotive therapy may be the best known of those; he coaches patients to calmly notice irrational thoughts and to dispute them by staying in the moment, realistically. This cognitive approach, now so common in psychology, has at last grown popular because it works.

Consider one reason why: Ordinarily, negative thinking is far, far more common than the positive sort. Perhaps this imbalance owes to our evolutionary past or to contemporary deficits in society. Just as likely, it reflects a general lack of education about mindful ways of living and working. Whatever their origins, our internal critics and other negative self-talk can easily overwhelm and block writing. These are the dominant patterns of thinking about writing revealed in my earliest studies amongst new faculty who struggled and disappointed:

- They thought perfectionistically and so they prematurely concluded they could not write well enough.
- They dwelt on prospects of criticism or rejection and they wanted to avoid writing.
- Internal censors haunted their thinking as they wrote and inhibited them from proceeding beyond narrow, premature attention to things like spelling, grammar, and style.
- They thought of writing as unbearably difficult and unrewarding and so they opted for things easier and quicker.
- They thought they knew enough about what they would write to excuse rushing into prose (without conceptual outlining and other prewriting) and so found themselves stumbling and lost.
- As they got farther behind in their writing, thoughts about it emphasized product over process. With that imbalance came another: A tendency to consider the process of working at writing mysterious, one better left unexamined.

But there is more, much more.

Negative Thinking Has Broad Effects

Pessimism and helplessness bring depression and inaction. Anxieties make us inefficient, impatient problem solvers; writing is, whatever else, a problem-solving task. Its excessive self-focus keeps us isolated and shy and unlikely to solicit social support—and then overreactive to public criticism. Its self-criticism inclines us to despair and, at least for awhile, to indecision. And its impulsivity makes us prefer other activities that offer immediate rewards and relief. The more we come to rely on quick and easy escape, the more likely our minds will object by way of negative thinking when we attempt to write anything more than a quick memo.

Positive thinking, as we will see, is far more efficient. To head us in that direction, I begin with this question:

How can you tell if your thinking is getting in the way of your writing?

Mindfully. First, by noticing when your thoughts delay and discourage, particularly when their discomfort makes you turn to a less threatening activity. Second, by clearly, calmly seeing when you are worrying about correctness and perfection too early. And, third, by keeping in mind the costs of negative thinking.

Experimental Evidence about Commonality and Costs

In a study (Boice, 1985a), I collected "talking-aloud" protocols from two kinds of academic writers as they began writing projects: one group with documented records as blocked writers and another group who wrote with occasional fluency. The blockers were most afflicted with negativism but even their more fluent colleagues depicted surprisingly high levels of negative thinking (see Table 14.1). These data can tell you a couple things worth remembering. First, the most common and problematic of negative thoughts were more about the hard work of writing (and about why something more emotionally pleasing in the short run might be done in its stead) than about criticism and perfectionism. Second, even the relatively fluent writers reported surprisingly high levels of aversive thinking when

TABLE 14.1 Percentage of 10-Minute Bouts of Talking Aloud in Which the Thought Was Salient

Type of Cognition/Thought	Blockers ($N = 40$)	Nonblockers ($N = 20$)
1. "Writing is too fatiguing, unpleasant"	65%	43%
2. "It's OK to wait for now and procrastinate"	30%	10%
3. "I'm too upset, depressed to write"	23%	5%
4. "I feel impatient about what I'm getting done"	20%	13%
5. "My writing needs to be superior"	13%	3%
6. "My writing will be unfairly criticized"	8%	18%
7. "Good writing follows rigid rules"	3%	0%

TABLE 14.2 Type of Self-Talk Reported

Group of Writers	Maladaptive	Neutral	Psych-Up	None
Blockers	74%	8%	7%	11%
Nonblockers	42%	6%	49%	3%

getting projects underway; they eventually managed writing but they suffered while resisting it

A different look at these data in Table 14.2 reveals an advantage for the nonblockers. Semi-fluent writers, more often than their usually blocked counterparts, spent comparatively more of their thinking on positive statements that helped psych them up to write (e.g., "This will be pleasant enough once I get going") and about the same small amount of thinking on neutral thoughts (e.g., "It's snowy outside"). But the semi-fluent writers evidenced many more bouts with no discursive/reflective thinking. I judged a period of time as "unthinking" when writers accustomed to talking their writing process aloud (1) ceased commenting; (2) seemed more immersed and efficient at writing and pausing; and (3) afterward, told they could remember the writing but no thoughts while doing it. During such bouts, writers were most fluent and pleased in their work.

Still, semi-fluent writers most often said aloud what they were writing as they wrote it and they hesitated until they could say it clearly. Blockers, in contrast, spent more time with me relating their self-talk, less at talking about writing or doing it; as a rule, they told themselves how unreasonable their task was, that it's OK to procrastinate, and so on—the usual kinds of negative thinking we saw in Table 14.1. And when they were not thinking, blockers most often engaged in strong emotions such as panic or in related behaviors like off-task busyness (e.g., arranging their desktops). All this fits with what is known about mindfulness: Expert practitioners of mindfulness meditation not only revel, calmly, in their release from most negative thinking and strong emotion; they also like to mention their freedom from discursive thinking. When they write, that means they no longer need to say or hear whole sentences, even approximations, to generate writing; instead, they simply let go and allow images to generate writing for the moment. Said another way, they work without having to carry on a story or a chronic discourse; they just do it.

These most mindful writers employ other useful clues about the most basic methods for moderating the role of thought:

> *Sit, focus, and be alert to the periodic presence of these thoughts [that leap ahead in planning, anticipating, and worrying] . . . [realize that] the thoughts themselves are not the problem; they are natural. Mindfulness of these thoughts will enable you to notice them without getting involved.—SYLVIA BOORSTEIN*

> *So when we encounter thoughts that hang on and sweep us away, label it all thinking with as much openness and kindness as we can muster, and let it dissolve.—PEMA CHODRIN*

The most mindful writers I've studied emphasize the shift away from thinking of any kind to working in the present (with balance from occasional thinking/reflection about what they are doing, of course). They talk about having learned to let go, calmly and nonjudgmentally, of most thoughts during writing sessions, especially those of no use in the moment. In particular, they mention something like this: "It's simpler and more direct. I don't really think so much now; that's wasteful, tiring, you know. Instead, what I'm doing is just letting images turn into writing, almost like an interested observer who needs to pay attention but not interfere very much."

And yet, when I've had mindful writers talk with groups of struggling writers, these experts put far more weight on the basic practices that precede direct writing. "First things first," they like to say.

Writing Rule 6: Moderate Negative Thinking.

Exercises for Writing Rule 6

Correctives for negative thinking grow easier, mindful writers (and mindful teachers) point out, once you are already practicing mindfulness. The best strategies, in my programs for writers and teachers are the simplest of these. (They are also so redundant with Section I, on teaching, that they may try your patience. I hope not.)

Exercise 1. Notice Your Thinking at Writing Times.

This is difficult in the short run because most of us are unpracticed at noticing much of our nearly constant self-talk. Most of it ordinarily goes unheard (particularly so long as we are mindless), but all of it is potentially powerful and problematic. The key solutions are all too familiar—patience and tolerance. Patience by way of pauses to listen, even when nothing seems to be happening in the nether regions of our minds. Tolerance to calmly hear the amazingly negative, depressing, irrational things we often say to ourselves.

Begin by noticing (and noting) your self-talk at just one critical time, the few minutes that precede the beginning of a writing session. Look for signs of blind, mindless thinking like the ones I listed earlier in this chapter (Table 14.1).

Exercise 2. Dispute Negative Thinking.
This act amounts to noticing and challenging the usual absurdity and deceptiveness of negative thinking by consciously listening to how rational the thought is when repeated slowly and calmly. If, for instance, you find yourself thinking that your writing assignment is unfair and that the assigner doesn't deserve your work done well or on time, practice a pause to look for irrationalities. For example, you may realize that you have the right to change the assignment, you might even come to like it as much as you did when you agreed to accept it, or you might decide that fairness is not so much the issue for the moment as simply getting to work.

Another kind of awakeness and clear seeing is just as important: Appreciating that part of the reason we engage in too much thinking and story-telling (especially of the negative kind) is the perverse pleasure they provide; the stories we constantly tell ourselves entertain and excite, explain and excuse, and distract or exaggerate. What are we trying to escape in the short run? What really stands between us and our best writing?

> *A restlessness and fear... a level of experience that requires making friends with ourselves at the most profound level possible... and the fears that the fears have no power if you do not need them.*
> *—PEMA CHODRIN*

Exercise 3. Replace Negativities with More Constructive, Optimistic Thinking.
Once you have disputed and exposed an irrationality, turn your thinking to getting on with the task—and, eventually, to getting past much reliance on thinking-at-all-once writing. With practice at this kind of letting go, images for writing replace much of your usual thinking.

> *You can't think and hit at the same time.—YOGI BERRA*

An essence of this third exercise is moving away from *product* orientations to *process* modes of working; the former are more about thinking, especially of the worrisome sort, than the latter. Because product orientations rely on thinking outside the moment, they aim too soon at outcomes and induce unnecessary pressures about working fast enough. Process styles, in contrast, focus attention on the present and not on regrets about the past or anxieties about the future With regular practice at process modes of noticing and replacing irrational thoughts—in the present moment—writers learn to get themselves on track with a simple and borrowed reminder like this: "Just do it."

Remember, too, what makes the transition away from old habits of mindlessness and its negative thinking so difficult at first:

> *One reason mindfulness may seem effortful is because of the pain of negative thoughts. When thoughts are uncomfortable, people often struggle to erase them. The pain, however, does not come from mindful awareness of these thoughts, but from a single-minded understanding of the painful event.—ELLEN LANGER*

What works better than single-mindedness? Mindfulness.

In the longer run, this mindful letting go of negative thinking leads to deeper changes. First, writers see the inefficiency of pessimism and the efficiency of optimism. That is, they learn to reinterpret the things that happen in a more positive light (e.g., by supposing that failures do not reflect a personal weakness so much as a correctable problem, such as having prepared insufficiently or needing to find a new audience). Second, writers freed from constant thinking as they write attend more to pacing and to levels of quality, even to objective information about rates of output.

