

Juggling Multiple Assignments

A Writing Guide Workshop with CK Kirch

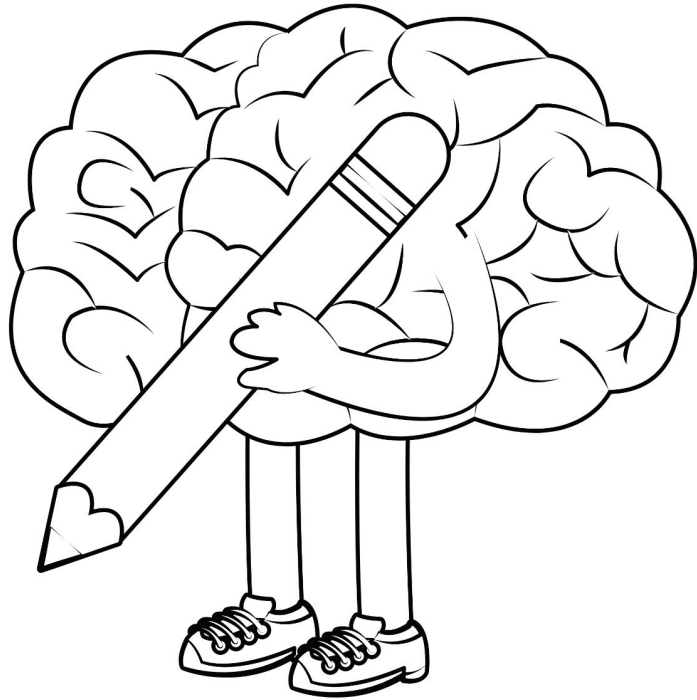
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Writing Guides:

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What's on the menu?

- How do we work differently when collaborating vs on our own?
- How can we make it easier to jump in and out of projects?
- How can we prioritize tasks to balance necessary deadlines with realistic goals?
- How can we help ourselves get “back on track” if/when we fall off?

Collaboration Mentality

Think of the last time you had a really great collaboration experience. (This does not have to be writing-related or even at Columbia.)

What did you and your collaboration partner(s) do to make that collaboration especially effective?

Collaboration Mentality

- Communicate with our team AND expect team to communicate with us, e.g.:
 - Emails about completed tasks & future plans
 - Comments in shared documents
 - Files and folders organized in an agreed upon logic
- Set priorities as a team AND communicate when priorities shift
 - What are the most important things to get done, and by when?
 - What is realistic to try to accomplish in a given amount of time?
- Help out our teammates when they need it

We do this to make sure everyone is on the same page and up-to-date so the project will be completed on time and to our collective standards

Collaboration Mentality

What if we treated ourselves with the same **courtesy** as we treat our collaborators?

Jumping in and out of projects

Collaboration vs. On Our Own

- Communicate with team to let them know:
 - what we did/changed
 - what still needs to happen
 - We don't expect collaborators to read our minds
- Expect ourselves to remember:
 - what we've already done
 - what we planned to do next time
 - Why do we expect our future selves to read our past selves minds?

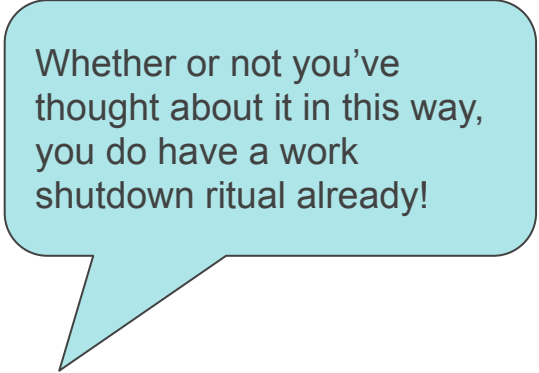
Work Shutdown Rituals

series of steps we take at the end of a writing session

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- Saving the file
- Closing the computer
- Turning off the desk lamp

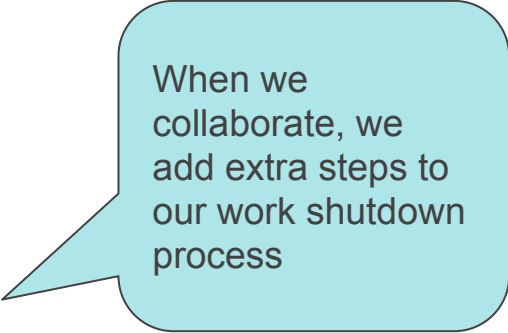


Whether or not you've thought about it in this way, you do have a work shutdown ritual already!

