

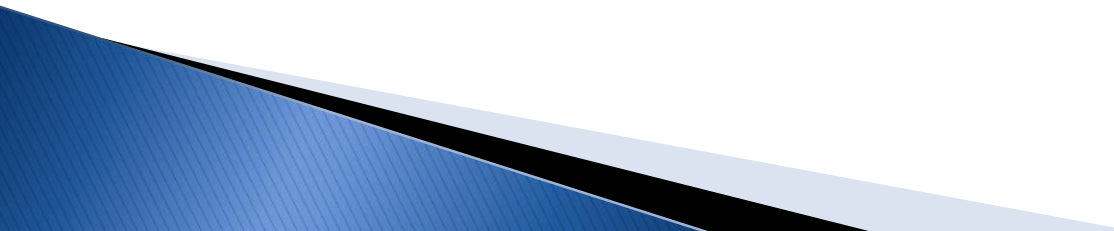


RESCAP-MED Project: Writing Workshop

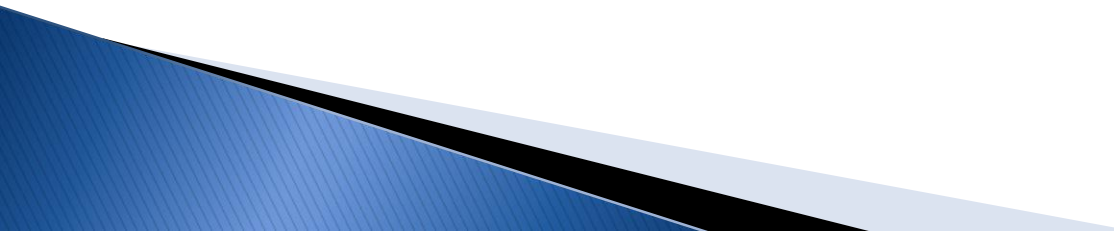
An Introduction to Writing: Getting Started

Julia Critchley

Outline of this talk

- ▶ How to get started
 - ▶ Outlines & planning
 - ▶ Problems with motivation?
 - ▶ Dealing with criticism / rejection
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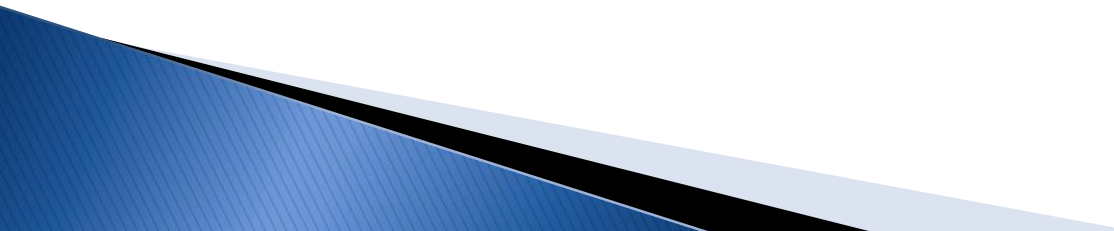
Most important points

- ▶ Be clear yourself!
 - ▶ What is it you want to communicate / achieve?
 - ▶ Decide on key messages / objectives
 - (just a few)
- 

General Principles

- ▶ Thinking time
 - Define purpose and scope
 - Target audience (who are you writing for?)
 - What readers need to know
 - Time and resources
 - (other people, e.g. statistician, help with discussion)

