

Everything You Learned is Wrong [AWA Episode 152]

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SPEAKERS

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Cathy Mazak 00:02

Welcome to the academic writing amplified podcast. On this podcast, we believe that the culture of academia needs to change radically. Women and non binary people are revolutionising academia within institutions that were not built for us. If you're ready to reject the culture of overwork, kick, guilt and overwhelm to the curb, and amplify your voice, to make a real impact on your field, without breaking down, or burning out, you're in the right place, with our team of experienced writing coaches, as CO hosts will share insights and talk to inspiring guests to bring you the practical strategies, systems and mindset shifts. You need to find time to write, publish work you love, and design your career on your terms. And it all starts with writing. Let's go. Oh, my goodness, okay. Everything you learned about academic writing is wrong. Okay, it sounds harsh. I know, I know. But the sub text, the secondary tagline is, and it's not your fault. It's the fault of how we are socialized inside of academia, how we learn from example, in kind of, you know, situations that maybe aren't the most ideal for learning how to write. So today, I'm digging in to five things that you learned about academic writing that are wrong, and what you can do to fix them. My name is Kathy me Zack. And after becoming a tenured full professor, I founded a writing and publication focused professional development company for academics called scholars voice. And I'm really happy to be talking to you today about you know, these like common misconceptions that can lead professors astray when they are trying to get their amazing publications out in the world, and actually making a difference in their field. Okay, so here's the first thing that you learned about academic writing, that is wrong. The binge and bust method, okay, so this is a method that many of us used as students to get work done. And not everybody, of course, but the doctoral student process, the graduate student experience is full of binge and bust, right? When we're trying to get a project done a lot for our graduate coursework, a lot of times we're working up to a deadline, we have so many balls in the air during the graduate program, a lot of us are doing like lab work, plus coursework, and then we're dissertate ng plus lab work less. Maybe we're a TA or graduate researcher, and all of those things can really make it so that we're juggling too many things. And when a deadlines coming up, we'd like binge on that project, right? Like work, work, work, work, work on that project, and then crash, right. So we take those cycles of binge and bust into our professor Oriole lives as well. But they don't work for us anymore as professors. So that

is one thing when if you're trying to get your academic writing done by whatever the professor Oriole equivalent is of pulling all nighters, right, which actually probably looks like writing all weekend, or writing every evening, and through the weekend, up until a deadline, like that kind of binge and bust is not sustainable. It wasn't really sustainable while you're in grad school, either. And it's really not sustainable once you're a professor. So if you're thinking you're gonna get your academic writing done, and get your articles out by, you know, binging binge writing, and then crashing, this is not a sustainable method. Okay. The second thing you learned about academic writing that is wrong, is that you must write every day in order to get your publications out. Now, this is almost the opposite of the bench and bust, right? It comes from this idea, like we need to be very consistent and consistent isn't bad. I'm not saying consistent is bad at all. But this idea of writing every day, or writing a certain number of words a day, which is how this is often like translated, actually comes from novel writing. It comes from Creative Writing, right? It comes from this idea that you're going to write a lot and then edit back. And that is not a very efficient or even like logical idea when it comes to peer reviewed papers and like much of the academic writing that we do. The reason is that like for example, if you're a scientist, the way that you start the most of the writing or the Compose thing of the paper happens when you are creating the figures. It's what are the figures? What's the order of the figures? What story do I want those figures to tell? And once you have that the words on the page part, it's like, easy, kind of like it flows or it can flow after that. So the idea like I need to write every day doesn't make sense for science writers. It doesn't make sense, like for people who are writing around data, right, either like anthropologists and social scientists who are qualitative researchers who are writing around data excerpts, it just doesn't like that, right? Every day doesn't work besides the fact that also it can derail you. So if the motivation to write every day is this don't break the chain, or the streak motivation. It's just not like, it's not the best motivator, in my opinion, especially for myself, as a mother, the kids were always interrupting any kind of streak I tried to do was always interrupted by children getting sick, pick them up from school early because something happened like it's a mess. When you put all of your motivation around keeping a streak with something as important as your academic writing and publishing. I don't think that's the best way to go. Now, if it's working for you, by all means, write every day. Absolutely. All right. So thing number three that you learned about academic writing that is wrong, is that there's a speed and yours is too slow. Okay, so have you thought of this is this a thought that you have in your head, right? Like, there's that speed to how fast I am supposed to be producing articles, when you are producing whatever kind of right or writing my book or whatever, writing my grant, when you have an idea in your head, most of us do actually write which is like, Okay, I'm going to submit this, I'm going to write this article, let's say, and it's going to take me this many months, or this many weeks, right. And then that deadline goes by and continues to go by, and the project stretches out, and it feels awful. And you have the secondary thought, which is I'm too slow, right? Like my writing, I'm a slow writer, I'm too slow at this. So what I want to tell you is that the only speed that matters is your speed. And actually the thing you need to learn as a professor or as a researcher, like once your post, I mean, you really could learn this before, before you get the PhD. But post PhD, when you're out in the world, doing the work trying to get the publications out there that are going to influence your field. The only thing that's important is how fast you do it. And really knowing how fast that is. Speed is not as important as predictability. So what you need to do is you need to learn how to predict how long it takes you to do things. And the only way that you can really do that is by practice, observation, we call it like collecting data on yourself, right? So that trying things, seeing what happens reflecting on it. Because it's way more important, especially for professors, that you know how long it takes you to do it, then this like false idea of I'm too slow, there's a speed and I'm not fast enough, that directly correlates with thing for that you learned about academic writing that is wrong, which is that time is your biggest obstacle, right? Like we think, Oh, we got to be faster, we got to be faster. And then you know, another thing, right?