Work Shutdown Rituals

series of steps we take at the end of a writing session

- Saving the file
- **Sending an email**
- **Uploading to shared folder**
- Closing the computer
- Turning off the desk lamp



When we collaborate, we add extra steps to our work shutdown process

Work Shutdown Ritual Goal

Leave notes and breadcrumbs for our future selves to follow, so it's:

- (a) easier to know what task we're supposed to be doing when we return to the project, and
- (b) easier to get started on that task.



1. What are the steps of your **current** work shutdown ritual?



Current ritual example:

1. Save the document
2. Upload file to cloud
3. Check items off a to-do list
4. Close computer
5. Turn off desk lamp



2. If you were collaborating with someone, what **information** would you want to share with your collaborator? What would you want your collaborator to communicate with you?



Collab info examples:

- What I got done / What my collaborator got done
- What needs to happen next, or when we plan to meet next as a group
- Updated outline of the new or current structure
- Explanation of changes made, or notes on potential future changes
- Questions for collaborator / Questions my collaborator has for me
- Where to find things, what files are called, what folder they're in, links, etc.

3. How would you **communicate** with your collaborator? How would you want to receive communications from your team? (Hint: Where would you *instinctively* look for this information?)

Communication modes examples:

- email (or text, or Slack, etc.)
- shared folder (e.g. Dropbox, Google Drive)
- marginal comments in a shared doc
- the bottom of a shared draft
- project management tool (e.g. Trello, Asana, Monday, ClickUp, etc.)
- physical notes (e.g. sticky-note or notebook)



With this in mind: what's **one thing** that, if you did it at the end of a writing session, would make your next writing session easier?



Example: my work shutdown ritual

- Save document
- Skim/scan doc for places where sentences/paragraphs/thoughts break off
- Make notes in those places—in **bold**, ALL CAPS, [and in brackets]—about what I plan to do or what needs to happen next
- Optional: sometimes I add color coding to make it easier to find specific things
- Save document (again!)
- Close computer

Another example: after freewriting

- Re-read or skim through freewrite
- Annotate, e.g.:
 - adding marginal comments to note how certain sections fit into project
 - highlighting specific sentences/paragraphs to carry forward into the next stage of drafting
 - etc.
- Save document (if digital)
- Close notebook/computer

Another: tracking the moving parts

- Write down in planner:
 - where this session left off
 - next steps/what needs to happen in the next session
 - what files or materials are needed (including what they're called and where to find them!)
- Save document
- Close computer

Work Shutdown Rituals can include things like...

- leaving notes for ourselves
- annotating drafts
- saving documents to a specific folder
- printing out drafts
- writing down file names
- setting a calendar event for our next writing session (the next time we'll work on this)
- anything else that helps our future selves re-enter the project!



With this in mind: what's **one thing** that, if you did it at the end of a writing session, would make your next writing session easier?



Task Prioritization

How do we set priorities as a team?

- When we set priorities as a team, it's usually not just one simple all-encompassing to-do list
 - We note what is most important to get done (and by when)
 - We delegate tasks so that the workload is evenly distributed
 - We do our best to establish timelines that are realistic for everyone
- We also communicate when priorities shift or when plans need to change
 - We let our teammates know if we're delayed
 - We redistribute tasks as needed, taking on different tasks if our team needs us to pick up the slack

What often happens when we're working solo:

- We often expect ourselves to do way too much over the span of any given day...
- We might stuff a to-do list with so many tasks that it's impossible to get them all done
- Or we put "work on xyz project" on the list, but can't check it off until the whole project is complete, so we don't leave time for other tasks or projects (and it still doesn't feel like we're making any progress)
- We might do a bunch of easy tasks so we can check them off our to-do list (but then run out of time to do the Big Scary Task)
- Or we might tell ourselves we *must* do the Big Scary Task first, before we do anything else (and then proceed to put off that task, so nothing else on the list gets done either)
- Or it might feel like ALL of our tasks are at the same level of importance: HIGH! (and so we don't know which ones to do)
- ...and then we get mad at ourselves when we can't "do it all"

Collaboration Mentality Task Prioritization

- Assign ourselves completable and measurable tasks so we know which tasks are done and which still remain
- Make our priorities clear and explicit so we can more easily decide what to work on and when
- Give ourselves a more realistic set of tasks to do on any given day so we can continue to make progress

Clarifying tasks

Collaborators assign teammates clear and completable tasks so we know which tasks are done and which still remain

To-Do List of Tasks (not projects)