Other Experimental Evidence

Ellen Langer (1989), the most prominent researcher on mindfulness, finds that the demonstrable costs of mindlessness and its negativity include:

- A narrow self-image that encourages unreasonable social comparisons about our work, as when we look only at a productive person's accomplishments, rather than at the processes he or she went through to get there. Then we mindlessly label ourselves as failures by comparison.
- An unintended meanness toward ourselves and others because we or they have fallen into routines of blind thinking that go unquestioned. So, for example, we might make impatient and reflexive self-statements about a lack of intelligence when others (or ourselves) do not display immediate brilliance.
- A blind compartmentalization of our thoughts (e.g., so that people from blue-collar backgrounds must have less inborn natural talent as writers than do the upper classes).
- A readier loss of feeling in control when we limit intelligent choices (e.g., by blaming our failures on others) and so we see fewer ways we could work against a background of chronic frustration and anger.
- An inclination to learned helplessness because we remain mindlessly passive in situations that could be easily handled with awakeness and its decisiveness.
- A stunted potential in our work because mindlessness (by diminishing self-image and self-esteem with its constant and negative chatter) narrows our choices and weds us to single-minded attitudes.

Langer's evidence also suggests that mindful alternatives are easier and better than staying with mindless negativity:

While some people think that mindfulness takes a lot of work, research discussed in my book shows that mindfulness leads to feelings of control, greater freedom of action, and less burnout.—ELLEN LANGER

15

Moderate Emotions

This seventh rule for mindful practice of writing, like the six before it, is about self-control. Here, though, awareness shifts to something even less often considered by writers, modulating emotions while working. Why strive for moderation? Writing with too little emotion results in dull experience, weak motivation, and mundane output. Writing with too much emotion exhausts the writer and makes the work aversive. Rule 7 aims to avoid both extremes.

The hardest part is reining in emotion and we already know some of the reasons why:

- Impatience and its impulsivity
- Mindlessness and its love of extremes
- Momentum and its short-term rewards

One other difficulty in moderating emotions may be most problematic for writers:

- States of high emotion are addictive.

  High emotion in writing usually takes the form of hypomania.

Hypomania

This near-state of mania, with its intense rushing and prolonged emotional escalation, is pathological (American Psychiatric Association, 1994); although hypomania's short-term benefits are tempting (and addictive), its long-term costs far outweigh them. The problem with hypomania goes beyond the superficial and disorganized writing it often produces—even beyond the lingering exhaustion

that makes restarting difficult. Hypomania commonly leads to dysphoria (just as mania begets depression) and to its sad inaction or angry impulsivity. With this cycle of ups and downs in place, writers work only sporadically. When they at last break out of their dysphoria, they need the emotional state that ensures the opposite experience: hypomania. And when they have drained themselves in a rushed and emotional binge necessary for hypomania, they face another bout of dysphoria. In fact, hypomania co-relates with:

- A measurable wake of depression after its manicky bingeing
- Less output and quality of writing in the long run
- More long-term difficulties in writing, including blocking

Hypomania also undermines the general health and social life of writers. Consider the case of a devoted binge writer, Ayn Rand:

> *Ayn suffered both physical and mental agonies in her struggle. Sometimes Frank [her husband] would find her slumped over her desk as if she were unable to rise again; she would emerge from her study with new deep lines on her brow and her body sagging with weariness. At other times she projected an emotional tension that was painful to see; she could not eat or sleep, or even talk. . . . As the last of her powers of endurance were spent, as her nervous state grew more jagged and fragile, the bitterness and pain in her personality began to take the ascendancy.*
> *—BARBARA BRANDON*

All this doesn't mean that hypomania has no place in writing. Although writers with the most fluency and happiness typically keep emotions at low to midrange levels, they also know the value of changing their pace. Sometimes they use a burst of excitement to work past their internal censors or to convey the appropriate voice in their writing. Other times they write dispassionately (just to get ideas down on screen or paper), knowing they can wait to find more imagination in revising it later. Best of all, in their opinion, they work with a rhythm based in mild happiness, one punctuated by occasional swings in mood that do not persist to the point that impedes returning to moderation (and mindfulness).

Why Moderation of Emotions in Writing Is Generally Unmentioned

The reasons are, of course, much the same as for the neglect of mindfulness practice in our society. While moderation of emotions sounds like common sense, it seems impractical in real life. And where the idea has been tried, it has lost favor. Early psychotherapists, for example, particularly those with an interest in Eastern philosophies, made a clear case for its value:

> *Poets and philosophers of all times have known that it is never the serene, well-balanced person who falls victim to psychic disorders, but the one torn by inner conflicts.—KAREN HORNEY*

Some of those pioneers were even more direct: Pierre Janet, Freud's predecessor, found that work with too fast a pace and too high a level of tension caused neuroses marked by emotional instability (Ellenberger, 1970). Nowadays, only a few psychologists continue to document the costs of working under extreme conditions of emotion. Baumeister, Heatherton, and Tice (1994) currently lead this dissident movement and they promote generally unappreciated findings like these:

- When people rush mindlessly, they respond so exclusively to their emotional needs that they are unlikely to solve more important problems.
- High emotion elicits high arousal, which consumes the very energy needed for self-stopping; states of high emotion are therefore self-sustaining beyond the point of diminishing returns.
- High emotions invite thoughts with broadly meaningful understandings (e.g., concerns about the worth of one's writing and of oneself) and these, in turn, risk the inhibitions, such as blocking, that exist at similarly high levels.

This information not only remains generally unknown and unimplemented in psychology, but also in composition teaching and other disciplines that educate writers. The reason, simply, is that most writers and teachers of writing aren't interested. They place writing into its own isolated category of behaving (a sign of mindlessness, as we saw in the prior chapter), with its own special rules that cannot be examined like ordinary phenomena (see Boice, 1996c). So, for example, writers often resist empirically based information about the counterproductivy of writing in hypomanic binges; even the "hardest" scientists in academe have insisted to me that they simply know, with a confidence not dependent on evidence, that high emotion produces the most brilliant writing.

Recall some of the reasons why this mindless tradition may be changing: (1) newly popular directives from expert practitioners of mindfulness meditation about slowing down and working in the moment, with calm and clear seeing; and (2) similar advice from mindfully-oriented writing teachers:

> *So try to calm down, get quiet, breathe, and listen. . . . If you stop trying to control your mind so much, you'll have intuitive hunches about what this or that character is all about.—ANNE LAMOTT*

We also have (3) the mindful habits and attitudes of exemplary writers to model after.

Writing Rule 7: Moderate Emotions.

Exercises for Writing Rule 7

Writers on the way to mindfulness, at about this point in my programs, typically become close observers of their moods; they notice which emotions impede or impel writing. And here the most mindful of them become patient experimenters who compare the effects of working with hypomania versus moderation. This is the usual progression:

Exercise 1. Monitor and Record Mood Levels and Types during Writing Sessions.

Begin by rating emotions on a scale measuring, for example, high nervous tension versus calm patience. That emotional continuum might have endpoints labeled as *anxiety–serenity.* With practice at noticing affective states as simple as happiness while working (something most writers have not been educated to do), other, more elusive emotions such as anger and fear become more discernible. The importance of recognizing anger and fear is that their narrowness maintains a status quo contrary to mild happiness and confidence.

Aim first for ongoing awareness of how emotions affect your writing. If you have trouble feeling emotions while you write, try awakening to emotions that occur during your regular bouts of "not doing," in practice of mindfulness meditation while sitting or walking.

Exercise 2. Set Reasonable Goals for Emotional Moderation.

At the least, try to maintain the calm pacing you already know about as you begin daily sessions of writing. Then, add the occasional emotion of mild happiness to it. Why? To optimize the kinds of problem solving essential to writing. To make writing more enjoyable and rewarding.

How can you tell if you are mildly happy while writing? Pause and observe; compare your feelings and expressions with other experiences. How can you induce this state if it's not already there? Scan for negative thinking, supplant it with positive thoughts—better yet, let it go. Then, plant a faint smile that helps relax your face and your mind (this grows easier with practice, even for New Yorkers). And notice moments when your writing is calm but joyful.

Expect to struggle, at least at first, in the absence of usual tension. You might suppose, mistakenly and mindlessly, that you are not working hard enough (or suffering enough). In the longer run, anticipate something else I've already mentioned. While the most mindful writers commonly work with a low but noticeable level of emotions, they also rely on changes of pace and perspective to keep themselves awake and interested.

> *The two major positive emotions are: 1) Interest-excitement generated by a moderate level of novel stimulation or complexity and ambiguity in one's environment; and 2) the joy experienced in matching or assimilating such novel or complex information with previously established schemata. . . . Reflective awareness and long processing may slow reactivity, lead to some loss of information (but most of our environments are highly redundant anyway), and establish a sense of control over input that maintains an emotional stance of interest and excitement or joy.*
> *—JEROME SINGER*

Exercise 3. Work and Write with a Sense of Rhythm.

This seemingly mysterious skill begins with pausing to shift emotions in timely fashion. Its basis, holding back, is the hardest part of mindfulness. But holding back brings more awareness about when to slow down to get ready to stop, and a greater appreciation that writing can be done at differing tempos. Sometimes, you might find benefit in writing as deliberately as though you are doing calligraphy and crafting succinct, clear sentences. Sometimes you might look to add elements of repetition or of parallel. Sometimes you might ensure a steady pace by working in concert with your breathing, even a metronome. Other times you might make a contrasting point or add a short sentence to change the pace. All this helps establish a pattern and a voice as a writer:

> *Vary your discourse; a style too equal and uniform puts us to sleep. . . . Keep a sharp ear for the cadence of your words.—BOILEAU*

Exercise 4. Accept Difficult Emotions.

Because mindful writing brings you face to face with real problems in your life, it also occasions pain. What then? Don't avoid or escape the pain by turning to procrastination or bingeing. Instead, slow down and embrace it, mindfully but briefly:

> *Putting your attention on your feelings gets you closer to the state of witnessing: you observe the pain without getting all wrapped up in all the secondary blame, avoidance, and denial that usually follow. . . . It takes detachment to bring understanding, and if you get caught up in your hurt, you won't see the reason behind it.—DEEPAK CHOPRA.*

Exercise 5. Work without Sustained High Emotion.