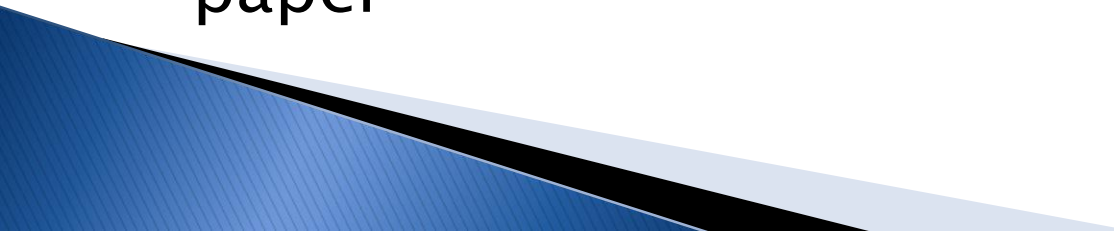
Structure is everything

- ▶ Tell people what you are going to say, say it, tell them what you've said
 - ▶ Make sure that readers know where they are, where they are going, and why
 - ▶ ImraD (Introduction, methods, results, and discussion)
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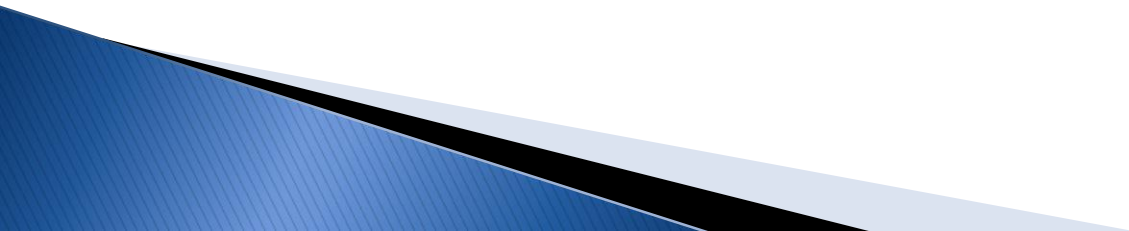
Organisation!!!

- ▶ PLAN PLAN PLAN
 - Key Messages
 - Outline [maybe even draft Abstract]
 - Effective beginning
 - Dummy tables / figure axes
 - Ordering
 - End
 - Talk with colleagues

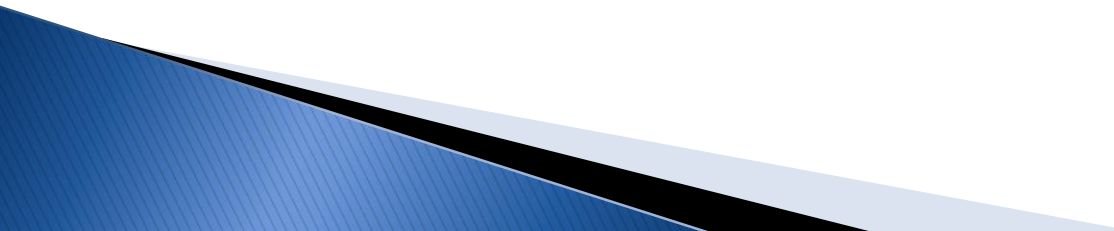
Formulate your key message

- ▶ Keep it simple; try to boil down to a single sentence
 - ▶ Your message must contain something **new** and **useful**
 - ▶ Make sure your results support your key message
 - ▶ The message may change as you develop the paper
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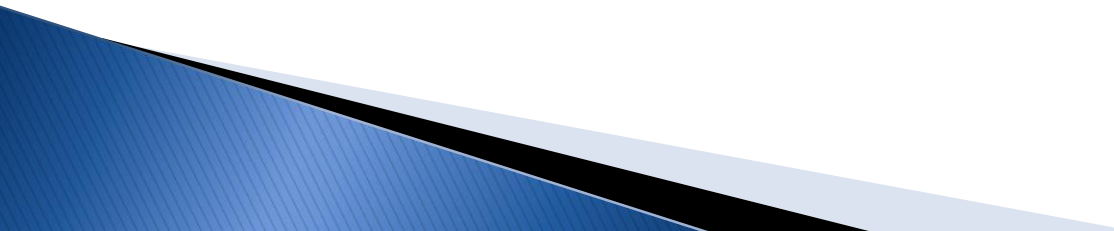
Motivational tips?



