

Monday, May 16, 2022

Resistance Is Real

Summer is here. This summer, we're dedicated to walking alongside all of you who are tackling big writing projects, trying to establish new writing routines, and needing to experience explosive productivity. If you've been reading the Monday Motivators for the last few weeks, you have a clear **summer plan** that you've discussed with your mentors or your writing community. You have also created some form of writing **support and accountability**. Don't beat yourself if you haven't. If you need to, take a day or two to review the previous two Monday Motivators before coming back to this one.

By now, you're very likely facing a new challenge: the intense difficulty of *actually writing every day*. Unlike the academic year, when we can attribute any lack of daily progress to teaching and service, summer lays bare the reality that daily writing brings up all of our stuff. This week, we want to describe what happens to many people when they engage in daily writing and give that "stuff" a name and a face. We just need to figure out how to get over that inevitable hurdle: our resistance.

Identify Your Resistance

Somewhere in the middle of teaching one of your lectures, we're sure you've daydreamed about summer, so you'll have the time, space, and energy for your writing. You've been anticipating those three months when you're no longer in the classroom, so you can finally finish your *Big Unfinished Project*. In your mind, you envision having all day, every day to write. And yet, when you actually sit down to write, your brain convinces you to do anything but write. This is your resistance manifesting.

Tell us if this sounds familiar. You've made a plan to write on Monday morning at nine. You sit down at your writing desk, and then all of a sudden, you feel a desire to do something else. Fold your laundry, check your e-mail, or organize your pens. Or you suddenly realize you need to read one more book, one more article, one more report before you can start

writing. Or maybe your campus just notified you to prepare your fall courses, and you're anxious to get a head start on this given how hard the spring semester was. Or maybe you find yourself gazing out the window wishing you were spending the day out in the sun instead of writing. In short, procrastination, avoidance, and denial arise to distract and derail you.

Why is it that we so often find ourselves *wanting* to write, but then end up *not writing at all*? Most academic writers we know genuinely want to share their ideas and findings, and also need to complete writing projects in order to finish their degree, get a job, and/or obtain tenure. And yet, whenever we put our butt in a chair to write, along comes our resistance! Barbara Sher describes resistance (when you want to do something, but you just can't seem to do it) as an innately human defense mechanism that is uniquely designed to protect us from doing anything dangerous. In other words, our resistance is like an internal bodyguard that rises up to keep us from any risky situation.

Having an internal bodyguard is mostly a good thing! On one hand, it keeps us from engaging in potentially harmful activities. On the other hand, our inner bodyguard can't tell the difference between *physical danger* and *emotional danger*, so it gets activated whether we are standing at the edge of a cliff or sitting down to write a book. Both *feel* dangerous and raise anxiety. In response, our bodyguard leaps into action to stop us from engaging in this activity in the form of procrastination, avoidance, and/or denial. It will do whatever it takes to stop us from jumping off that cliff or engaging in what feels (for many of us) like an equally dangerous act: the production of knowledge.

Fear Drives Resistance

Wherever there's resistance, there's fear underneath it, so it might be helpful to ask yourself: *When I sit in front of the computer to write, what fears emerge?* It may be fear of success, fear of failure, fear of being publicly judged, fear of not being good enough, fear of being revealed as an impostor, fear of speaking truth to power, or fear that writing about other people's pain will trigger your own. There's no need to analyze or judge

these fears; just to identify them. Knowing what you're afraid of will help you to design strategies to maneuver around them.

Over the next few weeks, we're going to go into greater depth about the different types of resistance that are common among academic writers for the purpose of suggesting a broad array of tips, tricks, and strategies you can use whenever your bodyguard shows up for duty. If you keep in mind that your bodyguard can't quite tell the difference between real and perceived danger and that it genuinely wants to do its job of protecting you, then you will quickly realize that the trick to sneaking around your resistance is to keep your inner bodyguard in a nice, comfortable, and relaxed state. For this week, it's enough to imagine your resistance as a big bodyguard that's always ready to protect you, identify when it's present and what it's up to, and then look it in the eye, shake hands, and get acquainted.

We love the idea that resistance is really our very own built-in bodyguard at work. It gives us a framework for understanding the procrastination, avoidance, and denial we experience when we sit down to write every morning. Everybody's bodyguard looks different. Maybe it's the irresistible urge to check Instagram or Twitter. Maybe it's the need to color-code your sock drawer. Maybe it's the self-imposed pressure to read every single journal article and book written on your research topic. Only you know what your bodyguard looks like. If you can figure out how to manage your relationship with your bodyguard, then cementing a daily writing practice becomes that much easier.

The Weekly Challenge

This week, we challenge you to:

- Write every day (Monday through Friday) for at least 30 minutes.
 - Notice what happens when you sit down to write.
 - Consider what it would be like to understand your procrastination, avoidance, and denial as protective impulses.
 - If you can't seem to start writing, gently ask yourself: *"What am I afraid of?"*
 - Identify all the ways your resistance manifests this week without judgment, shame, or self-recrimination.
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We hope this week brings you the willingness to identify your resistance as it occurs, a spirit of openness toward new ways of understanding your procrastination and avoidance behaviors, and a sense of compassion toward yourself in the process.

Warmly,

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