In the research brief that follows, I show how rushing, bingeing, and immoderate emotion (compared to writing with more constancy and moderation) lower productivity in the long run and bring unnecessary suffering and depression to writers.

Evidence for the Benefits of Working with Moderate Emotions. From longitudinal studies of hundreds of writers new to professorial careers (Boice, 1992c), I selected 16 new faculty members who came to campus with the most extreme attitudes about the role of emotion in writing. During my visits to their offices as they wrote (or tried to), 8 of them stood out as self-described romantics who claimed that their best writing needed high emotions and strong suffering, and 8 valued calm and moderate happiness as writers.

Group 1. The eight highly emotional writers worked at a hurried pace and said that they deliberately maintained it until they felt euphoric, brilliant, and frenzied. During our discussions they expressed strong disdain for their peers who planned to write with moderate emotion: Those "mechanical writers," the romantics assured me, would produce less overall, write with less creativity, and find less acceptance for their writing in prestigious outlets. The particular advantage of working amid crazed emotions, romantics assured me, was its creative madness and its special genius.

Group 2. The eight writers working with moderation of emotion were also in their second year on campus when I began studying them more formally. They, too, had demonstrated unmistakable patterns, but of constant and unhurried writing during their first years on campus. They, unlike the first group, never mentioned needing Muses, sudden inspiration, or heated emotions to write. Nor did these constantly moderate writers express much concern for brilliance, creativity, or perfection—at least in the present. And, finally, these moderates could not be coaxed into strong judgments about the writers in Group 1 (e.g., "If it works for them, fine").

Data Collection. All 16 writers agreed, without coercion or pressure, to endure even more of my scrutiny through their sixth years on campus (all were at research universities with clear requirements of writing and publishing for retention/tenure). All 16 writers soon learned to ignore my presence as they worked, even to disregard the appearances of my graduate assistant who periodically checked the reliability of my ratings of work habits and my notes of comments.

Results. My first task, given challenges from critics of my earlier work, was to document the extent to which romantic writers displayed rushing and euphoria, compared to their moderate counterparts. In fact, as Figure 15.1 shows, the romantics displayed far higher frequencies of hypomanic behavior: (1) They had more sessions, once underway, with distinctively high rates of words per minute, (2) more spontaneous reports of euphoria while writing, (3) more sessions where they worked impulsively and without resort to notes/outlines/plans, and (4) more errors in typing/writing that interfered with their fluency.

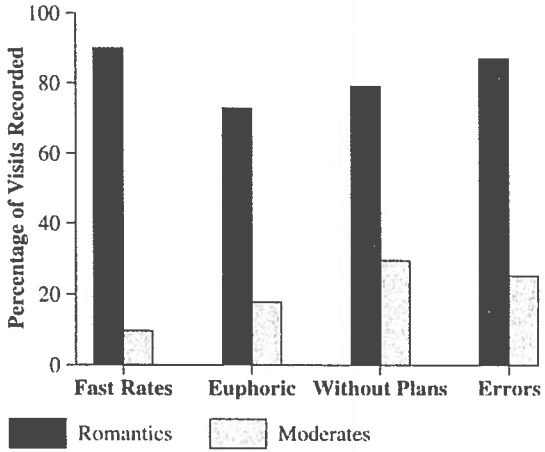

FIGURE 15.1 Hypomania

Differences between the romantics' levels of hypomania from those of writers in Group 2 were highly reliable statistically. Thus, the romantic writers had been correct in describing their writing styles as highly emotional, rushed, impulsive, and spontaneous—even in supposing their style carried some small disadvantages of higher error rates while composing and keyboarding in what they called a fine frenzy.

Figure 15.2 shows that these romantic writers resemble the binge writers of Chapter 11 in terms of work habits and long-term productivity. That is, writers who professed romantic beliefs of creative madness produced the same disappointing result as writers who worked in binges because deadlines forced them to. Here, as there, binges (intense, fast-paced, and rarely uninterrupted bouts of writing for at least 2 hours per session) documented per month were more frequent in romantic than for moderate writers. Moderates, in contrast, excelled in *all* long-term measures of output they needed for tenure/promotion (e.g., 1.8 vs. 0.2 manuscripts a year over their first 2 years on campus—a difference that continued until at least year 5).

Moderates, writers who wrote with deliberately calm emotions, worked with more brief, daily sessions (BDSs). Moreover, their BDSs were far more often marked by a calm pace (at least 4 pauses an hour) and short duration (no more than 90 minutes a day). And moderates, contrary to the expectations of their more romantic colleagues, managed far higher levels of output, both in terms of pages written per month and manuscripts finished and submitted to refereed outlets per year over the five years of formal observation and recording. (Recall that the formal study began after participants had displayed consistent patterns of high or moderate emotion during year 1 on campus.)

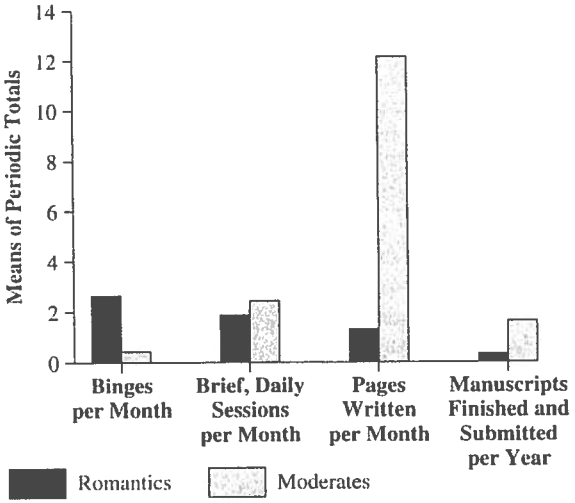

FIGURE 15.2 Bingeing and Productivity

Not until romantics were confronted with evidence about how their working style related to levels of creativity did they begin to admit their approach might not be ideal. They had assumed that creativity was a sure benefit of working with hypomania (e.g., "That's what divine madness means"). Here, too, I had data to test their assumption (Figure 15.3).

From the outset of formal observations and recordings, I enlisted all 16 writers to note their thoughts of innovative and useful ideas for writing on notecards. (Apparently this index, based on self-reporting of creative ideas as they occur, is more meaningful than typical systems of estimating creativity during writing.) In my weekly visits and calls I had writers restate and explain their entries for me. I counted only those I judged as original and potentially useful for her or his writing project. (Here, too, I used a second observer to check for agreement.)

Mindfulness, of sorts, may explain that difference in creativity. Romantics, for whom ideal writing meant suffering, excused their low levels of creativity as a result of keeping writing out of mind between sessions. Romantics were also observed to pause and reflect less often during writing, apparently because they were working at full speed or not at all. Moderates, on the other hand, reported thinking about their writing as a routine, enjoyable habit; they emphasized a fondness for coming to writing sessions with novel ideas and new directions in mind. When they talked aloud their writing for me, they, unlike romantics, used pauses to generate even more creative ideas.

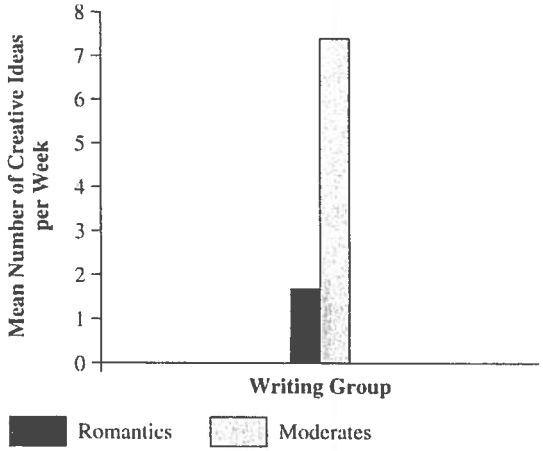

FIGURE 15.3 Creativity for Writing

Faced with these data and reflections about them, three of the binge writers began to question their writing habits and attitudes. The other five remained adamant, concluding that academic writing allowed them too little outlet for their creativity. All eight of the bingers, though, wondered if they had worked in ways that induced too much suffering. Indeed, binge writers did evidence far more discomfort connected with writing than did moderates, so much so that it seemed to interfere with their planned resumptions of writing.

To measure their misery objectively, I subjected all 16 writers to the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) during times just after beginnings of semesters where all of them reported feeling especially overdue as writers. I administered this brief self-inventory of depressive symptoms just prior to the first writing session (prewrite), just after (postwrite), one day after (day later), and two days later. Bingers far more often scored BDI levels considered significant in terms of depression at each of those testing intervals (Figure 15.4).

Note that the difference between percentages of writers with problematically high levels of depressive symptoms grew most dramatically by the day after the first writing session of the semester (a session in which bingers invariably binged and moderates performed with moderation). The individual BDI levels usually reached by individual romantics in the days following their emotional binge at writing are those that typically interfere with fluency in writing in my other studies of depressed writers.

Moderate writers, finally, displayed higher levels of interest in activities such as meditation and spirituality even as they came to campus. Their romantic coun-

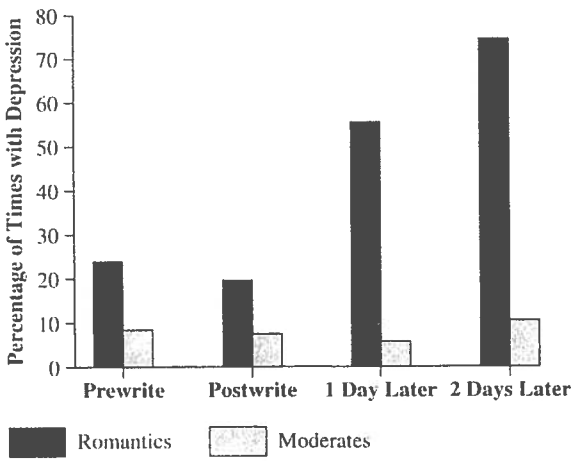

FIGURE 15.4 Depression after Writing

terparts, in contrast, evidenced higher levels of busyness and unhappiness in relation to tasks like writing.