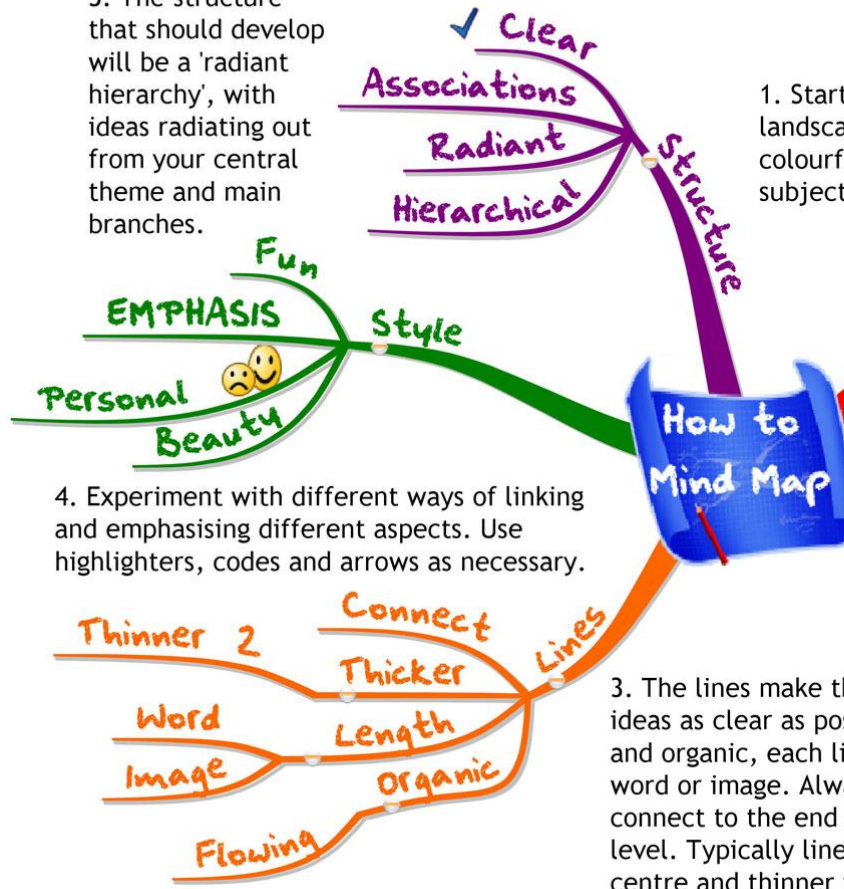
Trouble with getting started?

- ▶ Just write anything
 - ▶ Skip ahead
 - ▶ Get a little exercise (10 minutes walk)...
 - ▶ Make a deal...
- 

Mind Maps

- ▶ Brainstorming (individually or in groups)
 - ▶ Problem solving
 - ▶ Planning
 - ▶ Researching and consolidating information from multiple sources
 - ▶ Presenting information
 - ▶ Gaining insight on complex subjects
 - ▶ Jogging your creativity
- 

5. The structure that should develop will be a 'radiant hierarchy', with ideas radiating out from your central theme and main branches.