Like, I don't have enough time, right? I don't have enough time. Many people say this, I say this occasionally, where I'm like, there's not enough time in the day, you know, like kind of those thoughts. And let's be real, there's the same amount of time every day. And what you have to do as a professor is to figure out how you're going to allot it to the things that you want to and the need to do in your life, like not just in your work, but also in your life because you have to take into consideration, rest and recovery and all of those kinds of things. So your actual biggest obstacle is not time. It's alignment. And here's what I mean by that you have whether you've articulated them or not, right? You have a set of values around your life and your academic work. One of the tools that we use in our programs to help people kind of get what's important to them out is this academic mission statement tool. And we have clients right Write an academic mission statement according to a certain template. And that helps them to really get a focus on like, Okay, this is what my academic work is here to do. This is what I want to create in the world, this is who I am, this is, you know, this is why I'm as a as a scholar, right. And this is what I want to do. The problem is that, if you haven't articulated that, it's hard to like, make sure that you're using your time in alignment with that mission, or in alignment with your values. If you don't know, like, if you've never sat down and taken the time to write an academic mission statement, or to write out your values, it's really hard to like, then align your time behind there. But that is exactly what your actual biggest problem is, right? Like, we think it's like, we're gonna become professors. And absolutely, you're pulled in 1000 directions, that is absolutely true. What the work is for you, then to make a sustainable career is to make sure that you're making choices, conscious, deliberate choices about your time, that are aligned with your mission and your values, right? Like, we're not just giving away our time, we're far too specialized for that. We need to be very deliberate, have boundaries around our time and make real choices about how we are spending the only most precious resource that you have, which is your time. So writing time, you will create it by developing your ability to align your activities that you do in your career, with your academic mission and your values. All right, and the last thing that you learned about the fifth thing that you learned about academic writing that's wrong, is that teaching is your biggest obstacle to writing. So we hear this a lot from our clients and out there in the world, right? It's kind of like, it feels like there's this choice that you have to make as an academic, between teaching and research, right? That if you have a high teaching load that you can't maintain your research, and it certainly is absolutely right like and logically more difficult to maintain your research program with a high heavy teaching load. But that doesn't mean that it can't be done. And it's the same thing that I just talked about, right? It's about alignment. So the more that your teaching can be aligned with your research area, so that your career starts to feel like one thing, like it's about one academic mission, and you are moving everything, all the activities that you do during, you know, your work and your career. you're aligning that. And putting that all in the service of your academic mission, the better it will be. When I was a tenured full professor, I was teaching a four four load. And it wasn't hard. Yeah, absolutely. It's hard. But also, when you have a lot of structure to your time, because you're teaching, right, because you have scheduled places that you have to be, when you have that structure, there's actually an upside to it, if you can, you know, manipulate that structure to work in your favor. And the upside to it is that you have to put these boundaries around your time, you have to create the time to write, you have to put energy and time into publication. And when you have some things on your schedule, for some people, it actually can get a little easier. And I'll just offer as a little bit of evidence of that, when you're on sabbatical. It can be like really, really difficult to get your writing done, even though maybe that's the whole reason that you're on a sabbatical. Because you don't have a structure to your time or a structure to your day. Teaching can help create that structure. And it also kind of like, elevates the necessity to have boundaries around your writing time. And it can just be really wonderful to really think about the ways that our research and teaching can become integrated. It's great for students, it's good for you think about how many ways can you kind of double dip between your