Literary Evidence for an Advantage of Working in Brief, Daily Sessions

The kinds of data just presented don't appeal to all writers, I've discovered. Some novice professors prefer examples from "real" writers, not academics. One of the most informative cases comes from a biography of the novelist Joseph Conrad (Meyers, 1991).

It was Conrad who, when binging and depressed, suffered terribly from a crippling neurasthenia that paralyzed his writing arm and depressed his spirit. No wonder, given the writing habits of his early career: He often spent whole days struggling to get his writing started. If he got underway at all, it was usually in the evening and in binges. Despite these prolonged struggles, Conrad's outputs were small, often no more than 300 words a day; Conrad's editors also suffered over his slow, unpredictable pace. Despite its drawbacks, Conrad defended his style of waiting for crisis and frenzy before writing as one of "exquisite agony."

But during the middle stage of his career as a writer, Conrad was forced, more or less, into a mindful style of working when the novelist Ford Madox Ford became his close friend, benefactor, mentor, and amanuensis. This is how Meyers (1991) put it:

> *Ford's literary help was even more significant [than renting him his house cheaply and advancing him money]. He listened as Conrad read aloud what he had written, suggesting words, phrases, and forgotten incidents. Ford proof-read and corrected Conrad's manuscripts. He even took dictation as Conrad talked aloud what he would like to write.*

Ford also stimulated Conrad to write when he would otherwise have been overcome by depression and other forms of debilitating illness. In the main, Ford managed this coaching by structuring Conrad's writing days with planning and on-task work, always in a context of mindfulness about what could be written, always with an emphasis on staying in the moment and writing according to plan. The result for Conrad was a remarkable increase in both his writing output and his health. Conrad could, while talking aloud the writing process with Ford, write a thousand or more words day after day. During this period he made significant progress on *Nostromo* and finished *One Day More.* And over that time, Ford's moderation of Conrad's emotions during writing sessions removed the madness from his work, even while its productivity and publishability went up.

The problem with that arrangement was that Conrad never became more than a passive and skeptical recipient of Ford's mindful coaching. So, as Conrad's resentment of Ford's interventions grew, the two had a falling-out and Conrad resumed his old ways of tormented, maddened writing. His productivity and his quality of writing dropped as his hypomania reappeared; the creative struggle he suffered while writing *Under Western Eyes* was so intense that it led to Conrad's complete nervous breakdown (Meyers, 1991):

> *Conrad [again] suffered recurring pain from chronic gout and the ever-present anxiety about money. He often started his novels without a clear plan and had no idea where the book would end—or when. . . . In the summer of 1909 Pinker [his publisher], dissatisfied with Conrad's failure to deliver the long-awaited manuscript, threatened to sever their business connection. In December they reached a crisis when Pinker refused to advance any more funds and Conrad [vowed] to throw the manuscript into the fire.*

Here, as in my more direct and extensive studies of academic writers, this romantic approach to writing—amid high and sustained passions—was far less productive and healthy than working with the moderation of generally calm emotions. I know of no exceptions in other accounts of how writers worked.

Still, beliefs in creative madness are as popular as ever. Witness the admiration directed by scholarly reviewers to recent books such as Kay Jamison's (1993) *Touched with Fire*, an unsubstantiated glamorization of working amid hypomania. (She herself, as she proudly admits, is a well-diagnosed manic.) Why are her ideas so attractive to many other writers?

- First, writers who write, especially those who review, are far more often bingers and near-manics than are the exemplars I've mentioned throughout my book. Exemplars, recall, constitute a small minority of those of us who write. More to the point, exemplars are more likely to keep at their priority work than to judge and review, especially about manuscripts with an emotional or political edge; they tell me they prefer to work, even read, in contexts that foster calm and clear seeing.
- Second, mindless rushing amid high emotion has the enormous power of a well-entrenched habit. Its strength is increased each time it helps us get past difficult, discomfiting tasks like writing with a frenzy of blind emotion and driving euphoria.
- Third, the generally unexamined premise that fine writing requires strong pain makes a good excuse to oneself for not writing. (Recall the tables from Chapter 14 that showed blocked writers using the supposed aversiveness of writing as their most common reason for excusing themselves from writing.)
- Fourth, its culturally approved reputation as a madness available to only creatives born to their genius elicits mindless admiration and sympathy that reinforce the eccentric and unhealthy behaviors of writers. (Much the same romantic belief once applied to writers as consumptives, as they were then known; they, too, were presumably paying the price of their genius; they, too, sometimes made no attempt to cure the disease for fear its absence would drain them of their creative powers.)

Perhaps, then, the problem with mindfulness is that it offers too little romance and martyrdom. Or perhaps it offers too much practicality, too ready a success to all manner of writers (even those without the proper pedigrees). The real problems, it seems to me, are these: Too few of us who want and need to write have been shown this more democratic, humane alternative to mindless rushing and emotion as writers. And too many of us who already write want to keep the spoils to ourselves, by assuming that most other people should or cannot write.

16

Moderate Attachments

The eighth writing rule follows from the prior two—both of them about mindful letting go. In effect, Rule 6 said: When we let go of negative thinking, we help disconnect writing from usual anxieties and conflicts. Rule 7 said: When we let go of rushing and euphoria, we no longer depend on binges for productivity. Rule 8 deals even more directly with letting go of habitual immoderations by at last facing that formidable opponent of mindfulness called ego. Ego, as we know from Johanna Field, can operate blindly, with contentiousness and meanness, and with an unthinking attachment to the status quo. Unless we moderate ego, it blocks the free and generous spirit of mindfulness.

> *Know the difference between ego and spirit. Spirit exists to give and not to take. It wants to bring joy, it has no hunger for approval. It does not crave the obedience or agreement of another person and lives beyond all demands.—DEEPAK CHOPRA*

This eighth step in the *nihil nimus* approach means easing off blind needs for perfectionism and its overidentification with our work. It means keeping some emotional and intellectual distance from our writing, particularly in its formative stages. It means working patiently and tolerantly, with a sense of playfulness and humor. It means letting go to allow more openness to alternatives, even to criticism.

A bit of reflection reveals why we get so attached to the things, like writing, we present for public scrutiny. We want them to elicit admiration and affection, to be seen as acts of brilliance. We dislike disapproval, more so indifference.

You might sense the usual result of overattachment, given what you're learning about mindlessness: We try too hard and we strive too eagerly. We work intensely and self-consciously, straining from the outset to work with genius, and we invoke all the risks of a product orientation (some of which are listed here):

- Rushing and premature editing
- Narrowness that excludes both playfulness and seeing alternatives
- Tension that causes fatigue, doubts, struggles, and blocking
- Hypomania and grandiose expectations of having locked into a dazzling plan—and then a driving desire to produce deathless prose
- Dysphoria/depression with its overreactiveness to criticism
- An equation of writing success with self-worth

Overattachment is so important that I explain it another way: When we set our expectations, mindlessly, to say a particular thing, we may not notice alternatives.

So, to communicate effectively with our intended audiences, we need to keep some distance from our work—at least enough to imagine how listeners or readers will react; enough to benefit from suggestions for change; enough to ensure some compassion for ourselves and our audience.

Mindful writers such as Pema Chodron offer the most direct interpretation of the problem and solution: Overattachment builds when we grasp for short-term relief from doubt; it moderates as we let go of needs for certainty. This means more than nonattachment from blind hopes for comfortable experience at every moment. It also means giving up false expectations that insecurity and pain can be eliminated. And it demands relaxing amid the unpredictability and uncontrollability of real life. Specifically, it requires clearly seeing that panic and embarrassment are of little lasting help when things don't work out. Other mindful acts that help overcome this mindless attachment are insight and compassion—insight about the costs of indulging addictions to immediate relief; compassion in replacing those frenzied hopes with direct, honest relationships, even with our own selves.

The results of practicing this kind of mindfulness are things I saw first in those most fluent and healthy writers I keep referring to:

- Calm and gentle letting go of concern about always gaining the approval of everyone else
- Contentment with staying and working in the moment, mainly for the discovery
- A sense of humor about their own foibles as writers

Thus, exemplars don't pressure themselves to be perfect, just to be awake, clear seeing, compassionate, and insightful.

Writing Rule 8: Moderate Attachments and Reactions.

Exercises for Writing Rule 8

Please don't underestimate the difficulty of mastering this stage—or its importance. All of us as writers are, I think, inclined to overattachment with our creative, public presentations. So it is that most of us suffer stage fright and blocking at times, and that we have found criticism difficult to accept in calm, agreeable fashion. The following exercises demand an acceptance of disapproval that can be more painful than any other step in mindful ways of writing.

Exercise 1. Monitor for Overattachment.
During pauses from writing, look for signs that you are not keeping your distance, and carry out the noticing calmly and playfully:

- A pronounced reluctance to pause or stop because the prose seems too splendid to interrupt or reexamine
- A belief, early in the project, that the work is going to be superior to that of most writers and that it must therefore be all the more impeccable and radiant
- A reluctance to share preliminary versions of plans or text for fear that ideas and phrasings will be stolen
- A growing anticipation that the writing is so special that it will necessarily be undervalued, even rejected, by the establishment
- A diminishing sense of humor about the work (i.e., can you joke about it; more important, do you tolerate humor about it from others?)

All those feelings *could,* of course, be based in reality. But in considering the possibility they are real, you might do well to keep three other realities in mind: First, most writing (even by idolized writers) is not great until revised. Second, we can make our writing less likely to face criticism by working with the mindful standing back for clear seeing that ensures clarity and simplicity. Third, the roots of overattachment lie in pride and suspiciousness. One good way to exorcize them is with moderation and modesty. Better yet, replace them with bits of gentle self-effacement, such as this favorite saying of mindful writers in my programs:

I'm not much of a writer, but I'm a great rewriter.

Exercise 2. Encourage Criticism, the Earlier the Better.
This remarkable feat begins with making early writing less private and less self-centered. It means working with other people occasionally. It means letting others look at what you are doing, from the initial stages onward. It means working with a compassionate sense of audience in mind (e.g., reading what you have just done

to hear how it sounds, to imagine how readers might respond). It means abandoning that favorite pattern of writers, working alone, somewhat secretively, and not showing the product until it is seemingly finished and worthy of unqualified praise.