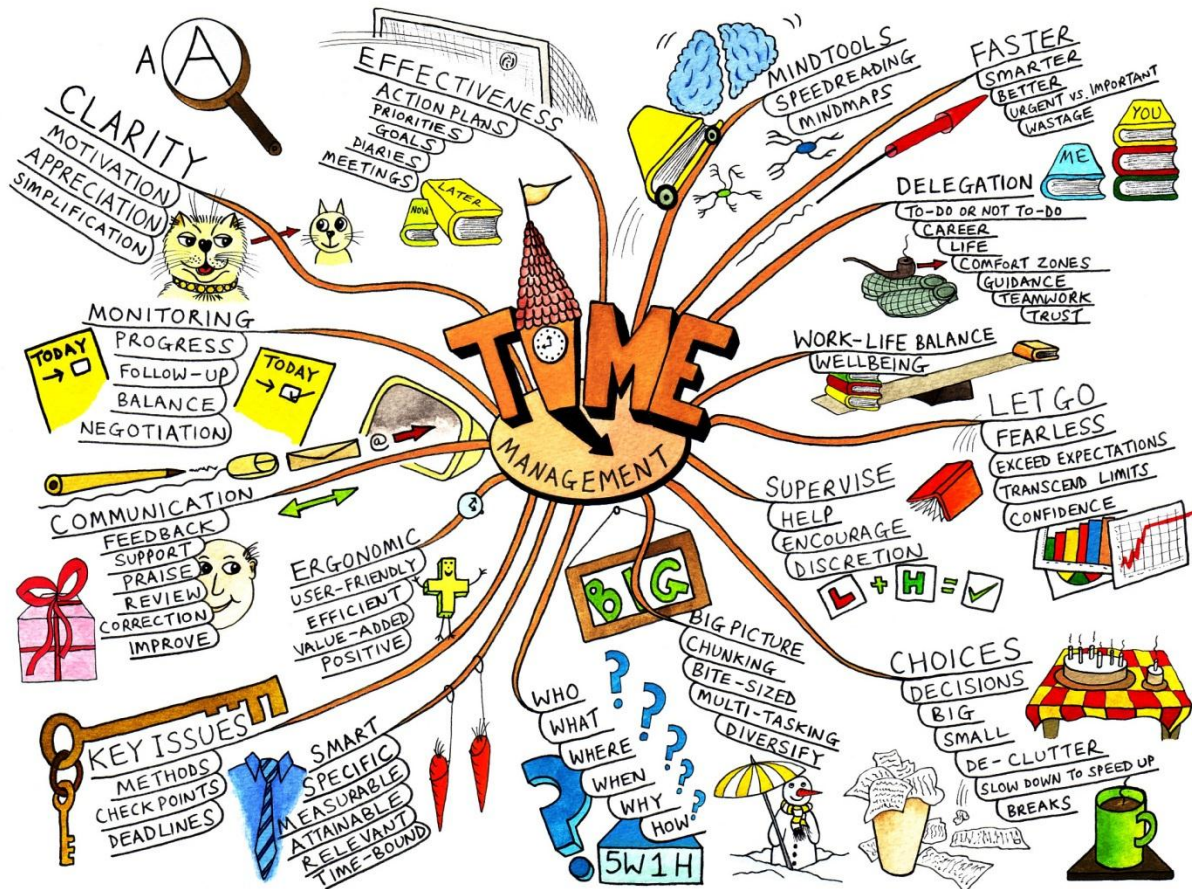


1. Start at the centre of a blank, landscape page, ideally with a colourful image to represent your subject.

2. Use words and pictures throughout your map. Wherever possible use single KEY words, printed along a line. Each word or picture sits on its own line.

4. Experiment with different ways of linking and emphasising different aspects. Use highlighters, codes and arrows as necessary.

3. The lines make the associations between ideas as clear as possible. Make them flowing and organic, each line the same length as the word or image. Always ensure that lines connect to the end of the line at the previous level. Typically lines will be thicker at the centre and thinner further out.



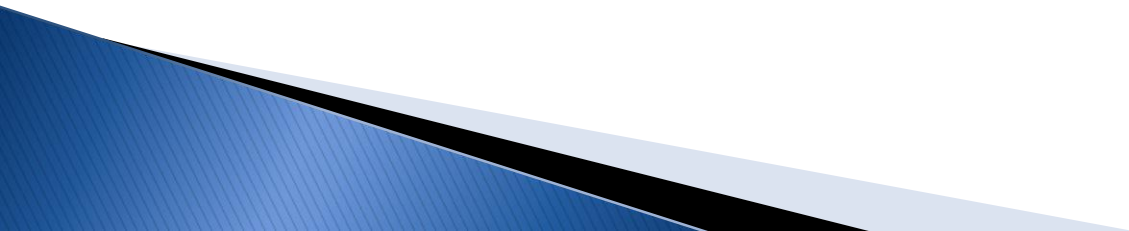
Getting Started...

- ▶ Write
 - Use your outline
 - Try to complete one section at a time if possible (can be small sub-sections)
 - Write as you like (can revise later)

First draft?

- ▶ Check draft for
 - Don't worry about spelling / grammar etc initially
 - Main points included / given appropriate emphasis
 - Anything missing
 - Clarity?
 - Correct?
 - Colleagues check
 - Revise again

IMRAD Structure



IMRAD

- ▶ ***IMRAD* (Introduction, Methods, Research [and] Discussion)**
- ▶ Introduction (including a title)
- ▶ [Review of background / literature / known information]
- ▶ Methods
- ▶ Results
- ▶ Discussion
- ▶ [also acknowledgements, funding, author contributions, bibliography, appendices]

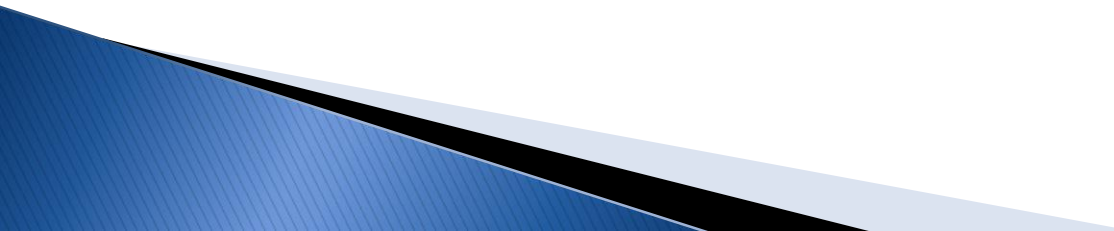
INTRODUCTION

- ▶ Issue, needs, specific problem, and way of addressing it in study in several paragraphs
- ▶ Background to the study i.e. *what is already known and where the gaps are* – how your study fits the gaps
- ▶ “The purpose of the introduction should be to supply sufficient background information to allow the reader to understand and evaluate the results of the present study without needing to refer to previous studies on the topic.”

