Brain Tumor Center

Writing Accountability Group (BTC WAG)

Adapted with modification from the book "*WAG Your Work: Writing Accountability Groups: Bootcamp for Increasing Scholarly Productivity*" by Dr. Kimberly A. Skarupski.

Writing Accountability Groups (WAGs) were initiated by Kimberly Skarupski, Ph.D., MPH, at Johns Hopkins Medicine, where she brought faculty together in small weekly meetings with the focused objective of cultivating a consistent and disciplined writing habit. For more info: https://www.wagyourwork.com/

Writing Is Challenging

Writing is a demanding task, made even more difficult when your day is filled with patient care, charting, teaching, managing research labs, attending meetings, and handling administrative, regulatory, and compliance responsibilities. As a result, scholarly writing often gets pushed to late nights or weekends, creating an unsustainable work-life imbalance that can lead to stress and burnout. If you're committed to writing but struggle to find time amidst your other obligations, a Writing Accountability Group can help.

Objective of WAG

To provide a structured, peer-supported environment aimed at fostering consistent writing habits, enhancing scholarly productivity, and overcoming common writing barriers among program participants.

Target Audience

Members of the Brain Tumor Center, including faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows, department fellows, and graduate students.

Group Structure

- **Size**: 4-5 members per group.
- **Commitment**: Each participant commits to attending at least 7 out of 10 sessions (each session lasting 1 hour).

- **Team Lead**: Each group will have one lead facilitator to guide the sessions.
- **Frequency**: Weekly or every two weeks, depending on group's preference.
- **Location and Time**: Group members will collectively decide on the location, date, and time of each session. Depending on how many people sign up, we may choose to hold the meeting in the same location/time for everyone (we can then potentially offer snacks). If not feasible or we cannot find time that works for everyone, each group will have their own schedule. Therefore, for now, location and timing are to be determined.

Session Format

1. **First Meeting (Introductory Session)**:

   o **Duration**: 1 hour

   o **Agenda**:

      ▪ Introductions: name, department, research area.

      ▪ State your 10-week writing goal(s).

      ▪ Review WAG rules: one hour per week for 10 weeks, WAGGERs should attend all sessions, must be on-time, no distractions during the session, and must agree to be accountable. The WAG structure is 10-40-10 (see next section).

      ▪ Decide who will be the WAG facilitator. WAG facilitators keep the time and keep track of the WAGGERs' goals. Peer facilitators can hold the job for 10 weeks or can rotate the role among others in their group.

      ▪ Start the 10-40-10 process.

2. **Subsequent Meetings**:

   o **Duration**: 1 hour per session (flexible to 2 hours if preferred by the group).

   o **Structure**:

      ▪ **10 minutes**: Progress updates and goal setting for the session. Participants will report on their previous week's progress and set specific writing goals for the current session.

      ▪ **40 minutes**: Timed communal writing. Each member works on their manuscript or related tasks (e.g., data analysis, literature review) independently but within the group setting.

      ▪ **10 minutes**: Wrap-up and goal setting for the next session. Participants report on whether they achieved their goals during the writing session and set writing objectives for the upcoming week.

Group Guidelines

- **Commitment**: Members must attend at least 7 of the 10 weekly sessions.

- **Punctuality**: Participants should arrive on time and fully prepared for the session.

- **No Distractions**: All participants agree to minimize distractions (e.g., turning off phones, avoiding emails) during the writing time.

- **Support and Accountability**: Members will provide social support to one another, offering motivation and encouragement throughout the program.

Pre- and Post-WAG Assessment

- **Pre-WAG Survey**: A REDCap survey will be sent out to gauge participants' current writing habits, barriers, and writing goals.

- **Post-WAG Survey**: After completing the 10 sessions, participants will complete a follow-up REDCAP survey to evaluate their progress, writing frequency, and the impact of the WAG on their productivity.

Goal-Setting Framework

Participants will set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals at the beginning of each session. This may include tasks like completing a manuscript section, analyzing data, or conducting a literature review. Participants should plan smaller, manageable tasks instead of larger, daunting ones like "finish results section."

Focus of WAGs

- **Not about Content**: WAGs are not focused on the content of writing; there is no peer review or editing. Instead, WAGs are focused on the **process** of writing, with the goal of establishing a **sustainable writing habit**.

- **Key Outcomes**:

  1. **Increased Regularity**: You will write with increased regularity and for shorter durations, fostering a sustainable writing habit.

  2. **Confidence and Control**: You will likely experience a newfound sense of confidence and control over the writing process, along with satisfaction in your writing practice.

  3. **Well-Being and Social Support**: WAGs also foster improved well-being by creating a small community of engagement, offering camaraderie and support, and reducing isolation.

Through a WAG, you will become skilled at identifying what can be accomplished within a limited time frame.

Benefits of WAG

- **Accountability**: Members are held accountable to their goals and the group, ensuring steady progress toward manuscript completion and research output.

- **Increased Productivity**: WAGs foster a habit of regular writing in shorter, focused sessions, leading to more frequent writing sessions, reduced procrastination, and improved productivity.

- **Peer Support**: The group setting provides emotional support, reduces isolation, and fosters a sense of camaraderie, which is especially beneficial for junior faculty and fellows.

- **Time Management**: Participants learn to break tasks into smaller, more manageable pieces, helping them prioritize writing amidst their busy schedules.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

- Regular feedback will be gathered to assess group dynamics, progress, and any barriers encountered.

- Based on feedback, we may consider adjusting the format or structure of the sessions, including the option to extend the program.

After the completion of first set of 10 sessions, another announcement for WAGGERs recruitment will be made.

Scholarly Productivity Tips and Tricks

➢ **Tips and Takeaways for Effective Writing Habits**

- **Routinize your writing**: Make writing a daily habit, even if it's just for a short time.

- **Avoid unplanned binge-writing**: While long writing sessions may give a feeling of accomplishment, they disrupt the habit-forming process. Instead of turning a 1-hour session into 4 hours, keep writing sessions brief and consistent.

- **Have a specific writing agenda**: Plan concrete tasks such as "copy means and standard deviations from statistical output into Table 1" or "draft the introduction section." Your agenda should not be vague, like "write" or "work on grant."

- **Start small**: You need less time than you think. Begin with 10-minute writing snippets.

- **Project manage your work**: Break projects down into manageable tasks. Think piecemeal.

- **Do not multitask**: Multitasking reduces focus. Keep distractions to a minimum during writing time.

- **Be accountable**: Hold yourself accountable to your goals and your fellow WAG members.

- **Schedule your priorities**: Proactively schedule writing sessions rather than reactively prioritizing other tasks.

- **Start writing immediately**: Don't wait for the perfect moment. Start with what you know—methods, references, or even just your name on the title page.

- **Delegate**: Get your team started on their writing parts.

- **Don't let perfectionism hinder progress**: Get the paper out the door. Perfection is the enemy of completion.

- **Learn to triage**: Academic writing is not a linear process. Prioritize tasks as necessary.

➢ **More *Scholarly Productivity Tips and Tricks:***

Regular insights and strategies for enhancing scholarly productivity—drawn from books such as:
- *Getting Things Done,*
- *Atomic Habits,*
- *The Power of Habit,*
- *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,*
- *High Output Management, and more*

will be shared regularly with members of the **Brain Tumor Center**.

WAGGERs, Unite to Write!