Mindful ways of writing not only bring order and action. They are also more public and more open and more responsive. In the long run, this relative "nonattachment" while working makes the writing more palatable for editors, teachers, advisors, and all manner of readers. Why? Because writing in the broader and more compassionate context of nonattachment helps make readers feel more involved. Did you know that success in writing is often measured by the extent to which readers feel like writers who would like to have discovered and said similar things? Darwin's patient and good-natured writing in *Origin of Species,* for instance, stimulated some readers to say, "I wish I had thought of that." (But not *all* readers, as I recall.)

Exemplars, again, let go of overattachment to their writing in order to see a broader, more involving context for communicating. And they apply that same sort of good-humored nonattachment to utilize criticism more productively. These exemplary strategies can help you progress somewhat gradually through the most difficult parts of that stance:

1. Ask critics to limit their comments to only a few things that you yourself wonder about (e.g., "Do you see anything missing from this list?"), inquiries where you know you will not be overly hurt by the response. With practice, move to slightly riskier questions (e.g., "Can you think of a better beginning than this?"). Like any other kind of phobia, avoidance of criticism is best moderated by way of what psychologists call exposure therapy (e.g., becoming less anxious about heights by gradually working yourself higher, each time letting go of tensions and growing more tolerant). Don't expect the pain of criticism to go away; rather, face it objectively and calmly. You'll learn that the pain is, like everything else, only temporary—even that you can learn something by not trying to change or avoid the experience in its moment.

2. Ask critics to make specific, constructive comments. This means not accepting vague criticisms (e.g., "This is unclear"; "I don't like your writing style") but instead calmly asking for more specifics ("OK, please tell me what I should do to make it clearer"). And, as you muster more bravery, ask critics to begin with specific and positive comments about at least one thing you have done well. In actual practice, few critics refuse this request or even see it as an imposition; they may simply be unaccustomed to doing it.

3. Practice mindful ways of staying relatively calm and nonreactive while learning about your criticism. You already know the basics: Returning to your breathing while listening to or reading the critic and clearly seeing what is useful in the criticism. If you expect yourself to overrespond, get it by way of an intermediary who restates the critic's remarks or written comments in gradual, tactful fashion. In that manner, you will be better able to sort the useful message from what might have seemed intolerably personal and hurtful.

4. Then, when you are ready to hear or read critics directly, maintain your focus and distance by taking careful notes on what you might consider doing differently. Stop your critic, calmly and compassionately, for clarification if necessary. (Doing this usually defuses what would otherwise be a tense situation.) Don't forget the reasons why critics need compassion: Theirs is a task that usually goes unrewarded, unappreciated. And they may feel obliged to demonstrate their smartness (writing is a context likely to do just that). They may not, you know, have been taught to make positive comments about writing; most college educations encourage criticism, not praise, of what is read and evaluated.

5. Practice ways of agreeing with criticism, at least *some* aspect of it. Begin by recognizing a basic truth about writing efficiently: All critics, even the harshest and most ill-informed, have something worthwhile to teach us. If the critic hasn't even read your manuscript carefully, find out what put him or her off from a closer and more patient look. If your critic has misunderstood your message, investigate to see where the confusion occurs. If your reader is offended, inquire about the stimulus (it may be something minor that you hadn't noticed; it may be something major, like a racist attitude). Whatever the problem, it is (in the view of mindfulness meditators) just a problem to be solved. Or you may decide, after calm reflection, that there is no problem (e.g., because your critic wants you to write the paper as she or he would).

An especially effective strategy for practicing these counterintuitive, unfamiliar things is this: Begin your spoken or written response, by finding something with which you can honestly agree (e.g., I can understand how some people might not find this interesting, but . . .).

6. Thank your reviewer for his or her work. You may encounter the same critic again.

7. Exercise your sense of humor about your usual reactions to criticism.

> *My first response if they have a lot of suggestions is never profound relief that I have found someone in my life who will be honest with me and help me do the very best work of which I am capable. No, my first thought is, "Well, I'm sorry, but I can't be friends with you anymore, because you have too many problems. And you have a bad personality. And a bad character."—ANN LAMOTT*

17

Let Others Do Some of the Work

This ninth rule may be the most surprising of all the mindful ways of letting go. Not until exemplary writers told me they practiced this strategy deliberately, did I begin to appreciate its worth. They not only had learned to excel at allowing other people do some of the work of writing, but they were overcoming two very ingrained, blind beliefs in doing so: That asking others to help with writing is an imposition on them, and that accepting help lessens the originality and worth of your own writing.

The other aspects of this mindful pattern are not surprising. Compared to others, exemplars:

- Encourage more observation and criticism of their work, especially early in the planning process. (When readers mention overlooked sources and confusing transitions in our plans, they do some of our work for us.)
- Collaborate more often and are quick to explain reasons for doing so (e.g., collaborators share the work and thus improve the product; they also help reduce the chances of fatal mistakes in manuscripts).
- Acquire a sense of audience that includes awareness of social conventions and ongoing conversations:

  If thought is internalized public and social talk, then writing is internalized social talk made public and social again. Communities agree on sets of conventions and values for writers; not to have mastered the normal discourse of a discipline is not to be knowledgeable in that discipline and not to be accepted into that community.... We write in order to be

accepted, to join, to be accepted as another member of the culture or community that constitutes the writer's audience. —KENNETH BRUFEE

How readily do writers accept this stance of letting others do some of the work for them? Even exemplars say they struggle at it and that they often fail to practice it whole-heartedly. Normal writers resist heroically. We already know the reasons why:

- Mindless tradition credits the most genius to artists, inventors, and writers who seem to work alone and without help.
- Custom commends writers who apparently produce finished, flawless work in a flash of brilliance (but not those aided by patient coaching and priming that, say, a Ford Madox Ford might provide).
- Conventional beliefs hold that writing shared early, while still imperfect, will create irreversibly negative images of our intelligence in those preliminary readers.
- Folklore perpetuates the tragic misbelief that fine writing is completely original.

New faculty who get caught up in these convictions also suppose that letting others do some of the work is tantamount to weakness or manipulation. The best counterargument is this: The most mindful, exemplary writers (and teachers) not only delegate some of the responsibility (as any good manager does) they also admit the truth: Virtually all writing (and teaching) is borrowing and restating of old ideas.

Writing Rule 9: Let Others Do Some of the Work.

Exercises for Writing Rule 9

Involving others in the work means letting go of some of the control—and of the credit. This delegation of responsibility is a difficult social skill for writers, one commonly overlooked and underappreciated.

Exercise 1. Broaden Social Contracts.
You may know these contracts in a preliminary way from Writing Rule 3 (Chapter 11), as part of setting contingencies to make the habit of writing more constant. Here, you not only enlist a writing partner to assure your presence at a mutual writing site each day but you also set aside times at the ends of sessions for exchanges of samples of what you've just written. This sharing helps bring focus and clarity to your work as you prepare it with your listener in mind. And actually reading/hearing it suggests even better ways of writing as you are stopped for clarifications and other comments.

The most common problem revealed in this social way of working, in listeners' opinion, is a failure to set a clear context for the writing, one that helps the listener know where you are going and why. The second-most frequent complaint is similar: A lack of useful transitions from one idea to the next.

Such a commitment to work in each other's presence and to check for real progress helps ensure timely completion of projects and it hints at the kinds of criticisms and misunderstandings likely from more formal critics later.

Exercise 2. Collaborate, at Least Occasionally.
I begin by anticipating a very common objection: Yes, some coauthorships are disappointing because one person does most of the work or because the partners don't communicate well. But other collaborations provide worthwhile educational experiences. Close, interactive planning and writing offer a rare opportunity to discover how other writers think and work. Collaboration can bring a richness of combined styles and ideas that neither author could have summoned alone. It can, again, reduce the kinds of mindless mistakes that undermine editorial acceptance. And it often produces a completed manuscript in less time than if done solo.

But collaboration, like anything else about writing, benefits from some awakeness and clear seeing—and from consulting with experts like this one (who doesn't mind doing some of the work for you):

> *You may want to consider the following questions before deciding to coauthor a project: 1. Do I like the prospective colleague? Do I want to spend time with this person? 2. Can the colleague and I establish an equitable work schedule? Are we going to divide the work into equal units or will one author assume the senior pattern? How will this judgement determine who is first, second, or third author? 3. If the colleague is senior in rank to me, will he or she perceive his or her role as a boss? 4. How will gender roles affect work assignments? Will male authors expect female authors to take orders and do the typing and secretarial work? 5. Can I trust the coauthor to complete his or her tasks on time? 6. Will ego taint the collaborative process? Is the colleague flexible or rigid in perceiving how the work should be completed? 7. Does the author pay close attention to detail? 8. Does the coauthor share a similar perspective? 9. Does the coauthor possess skills that I don't have that are necessary to the research?—JOSEPH MOXLEY*

Exercise 3. Critique and Review Other People's Manuscripts.
When you commend, critique, and edit the writing of others, you learn a lot about becoming a better writer, reader, and editor for your own work. And you acquire compassion for others as writers and as critics.

Exercise 4. Join the Conversation.
The three exercises before this one are about letting others do some of the work—and, so, about moving away from the solitude that traditional writers have claimed to prefer. These exercises, practiced mindfully, amount to making writing more outgoing, connected, and social. That doesn't just mean sharing what you write. It also means socializing with other writers working on problems like your own. It means recognizing that when you write in a new area, you will save yourself unnecessary pain by becoming a useful part of an ongoing conversation.

If you clearly see how others are posing problems, you can reshape your contribution to fit the mode while making sure you have something relatively new and interesting to add. To the extent that you learn from the conversation (e.g., how to state problems; how to present arguments), you let others do some of the work. To the degree you allow others (even teachers and editors) to help you, the more socially skilled and responsible you will become. Successful writing is in part a social skill of accepting help from others, even competitors and critics.

A Caution Near the End of These Writing Rules

Some writers proceed through these 10 rules about writing more slowly and hesitantly than others. Why? Writing is one of the most personal, individual things we can do. And one that seems to demand extraordinary care.