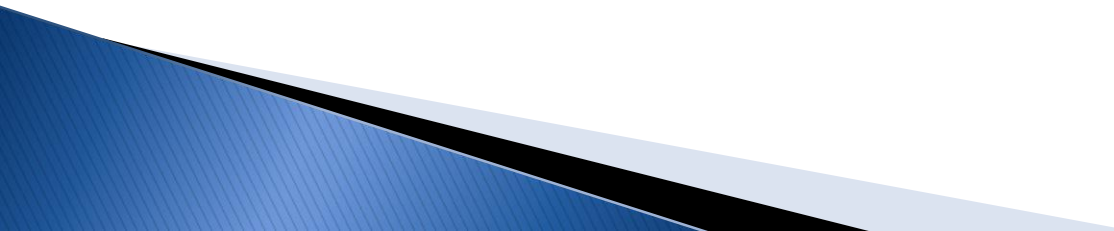
METHODS

- ▶ Description of the specific materials and/or methods used to carry out the research in several paragraphs
- ▶ Common subheadings include:
 - **Participants** – number, criteria for selecting, relevant demographic information
 - **Research Sample** – what you collected and criteria
 - **Procedures** – how did you go about collecting the data? Observations, interviews, surveys, etc.
 - **Analysis** – how was the data analysed? Include formulas, statistical procedures, and equations, etc.

RESULTS

- ▶ Description of the application of the data and specific results or findings in several paragraphs
 - ▶ Also tables, charts, graphs
- 

Organise/summarise results succinctly

- ▶ Fill in dummy tables and figures with real data
 - ▶ Draft additional tables and figures if needed – look at published articles for potential templates
 - ▶ Summarise each table/figure in a single sentence
- 

DISCUSSION

- ▶ Extended discussion of the results--what they mean, what will or can happen next, what other experiments might be fruitful, etc
- ▶ Begin by summarizing the main points of the Results section - emphasize the bottom line
- ▶ Discussion flaws and limitations in your study and suggest ways the study might be done better (but not at the start)

Likely Writing Order

- ▶ 1. Materials and Methods
- ▶ 2. Results

[These can be written first, as you are carrying out research and collecting the results]

- ▶ 3. Introduction
- ▶ 4. Discussion

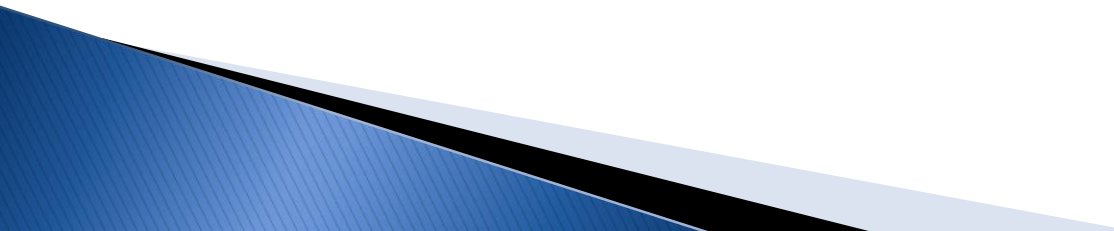
[Write these sections next, once you have decided on your target journal/s]

- ▶ 6. Title
- ▶ 7. Abstract

[Write your Title and Abstract based on all the other sections]

- ▶ SOME like to start with Abstract (can be useful to help clarify main messages / key points briefly)
- ▶ but also return to it (and revise it) at point 7.