reading in your research area and your work with students. You're teaching your curriculum that you develop? So teaching is an obstacle. Sure. I don't think it's your biggest obstacle. I think there's some there's an upside to being a teacher researcher, for sure. All right. So here's a few things that I did to help I just to kind of finish out this story and talk about next steps. I could never write every day. That was something that I thought I was supposed to do. Like I said before, it never worked out for me. Another thing that happened was that like when I was a new professor, I always taught in In the mornings, that's because like nobody, all the old professors, nobody wanted to get up and teach the 730 in the morning class. And so the new professors usually got that class. The problem with that, for me was that, by the time I got to the afternoon, I was like, mentally drained for writing. So one of the things that really helped me and again, this is like, teaching helps you scheduled teaching, right, like helps you to realize some of these things, if you can be reflective about them. What I figured out was that, when I was able to schedule classes in the afternoon, I could use my great morning energy and my best time of day for writing, instead of using my best time of day for teaching. Now, this is totally in line with how I work right with, which is what I was saying before about the idea that there's a speed and yours is too slow. The important thing is you have to figure out for you what works. So for me, the first hours of the day are like my mover and shaker hours are like the hours I can get, like so much done. And then I hit a wall between like 1232 33 o'clock, I'm not very good. You know. But if I'm in a group of people, like, obviously, I'm going to rally. And so that really is something that when I realized that and then I started to build my schedule around those kinds of my, my strengths. And my best way of working, when I built my schedule around that it became so so so much better in terms of being able to really get my writing done. So I offer this to you, as you know, a way to reflect on whether you have been falling into one of these traps, right one of these five things that we kind of are taught about academic writing, by our experience, especially as grad students, and think about ways that these things, maybe you've been thinking they're true for you. And now, you know, you can release them and you can choose something different. Before I leave, I want to let you know a few things. One is that my company scholars voice, we are piloting a new version of a very old and time tested program, we have a program called navigate your writing roadmap. And this program helps you to clear your publication pipeline. This is a program that teaches you how to figure out gives you the space holds the space and also gives you training around how to figure out how you work, how to create project plans for your writing how to map out your publication pipeline, and really understand it as a high level project plan for you. We teach you all about developing your writing system, including how you can take advantage of those like, particularly great times of day for yourself, like how can you take advantage of those so that when you're writing, you don't need to write every day, you can strive for consistency, but consistency under circumstances that are going to create flow in your writing, and that are really going to move the needle on your writing impactfully. So this is a 12 week program. And we are super excited to be piloting it at the end of November, no February the end of February. So in the comments in the show notes in the written section of this content, you will find a link to information about the Navigate pilot to see if maybe you want to participate and an application to join us. So we'll be taking applications until February 17 2023. So whenever you're watching this video, though, we still should be taking applications above for this particular pilot version. We are looking for 10 to 20 people who have never taken our navigate program before to join us this time. So thank you so much for joining me today. And I really hope that you check out navigate, think about these ways that we've been kind of acculturated and that the things that we end up believing about academic writing, and about how to get publications out that aren't necessarily true. Or maybe they were true for you once and they're not true anymore. So have a wonderful day. Bye. Thank you so much for spending your valuable time supporting yourself and your writing by listening to this episode. If you like what

you heard today, the best way to say thank you is to hop on over to Apple iTunes and write an honest review. The more reviews the more amazing academic women and non binary people will find this podcast so go write one now