Publication—is the auction of the Mind of Man.—EMILY DICKINSON

18

Limit Wasted Effort

This last rule in Section II is about resilience in writing, about persisting through obstacles, about recovering from setbacks. A simple way to appreciate resilience is by way of an old maxim amongst efficiency experts:

The less the wasted effort, the greater the resilience.

Modern-day facts confirm this saying for writers in several ways. First, academics who write with constancy and moderation get the most writing done in the least time spent working and work with the least interruption through crises (defined as the aftereffects of traumas—such as a speeding citation—that stop the majority of writers from writing during the rest of the day). Second, these most mindful writers simplify their work (and so waste less effort) in ways now familiar:

- They devote only moderate amounts of time to writing each day (and so they continue to write amid unusually busy or distracting days because the writing takes little time).
- They write in brief sessions that require little warm-up time (and so the writing is not as difficult to get underway as it is for others).
- Their writing habits include acts of pausing and slowing that keep the writing on track, more succinct, and more satisfying.
- Their pauses also encourage stopping in time to permit other daily activities such as socializing and exercising (thus, with time to do other things, there are fewer excuses for not writing that day).
- They've prewritten, planned, and approximated enough so that prose writing goes quickly (thus, they work with comfort and happiness that minimize associations between writing and pain/exhaustion).
- They routinely practice ways of treating inevitable interruptions with calm and tolerance, either by returning to the present moment and its process ori-

entation of working, or, when that is impractical, as by taking breaks and gaining perspective on what they were writing.
- These resilient writers welcome criticism, learn and grow with it, and moderate reactions to it; they let other people, including critics, do some of the work of writing, even as agents of discipline (e.g., with partners waiting for their appearance at joint writing sessions, writers take fewer days off).
- They work, mindfully, toward mastery but they tolerate failures and mediocrities along the way with patience and humor (and so remain more process-oriented in the moment, while experiencing—and letting go of—distractions and pain).
- They produce more writing in less time because they work with an economy of action, a style uncovered early in this century by psychologists since forgotten:

> *[Jules] Amar...found that the accomplished journeyman normally adopted an efficient economy of motion that starkly contrasted with those of an apprentice, whose "chief defects are irregular and spasmodic action leading to unduly rapid fatigue."—ANSON RABINBACH*

Said another way, resilience depends on the constancy and moderation I've harped on throughout this book. As BDSs become stronger habits, so does the likelihood they will persist through distractions, traumas, and sicknesses. Moreover, regular habits of work translate into faith:

> *Students' perceptions of their growth as writers centered [in this study of students practicing BDSs] on a sense of increased confidence and power. Student's perceptions of success and failure centered on self-discipline ... liking to write and getting readers' responses, finding the time to write, subduing external constraints such as fear of failure, and being able to find the right topics.—ROBERT TREMMEL*

So, none of these foundations for resiliency is new. What changes here is the emphasis on seeing the efficiencies interactively, systematically, mindfully. It isn't so demanding and complex as it sounds.

Writing Rule 10: Moderate Wasted Effort.

Exercises For Writing Rule 10

The key to resilience lies in mindfully noticing the difference between efficient and wasteful actions in writing. Examples of the latter include the chronically negative thoughts and excessive emotions of writing we examined earlier; inefficiencies may be invisible or elusive at first.

Exercise 1. Monitor for Inefficiencies.
Make a brief, daily habit (perhaps at the ends of writing sessions) of noting inefficiencies in working for that day. The doing takes but a minute or two. These are common examples of inefficiencies that writers in the program have noted in their journals:

- Allowing too much distraction and interruption during writing times (e.g., an interloper to your office stays and chats well beyond the brief message he or she intended to deliver)
- Overreacting to unavoidable distractions (e.g., quitting a writing session, angrily, after having to stop for the noise of a leaf blower outside the window)
- Working to fatigue, even in BDSs (because of failing to pause, calm, slow down, even to do compassionate things for oneself like readjusting a cramped seating posture or looking out a window for a restful bit of distance focusing)
- Working off-track, on an aside that isn't necessary
- Rushing (and thus reflecting too little) to keep the writing direct, clear, and succinct
- Shifting too soon, too blindly, to product orientations, including interruptions to worry about meeting deadlines or pleasing reviewers
- Working beyond preset stopping points, supplanting the time for other important things like socializing and exercising
- Working euphorically, hurriedly, and moving completely away from conceptual outlines and other plans
- Trying to work at writing in the evening, when tired and when writing will take needed time away from sleep
- Putting off completions of project components like conceptual outlining while doing less needful things (or else continuing to redo COL beyond the point of diminishing returns)

I could continue the list but I suspect you get the point. Besides, these are things best discovered for yourself.

Exercise 2. Use Social Contracts to Discover and Appreciate Wasted Efforts.
Brief, regular discussions with a kindred writer about wasted efforts make the discovery process more economical. They impel you to do the noticing of your own inefficiencies so that you will have something to report at the next meeting. And as you listen to the reports of someone else's inefficiencies, you will notice wasted efforts you had overlooked in your own writing.

Exercise 3. Put Increasing Emphasis on Efficiencies (Not on Inefficiencies).
There are limitations in looking too closely or too long at inefficiencies. They can demoralize, especially if they seem to dominate your actions. They can confuse;

sometimes, for example, it is hard to distinguish between inefficiency and play. And they don't always tell you what to do in their place. So in the long run, resilient writers tend to emphasize what they do well and then add more and more economies. Examples are:

- Add more mindful practices of prewriting to further abbreviate the writing process while bringing added motivation, clarity, and imagination (e.g., "I'm learning how to make good use of that back-and-forth freewriting and it's helping me getting to the point more quickly").
- Make more pauses, stretches, and refocuses that refresh and enhance mindfulness about what needs doing now and how it can be done directly but imaginatively (e.g., "I'll say that briefly and then explain and enliven it with a good anecdote that just came to mind").
- Find enjoyable ways of doing BDSs (e.g., "My bigger chair and computer screen almost make me look forward to writing").
- Post reminders at the writing site to stay in a process orientation, in part by looking out for mindless negative thinking. (Franz Kafka had a sign over his desk that said, simply, "Wait").
- Notice which writing experiences bring the small successes underlying self-esteem (a powerful ingredient of resilience); and, too, notice when you waste efforts on pessimism or on solving the wrong problems (such as working for short-term relief of emotional distress).

Exercise 4. Extend Mindfulness to Other Domains of Living.
In the longer run, the most resilient writers notice that writing does not occur in isolation from the rest of their lives. The hardier they become, the more actively they look for ways to build more constancy, moderation, and resilience in other things they do. Consider just two of the related things they commonly do to enhance their strength: Sleep and physical conditioning.

Sleep. Mindful writers notice that chronic insomnia and tiredness sap resilience in writing and so they combat sleep problems with mindfulness practices they already know as writers: They hold back (wait, actively), near bedtime, from exertions that arouse them in sustained ways (e.g., arguments); they begin early, several hours before bedtime, to relax and calm themselves; they limit the time they spend in bed by getting up at a preset time in the morning, no matter what (and so ensure they will be ready to sleep at a reasonable hour later that day).

Physical Conditioning. Resilient writers, having noticed how regular practice of mindful ways makes them stronger writers, suppose that physical exercise will add even more resilience in the face of stresses. Writers in my studies who exercised with constancy and moderation (e.g., weight lifting, Yoga, aerobics, running) rated higher on scales of self-esteem and self-efficacy (i.e., they more often

stated that they would succeed; they more commonly took a process stance in simplifying a writing problem). This idea, like all the others in this book, is not new:

> *The better your physical condition the easier it is to write.... Whatever discipline you expend on your body will affect your artistic output.... You need to eat properly and get enough sleep.... If you aren't prepared to put your writing first, you really aren't a writer.—RITA MAE BROWN*

In my own programs for writers, these sorts of advice elicit an understandable objection. The point is often made like this: "Aren't you asking us to change our *whole* lives? I just want to be a better, happier writer." Sometimes the reservation is said this way: "Isn't there an escape from rules and hard work anywhere in all this? Isn't there room for magic here somewhere?" My answer to all these questions begins with a calm "yes" and moves to explanations like these:

- Mindful ways of writing generalize, rather spontaneously, to other aspects of working and living. Mindfulness, once habitual, simplifies lives in general ways.
- Writers who achieve this resilience and its self-esteem display more openness to learning from all manner of sources, even popular writers. One program participant even put special value on a mindful insight from a writer he had formerly scorned:

> *Too often, the way taken is the wrong way, with too much emphasis on what we want to have, rather than what we wish to become.*
> *—LOUIS L'AMOUR*

Section II Summary and Extension of the Mindful Ways of Writing

Here, at the end of Section II, I pause for contemplation, just as I did with the new faculty members in my more formal programs carried out in person. Those periods were, most of all, an opportunity to appreciate how far we had come, what we had learned, and where we would like to go next. I hope that you, as a reader, can join in the spirit of these collegial meetings, at least in appreciating how we reviewed now familiar ideas about working and generated new ones.

The first thing that stood out for me in these sessions—at the end of participants' second academic years in the program—was the change in attitudes since beginning. Worries about survival now seemed distant; good starts had been made at both teaching and writing. Participants rarely lamented about falling behind schedule; they no longer did or expected to. The change that participants listed as most telling, though, concerned principles of constancy and moderation: Their writing had grown so dependable and comfortable that they had begun to turn away from concerns about doing enough to doing better quality work. Said one participant to her group: "I'll meet the minimums but I'd like to do more, on my terms. I want to think clearly about issues and their essences. I know now that I can become a very good writer." Everyone else in the group, it seemed, had similar intentions. "That's the most important change in how I feel now," said someone else who had been listening and nodding.