Style

- ▶ Short words
 - ▶ Short sentences
 - ▶ Short paragraphs
 - ▶ No jargon
 - ▶ Abbreviations
 - ▶ Prefer nouns and verbs to adjectives and adverbs
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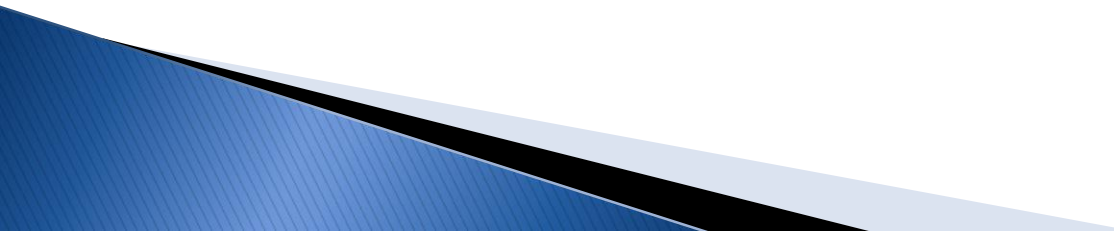
Style 2

- ▶ Avoid figures of speech and idioms
- ▶ Prefer active to passive
- ▶ Prefer the concrete to the abstract
- ▶ Avoid the “*not unblack cat crossed the not unwide road*”
- ▶ Don't hector
- ▶ Be unstuffy

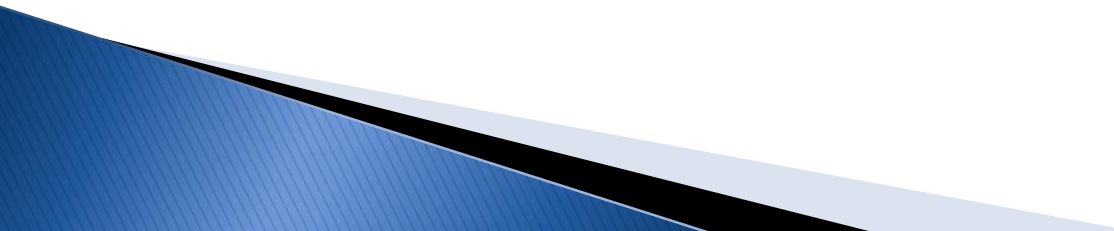
Get early, frequent feedback

“in chunks”

Get early, frequent feedback

- ▶ Share your tables/figures and single-sentence summaries with coauthors/colleagues
 - ▶ Ask if they are clear/concise/compelling
 - ▶ Give presentations to colleagues at work, at conferences
 - ▶ Try to formulate a concise key message
- 

Get early, frequent feedback

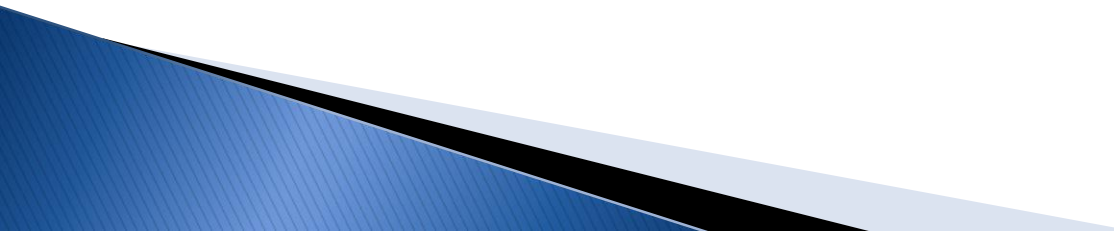
- ▶ Share your tables/figures and single-sentence summaries to coauthors/colleagues. Ask if they are clear/concise/compelling.
 - ▶ Give presentations to colleagues at work, at conferences
 - ▶ Try to formulate a concise key message. **Get feedback.**
- 

Don't wait for a complete draft to begin getting feedback



**Thanks for your detailed and lengthy criticism of my manuscript.
I'll be sure to incorporate your suggestions into my next draft**

Dealing with problems: TIME

- ▶ Don't need big blocks of time
 - ▶ (small regular blocks e.g. 20 minutes per day could also work)
 - ▶ Break outline into small sub-sections to work on bit by bit
- 

Emotional problems with writing

- ▶ Fear of rejection / Anxiety about the quality of the result / Lack of belief
 - Writing in stages – its not the end draft
 - Take a step backwards
 - Bolster confidence / opinion