- You can't "do" a project – you can only "do" tasks
- The problem with putting "[xyz project]" or "work on [project]" on the to-do list: How much is "enough" to say we've effectively "worked on" something?
- Instead of "work on xyz," give yourself a measurable outcome (or outcomes) – how will you know when you can mark this as "done"?
- Provides a clearer sense of progress and of what still needs to be done

Setting priorities

Collaborators make priorities clear and explicit so it's easier to decide what to work on and when

ABCD: make priorities explicit + tangible

- List out the tasks you could be doing
- Mark each task based on priority:
 - A = must get done (dire consequences)
 - B = should probably get done
 - C = would be nice to get done
 - D = delay (can get done another day)
- Bonus: number the ABC tasks under each letter – you'll end up with tasks labeled A1, A2, B1, B2, B3, C1, etc. (If it's a D task, don't give it a number)
- Use the labels to make decisions about what to work on

Setting realistic goals

Collaborators delegate sets of tasks that are realistic to do on any given day so we can continue to make progress

1-3-5 for a Realistic Task-load

- List out your tasks
- Mark each task based on anticipated size
 - Small = less than 5 minutes
 - Medium = ~20-30 minutes
 - Large = an hour or more
- Principle: it's realistic to give ourselves 1 large task, 3 medium tasks, & 5 small tasks in one day
 - Can adjust these numbers based on the day and your other obligations
 - Even if you don't apply this precisely, making relative sizes of tasks explicit can help highlight when we're at risk of overload

What happens when we fall
“off track”?



If one of your collaborators fell off track, how would you help them get back on?



Collaboration Mentality: Back On Track

We're often more patient & understanding with others than we are with ourselves when we fall off track.

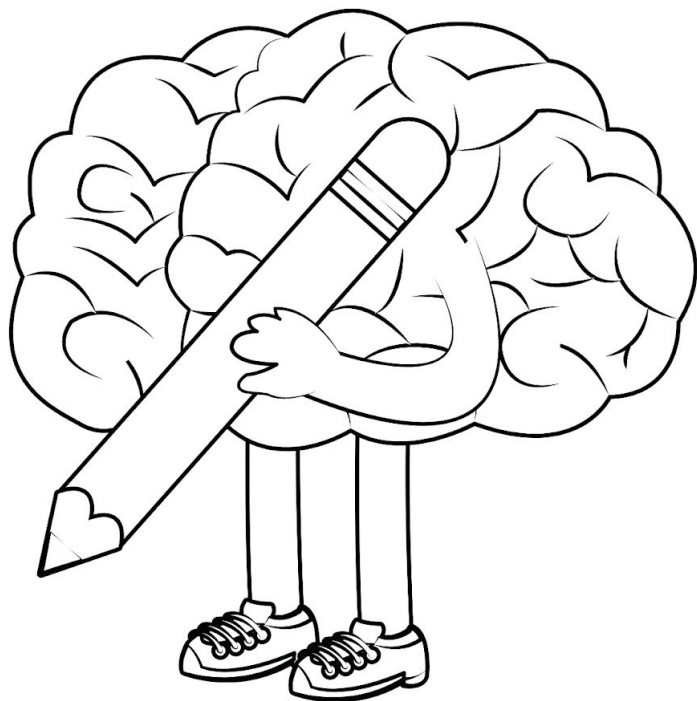
How can we extend the same kindness to ourselves when things don't go as planned? How do we help ourselves get back on track so the project can keep moving forward?

Getting back on track

Collaborators are kind to each other when things don't go as planned and help each other get back on track so the project can keep moving forward

One approach: The Sprint

- What's the next milestone?
 - e.g. outline, first draft, second draft, etc.
- What are three "sprint" tasks I can do right now to make progress toward that milestone?
 - e.g. open a document, re-read my outline, freewrite a paragraph



Recap: Juggling Multiple Assignments

- Jumping in and out of projects:
 - Mobilizing work shutdown rituals to make it easier to re-enter a project
- Task Prioritization:
 - Working from a task list (rather than project list)
 - Making priorities explicit with ABCD labels
 - 1-3-5: noting relative size of tasks to avoid overload
- Helping ourselves get back on track:
 - 3 “sprint” tasks to make progress toward the next milestone



What is **one thing** you will take away from this workshop?



Questions?

References & further reading

- ABC method adapted from:
 - Tracy, Brian. "Chapter 6: Use the ABCDE Method Continually." *Eat That Frog: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007.
- 1-3-5 method adapted from:
 - Cavoulacos, Alex. "Why You Never Finish Your To-Do Lists at Work (And How to Change That." <https://www.themuse.com/advice/why-you-never-finish-your-todo-lists-at-work-and-how-to-change-that>.