Then, we looked for other changes, including a simpler image of how to work at writing. In one instance, this topic led to a respecification of timely stopping and its lessons (e.g., knowing, beforehand, how much will be enough for the day). That sort of reflective reduction was expressed in ways like this:

- The astonishingly broad importance of moderation (as opposed to rushing)
- The wide role of constancy in supporting moderation (and vice versa), especially in terms of comfort enough to pause and stop
- The far-reaching value of working in a process mode, say, by focusing on doing the important things first, and getting them underway in the present moment

- The expansive power of recursiveness in writing to keep bouts of generation and reading brief, interactive, and more creative/productive/economical
- And, most fascinating, the joy in discovering that so simple an act as timely stopping helps move the writing to a higher plane (e.g., using pausing and stopping to induce a rhythm of working that clarifies the image for writing and then the writing)

Mindfulness, for all its emphasis on calm, brings a surprising enjoyment and optimism to writing.

Mindfulness and Metacognitions

As we generated and revised broader ways of seeing mindfulness, we called them metacognitions, despite the grandiosity of the word. These cognitions *about* cognitions helped us to resee processes in a wider perspective (e.g., to see what mindfulness does as it moves outward from its traditional roles in not doing and not thinking, all the way to forming images that compel writing). Said another way, our metacognitions relied on mindful nonattachment from experience to get a broader picture, a clearer seeing, of what matters and what doesn't.

One prized metacognition in these reflective groups helped clarify what had still seemed a difficult concept: The generation of prewriting, intermixed with revision/rewriting, into prose. Writers at this point could explain the two essential and interactive components but they remained unsure about their own abilities to put them into practice. What helped was a reseeing of generation and revision, by way of reliving our attempts to practice them. The essential move went from reseeing to relabeling.

Internalizing

One part (generation) we now called *internalizing* or *inning* (i.e., holding back to calm and clarify internal experience as ideas/themes for writing). Those words better described one basic process of generation and they more readily instated that process. When writers now practiced holding back to keep the process internal, and did so in front of the group, they began to talk about how this simple act helped generate ideas for writing: Waiting, directed inward, revealed a sufficiency of ideas and images already in mind, especially if allowed to appear without rushing. With further patience (and a bit of preliminary, implicit revision) those bits of prewriting would grow clearer, especially as writers began to ready them for outward expression in linear and verbal form.

What helped most specifically in conjuring this metacognition among several participants? Prior, many writers hadn't quite visualized themselves generating ideas and themes, apparently because they supposed the process more complicated than it is. Now they saw and did it more realistically.

Externalizing

When the same writers reconceptualized the other part of the duo as *externalizing* or *outing,* that designation seemed too obvious for any of the self-congratulation they had been feeling. So we slowed to think and talk a bit about how this outer-directed mode of mindful working reflects its opposite: Inning seems mostly visual and nonlinear, outing mostly verbal and linear. Inning is more wholistic and affect-laden, outing more step-wise and disciplined. Indeed, it seemed to us, that each process is optimally located within or without.

That, in turn, cued an examination of benefits of working at writing from those two vantages. Each mode, in its own way, helped clarify and expand the other—inwardly on the form of more compelling images and outwardly as increasingly directed and direct writing. And with that came a linking insight, one that may have occurred to you: Inning and outing are not so discrete and separate as they first seem:

- Visual images might remain foggy until we hold back, early, to freewrite and conceptually outline what we could say.
- Visual images, even before we start to put them outward, soon suggest enough verbal substance in faint auditory approximations to allow us slow and reshape.
- As we move those increasingly verbal images outward for even clearer verbalization and revision, we may be most motivated to write; a special relief comes with saving those images out onto paper or screen. That same anticipation of relief, kept patient and moderate, also helps generate the images in the first place.
- A related sort of image stays with the writing even longer in its outward movement, often to project completion: It portrays how the manuscript should look and sound.

That interaction of inning and outing, we noticed, made the writing easier to generate and ever more open to change. How, exactly? The answers came more slowly, after the meetings:

- First, because the two processes of inning and outing could sometimes be kept in mind at the same time.
- Second, because these juxtapositions at two levels, imaginal and verbal, encouraged more shortcuts between ideas or themes.
- Third, because the growing interactiveness between generation and revision simplified and clarified images until they compelled outing of more finished, confident, and satisfying writing.

What if you feel short-changed by not experiencing these insights directly? Wait. Work in brief, daily sessions and in other mindful ways. Consider starting a writing group on your own campus. And generalize your mindful ways back to

teaching (e.g., by way of an acquired preference for recursions between generating and revising before going to class and once in it).

Look, too, at how these participants in my formal programs summarized the chapters of Section II as a closure to the discussions I abstracted above. This sample perspective, from just one group, emphasizes the natural movement of mindfulness outward.

Veteran Participants' Reviews

Outing is just as odd a word as its more technical counterparts, *exteriorization* and *externalizing*. All those words refer to the mindful act of putting images/ideas for writing outside our minds, the sooner the better (so long as we consistently return to inning as we are outing). Externalizing is so valuable because its expansiveness helps us let go to trust vague, imperfect images as the basis for writing. Externalizing works because it gets us to model after fluent (and least blocked) writers.

Once we understand outing, we better comprehend why internal images need externalizing into talk. Personal speech is cryptic and unstable, sometimes not fully verbal. The longer it is left untended and unexternalized, the more likely it will grow distracted, mean spirited, and blind. The more quickly and often we transpose it into publicly understandable messages, the more readily we write productively and painlessly. Prose writing in our heads is possible but doing it on paper or screen is far more practical.

Outing first came up in the program as the essence of holding back to begin early. Writing Rules 1 and 2 admonish writers to move beyond merely avoiding or worrying about a project to actually putting ideas and plans outward as hard copy in the following ways:

- By waiting, actively, to generate ideas and imagination (instead of rushing into writing or running away from it, impulsively)
- By talking aloud notions and/or images for writing to oneself and to others
- By freewriting and conceptual outlining before fully knowing what is going to be said, even before images begin to appear

These initial kinds of outing have two proven benefits: First, they induce lasting momentum via growing approximations to prose. Second, they help us clarify our thoughts in the linear, logical fashion necessary for most writing (cf. Gertrude Stein's famous automatic writing).

Outing practiced in the *intermediately numbered Writing Rules* revolved around constancy and moderation, particularly working in brief, daily sessions and publicly charting our progress against plans. Outing was also a part of noticing maladaptive thought patterns by talking them aloud, by disputing and replacing them aloud (i.e., externally). Outing was an essential aspect of getting in touch with the emotions that accompany our work at writing; by noticing and noting

their outward presence and effects, we moderated them and gained more control over our writing and ourselves. All these forms of outing are about gaining control (as Zen teachers might say) by first giving up familiar controls and their short-term objectives/impulsive actions.

Outing in the *later Writing Rules* helped as a more social act. It included sharing early materials with critics and letting others do some of the work (Writing Rule 9) as a means of making writing more socially acceptable and more efficient, even of moderating the attachments to writing that cause overreaction to public criticism (Writing Rule 8). Outing turns intentions into action, and its mindful economy strengthens resilience (Writing Rule 10).

Said another way, *inning and outing are really nothing but patience and tolerance,* the two essences of the *nihil nimus* approach. These two processes could be the most essential outcomes of education in general, certainly for writers learning to write (even those who might suppose themselves already well educated). We need patience to hold back and tolerance to deal with the often surprising results, including creativity and criticism.

After all this, participants and I felt optimistic about having sorted out two essential, simple, and manageable actions of mindful writing. That, in turn, inspired me to add a brief review with more emphasis on the broadly functional theme of Section II: Mindfulness. I began by wondering if the concept of mindfulness would still prove useful. It did.

Reseeing Inning and Outing in Terms of Mindfulness

In the Introduction to this second Section of the program, I showed how traditional information about mindfulness approximates exemplary ways for writing among new faculty. Here, at the end, I've relied on group reflections to draw a similar parallel about how traditional experts on mindfulness hint at these notions of inning and outing. See if the following progression helps you, as it did us, to better understand the specific ways in which writers can practice mindfulness. Ideally it will ready you for the last stage of this *nihil nimus* approach, a compassionate path to collegiality, mentoring, and service (Section III).

Sources of Expertise, Most Revisited and One New

Pema Chodrin (1997). For Chodrin, mindfulness is largely a matter of replacing struggling with relaxing, mainly by stopping one's self-talk and coming back to the freshness of the moment. Even though there is some "doing" in her formula (in stopping the ongoing discourse), the action is largely internal and different from, say, trying to solve a working problem like writing. Mindfulness practice for her is largely a commitment to staying awake, with a gentleness and a letting go of narrow, selfish reality. When she does specify ways of externalizing mindfulness, she imparts the feeling of modesty, of not trying to do too much. Her approximation of outing begins by "noticing"—with the precision and gentleness of a becalmed mind at the ready—what needs doing and then doing it, unimpulsively and patiently, as though it were the only thing that matters (i.e., with strong involvement).

Sylvia Boorstein (1996). Boorstein, much like Pema Chodrin, characterizes mindfulness as seeing clearly, as awakening to the happiness of the uncomplicated moment. But Boorstein is a bit more revealing about ways of extending practices based on "sitting" and "nondoing" to other activities. She emphasizes her discovery that the periods of formal sitting make possible the mindful practice of everyday activity. That is, once in possession of the continuous, calm, and focused attention of mindfulness meditation, we can carry it over into activities such as walking from one place to the next, so that "the journey itself becomes the practice." How, specifically, does this happen? Mindfulness helps us uncomplicate and enjoy activities by not letting them elaborate into more complex, emotional experiences than they need to be.

Philip Kapleau (1969). In his classic interpretation of Zen Buddhist practices of mindfulness for Westerners, he highlights meditation (zazen) as a means of keeping the mind free of discriminating and judgmental thoughts, of giving full attention to the moment. He eagerly relates the benefits of daily "sitting" to daily tasks: Involvement in work becomes easier because practice at zazen lessens tendencies to squander energies in purposeless actions and compulsive drives. The sitting also helps us face daily struggles because it teaches better alternatives than the mindless impulsivity of escaping or mitigating pain:

> *No longer are we dominated by intellect at the expense of feeling, nor driven by emotions.... Eventually zazen leads to a transformation of personality and character. Dryness, rigidity, and self-centeredness are transmuted into self-mastery and courage.*

A clue to the importance of working mindfully in the Zen culture that Kapleau studied is that novice monks spent most of their time at simple tasks, not sitting.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994). This contemporary popularizer of mindfulness techniques begins with exercises for contemplative sitting: paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment—nonjudgmentally. But he, too, hints at how mindfulness can be put to use in external matters, notably in replacing actions driven by blind thoughts with those undertaken in awareness. One mechanism sounds like a writing rule of this book:

I like to practice voluntary simplicity to counter such impulses [to blind action]. . . . It involves intentionally doing only one thing at a time and making sure I am here for it.