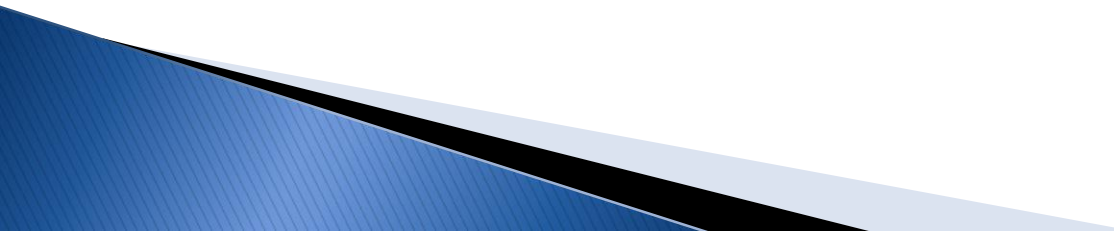
Difficulty with focus

- ▶ **Conflicting priorities**
 - remember you had decided this task was the top priority for now
- ▶ **Struggling to decide what to do next**
 - Plan / organise – identify tasks / sections etc
- ▶ **COMMIT PUBLICLY**
- ▶ **Environmental**
 - go somewhere else e.g. library / coffee shop (maybe without internet access)

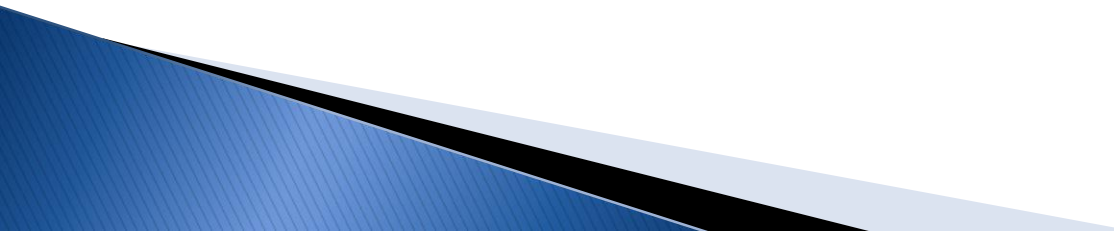
POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

- ▶ “Some writing, even just a little, is a step forward”
- ▶ “I only have to work on it a little bit today”
- ▶ “I will focus on this task right now and not worry about what will come later”
- ▶ “I can write freely now and worry about editing later”
- ▶ “I will allow others to read this in draft form”
- ▶ “Its ok to ask for help and its ok if some of it needs to be corrected”

Dealing with rejection

- No one likes rejection
 - Its very very common (even for the most experienced and successful academics)
 - Don't take it personally
 - Outside editors interests / scope of journal
 - Bad luck
- 

Dealing with rejection (2)

- ▶ It is “unusual” to get 2–3 reviewers comments that are “all positive”
 - ▶ Total rejection is different from “reject but resubmit” category
 - ▶ Acceptance with “minor revisions” is unusual
- 

Dealing with rejection (3)

- ▶ Move on
 - Don't get angry
 - Maybe put it aside for a week or so
 - Address comments and resubmit (Plan b)

- ▶ Main reasons for rejection (by peer-reviewers)
 - Often not “total rejection” – reject but you may resubmit is a positive response
 - They did not understand you very well
 - – they may not know your field that well?
 - Methodological / academic diversity
 - The “bastard” reviewer

Dealing with critical / lengthy comments

- ▶ Don't be perturbed / put-off by detailed comments –
 - Often reflects reviewer personality rather than manuscript quality
 - This is likely to take a lot of time but you already have a “foot in the door” with the journal
 - Probably something in there that is “useful”
 - Usually not necessary to address every comment – some can be “rejected” (not ignored)
 - If they look “too much” ask for help
 - (address “easy” ones yourself and circulate the others to co-authors or divide among co-author team to address)

Sources

- ▶ [Luc Reid - The Will to Write: Getting Past the 6 Most Common Obstacles](http://www.phd2published.com/2011/11/30/luc-reid-the-will-to-write-getting-past-the-6-most-common-obstacles/#sthash.5LffGjHR.dpuf) – See more at: <http://www.phd2published.com/2011/11/30/luc-reid-the-will-to-write-getting-past-the-6-most-common-obstacles/#sthash.5LffGjHR.dpuf>
- ▶ IEA 2013 course on Epidemiology
- ▶ Epidemiology Supercourse (presentations by Richard Smith and Paul s Ziegel)