Mark Epstein (1995). Epstein, like Kabat-Zinn, is a psychotherapist working from a Buddhist perspective and he, too, begins with a caution about assuming that mindfulness is limited to internal acts:

Despite Buddhism's reputation as passive, stoical, and anti-ego, classic ego functions of taming, mastering, self-control, and adaptation are clearly valued in the Buddhist cosmology.

Epstein also explains why initial practices of mindfulness might discourage us from pursuing outer-oriented practices: Both modes, inning and outing, inevitably produce humiliating experiences that we don't want, but the latter ("outed" practices) are more publicly visible and so more readily avoided. What we need, then, is the momentum from inning. Once we're doing the hard, regular work of *holding* our thoughts, images, feelings, and actions in suspension in order to see them clearly, we then write them more confidently and tolerantly. That effort of externalizing by putting experiences and insights out into spoken and examined narratives, helps us "break identification" with inadequacies such as impatience. And it is invariably therapeutic. That mindfulness also, in Epstein's view, accomplishes something else akin to what we, as writers, have practiced in the exercises of our own book: It puts the buzzing, confusing mass of our thoughts about writing out into linear prose by switching from a spatially based sense of self to a linear experience that operates in the moment and with more awareness of our bodies and feelings.

Ellen Langer (1989). Langer found fame in her demonstrations of how mindlessness in the elderly—particularly as evidenced in their unthinking acceptance of stereotypes for their age group—unnecessarily restricts their activity and undermines their health. She also devised ways of teaching the elderly mindfulness, and thereby helped them reassume more productive, healthy lives. Although she neither advocates practices of meditation nor speaks directly about externalizing mindfulness, Langer does provide its functional equivalent: She outlines ways of coaching elderly people to take more active control in a problem-solving task, by helping them make explicit more of the decisions about how to proceed, and, in turn, to act more independently and confidently, with less helplessness and depression. Her influence on the rules of the present book can be seen in admonitions to work in process modes, with clear seeing and calm but always with a readiness for externalized "doing."

Joanna Field (1936). Field's may be the best modern examination of mindfulness as outing. She came to understand the sources of her unhappiness, tension, and inefficiency by putting her usual thoughts outward into spoken and written forms as an ongoing diary of what was happening in the moment. She was surprised at how often her thoughts were blind and anxiously distracted by the prospect of something more important just ahead. This constant looking ahead for a better experience, she noticed, kept her from living in the present; it also left her unaware of how her mind usually worked and where it was taking her. Moreover, the implicit self-talk that occurred in the meanwhile, without her full awareness, tended to be mean-spirited, unhappy, and unable to set clear goals.

Part of what helped Field's progress beyond that insight was putting her thoughts and emotions outside herself for careful examination—into calm speech and writing. She discovered this complimentary step when practicing mindfulness elsewhere, while listening to music by putting her consciousness outside herself. The result was the complete and joyful immersion she wanted in what she was doing in the moment, one free of the distractions of chattering thoughts. She then extended the same principle to working and playing, realizing, for example, that ping-pong performed with one's consciousness in the arm and hand is far easier and more effective than giving in to usual temptations to let the head do the hand's work. This, my writing groups and I agreed, is an unusual way of seeing the difference between inning and outing: Letting the mind do some of the hand's work versus letting the hand do some of the mind's work.

Field's discoveries may at last be coming to recognition (e.g., Oatley, 1992)—so are even far older, more obscure insights that deal directly with externalized and mindful ways of writing. I'll finish, despite my love for history and my desire to include many more case studies, with just one.

Samuel Johnson (circa 1700s). You may already know something about Dr. Johnson, perhaps his pithy sayings as related by his biographer, Boswell. You might be aware of his *Dictionary,* the first of its sort in English and an accomplishment not surpassed for over a century. You might even have read his classic introductions to great poets. But you may not know that he practiced mindful ways of writing and living (Bate, 1977; Boswell, 1934).

His progression to mindfulness was largely self-taught and his goal, consistent from the start of his work as a writer, was to learn to live and work in the present. The move apparently began with his discovery that work itself (such as learning to bind books as a way of supporting himself) was therapeutic. This was not, in itself, an unusual insight; his further conclusions were and still are.

Johnson discovered that full, undistracted immersion in one's work (including writing) keeps blind thinking at bay, focuses attention on what needs doing, regulates imagination and its tendency to extremes of emotion, allows seeing things both realistically and in ways that readers will appreciate. Not least of all,

he liked to point out, this mindful step to outing rewards the worker with the seeing of progress in the moment—an important incentive for writers.

From these insights and practices, Johnson developed more specifically mindful ways of working at writing—probably more than any writer before or since:

- An "essentialism" (i.e., simplicity and directness) of expression found by way of working with the focus of clear seeing and a planful readiness to get to the point
- A broadened seeing, while patiently holding back for reflection, whose interconnections suggest insights and aphorisms for writing
- A "promptitude" (including an element of deliberate risk taking) to compress experience into generalities, followed by care at pinning them to concrete examples
- More readiness and health for writing because of regular practice of general disciplines (e.g., arising at eight o'clock each morning, thus curing his insomnia; or managing procrastinated tasks in brief, regular sessions, and so diminishing the guilt he felt about neglecting, say, his Bible reading by managing it at a constant, moderate rate of 21 pages per Sunday)
- More ease and happiness in writing by using a present-orientation to see the "stability of truth" (what Freud later would later term the *reality principle*), and consequently to appreciate the benefits of living in the present—all while conquering that fearful combination of anxiety, self-punishment, and excessive self-demand that would otherwise afflict him.

A few excerpts from the writing of Samuel Johnson illustrate his notions of mindfulness. This one exemplifies his belief that we need mindfulness to manage our imaginations:

> *No mind is much employed on the present: recollection and anticipation fill up almost all our moments.... So few of the hours of life are filled up with objects adequate to the mind... that we are therefore forced to have recourse every moment to the past and future for supplemental satisfactions.*

This is one of his suggestions for a solution:

> *If it [imagination] is an indispensable ingredient for human happiness, when it is kept sufficiently open and regulated by reality, it is [otherwise] also the source of most human misery.*

Here, he writes, with essentialism, about the difference between living mindfully and mindlessly:

> *The flights of human mind are not from pleasure to pleasure but from hope to hope.*

And here, he writes about the real discipline behind the difference—not just the fortitude to meet great occasions or exceptional disasters, but the resiliency to live and work in the moment, in the midst of mundane or serious problems:

> *The real test is what we do in our daily life, and happiness—such happiness as exists—lies primarily in what we do within the daily texture of our lives. Life is very short and very uncertain: let us live is as well as we can.*

So Samuel Johnson was clear about the need of "interiority" (as it would have been called then) for writers. It was the core of his methods for moderating the imagination and it centered around holding back and living and working in the present moment. But he was also prescient about ways of externalizing mindfulness; some are like those of this book and some are far more advanced:

- His self-disciplines to enhance his strength for staying in the present and facing reality head on
- His resort to manual labor, including writing, to "get himself outside himself"
- His preplanned moves, once outside, to see even more broadly, while taking the whole context into account
- His mindful simplifying of thoughts into writing, by way of the essentialism we saw earlier
- His compression of broadly seen ideas (i.e., metacognitions) into memorable generalities
- His concrete, simple, direct, and reassuring thinking by way of first saying what he might write in the social conversations for which he is so famous

Why else might we want to emulate his methods? Because Samuel Johnson may have been the greatest writer ever. He helped pioneer direct styles of expression, including short phrases; he stands second only to Shakespeare, as the most quoted author ever. More important, I believe, Johnson's ways of writing provided him with courage, generosity, a childlike playfulness, and a juxtaposition of wisdom and action that still inspires unusual trust, even joy, in readers.

That realization of what mindfulness did for Samuel Johnson, notably the happiness and acceptance it brought him as a sociable writer—the program participants and I decided—primed us for the third stage of working in the *nihil nimus* approach: The extension of an involvement in the professoriate that had seemed largely a matter of teaching and writing well enough, to a more sociable, caring, and generous style of professing. Not only do all experts on mindfulness conclude that its practice brings more compassion (perhaps the ultimate kind of outing) and social responsibility. Its results, they note modestly, make practitioners far easier

to get along with, to like, to learn from—and far more committed to the happiness of others. Consider what it did for Samuel Johnson—by universal consensus one of the homeliest, most awkward, but beloved people who ever lived and worked.

Section III

Socialize and Serve with Compassion

Why Compassion Is Ultimately Important

I've put socialization and service last in this book because they are primed by the practices of moderation and mindfulness of Sections I and II. When we first slow down and notice our own needs, we are more likely to see others' needs. When we first care about ourselves, we more readily care about others.

While compassion naturally moves outward in the *nihil nimus* way of teaching and writing, it's up to you to make optimal use of it, even to allow its meaningful expression *at all* during your tough first years on campus. If you downplay socialization and service, you greatly increase the risk of a poor start.

There is another reason to give more than cursory attention to the social side of your initiation rites. Decisions against retention/tenure/promotion (R/P/T) are just as often made subjectively, on the basis of sociability (e.g., "Can we get along with this person; will he treat students humanely?") and citizenship (e.g., "Is she likely to carry her share of departmental duties?") as on productivity numbers or teaching ratings. There is a real but often overlooked principle behind this custom: To fail because of teaching and writing, you have to prove yourself incompetent beyond doubt. To fail because of social problems, you need only the appearance of aloofness and uncooperativeness. After all, a decision to award you permanent appointment (or its equivalent) may mean having to work and socialize with you for 50 years. Think of it!

My guess about why academe keeps its criteria for socialization and service vague is this: Unstated and uncalibrated rules leave the most control for gatekeepers because they can adjust their implicit criteria to fit their biases. Given the cus-