



Trekking through the Dissertation Underworld

You've finished your coursework, and you're in that strange void known academically as ABD: All But Dissertation. To you it feels like DRH: Down the Rabbit Hole. When you try to imagine the finish line, nothing happens.

If this is you, or even if your own dissertation struggle is less epic than this, I have a few suggestions for you as you journey heroically toward the end (it really is up there, around the curve and behind the mountains).

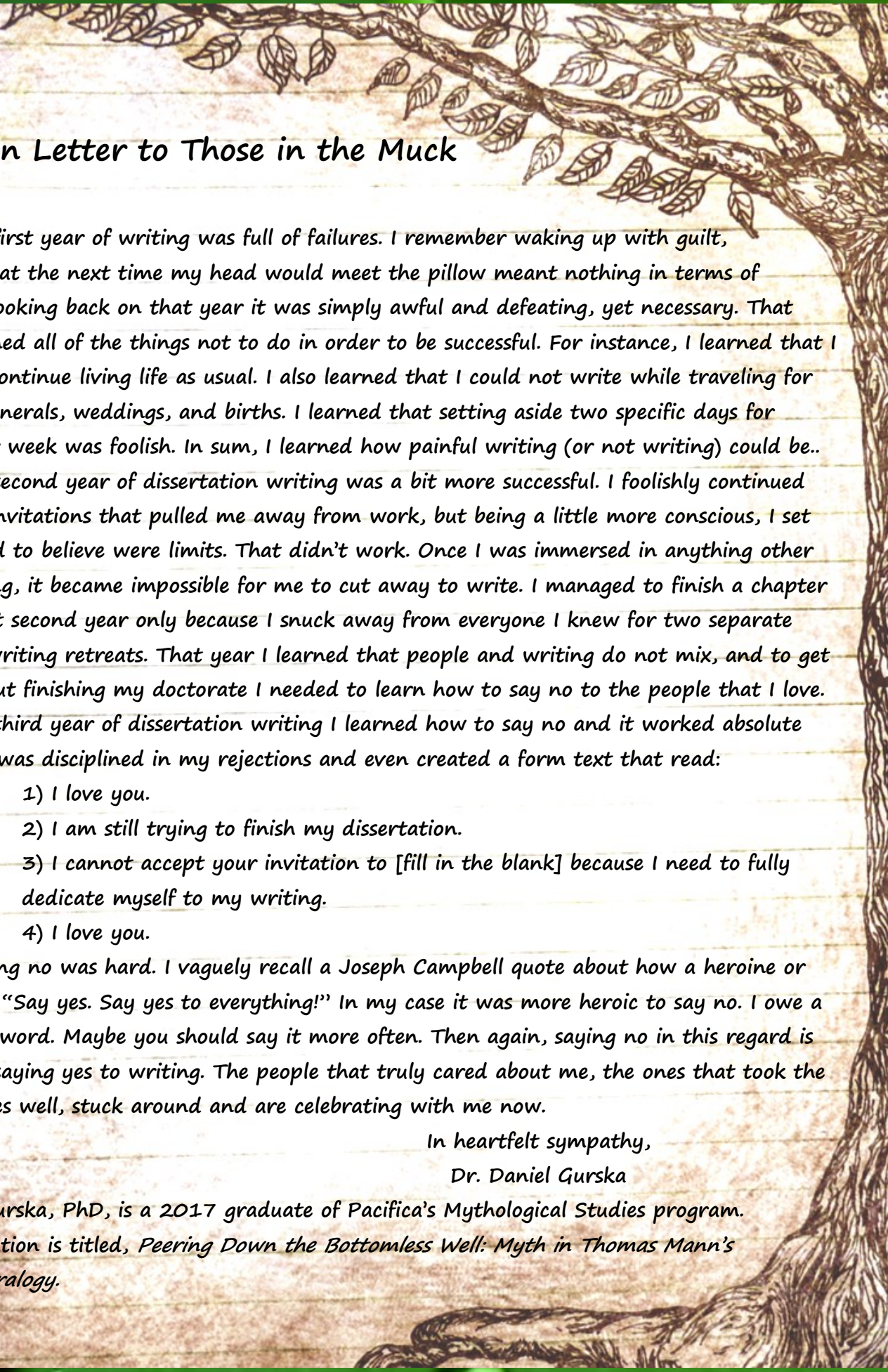
The first is to focus more on the handholds and toeholds than the mountain you scale. Concentrate on whatever task is before you, and only on that. When you finish, take a few breaths and then go for the next level up.

Second, it's very important to keep your dissertation committee informed of where you are. You needn't email or call them very often, but make sure to now and then as you work. Too often students in ABD Land write most of the dissertation and then send copies to committee members with the expectation of graduating soon, only to receive lots of corrections that take time to complete. (So does reading your work.)

Next, make sure you have blocks of time for writing and research. If you have diffuse boundaries, now is the time to practice strengthening them. Friends and family must be made to understand that you are unapproachable during certain hours or days when you must focus on your scholarly work. If necessary, go around wearing a DO NOT DISTURB sign, or post one on your closed door.

Finally, don't fear the lit review. It's a chance to pay homage to your scholarly ancestors. Cite their works in the appropriate subsections of the review; but then put their voices into conversation with each other: "Whereas XX maintains such-and-such, YY develops another side of it...." etc. The finished lit review is a document of gratitude to those who made your work possible.

—Craig Chalquist, PhD, Associate Provost



An Open Letter to Those in the Muck

Greetings,

My first year of writing was full of failures. I remember waking up with guilt, knowing that the next time my head would meet the pillow meant nothing in terms of progress. Looking back on that year it was simply awful and defeating, yet necessary. That year I learned all of the things not to do in order to be successful. For instance, I learned that I could not continue living life as usual. I also learned that I could not write while traveling for holidays, funerals, weddings, and births. I learned that setting aside two specific days for writing per week was foolish. In sum, I learned how painful writing (or not writing) could be..

My second year of dissertation writing was a bit more successful. I foolishly continued accepting invitations that pulled me away from work, but being a little more conscious, I set what I liked to believe were limits. That didn't work. Once I was immersed in anything other than writing, it became impossible for me to cut away to write. I managed to finish a chapter or two that second year only because I snuck away from everyone I knew for two separate weeklong writing retreats. That year I learned that people and writing do not mix, and to get serious about finishing my doctorate I needed to learn how to say no to the people that I love.

My third year of dissertation writing I learned how to say no and it worked absolute wonders. I was disciplined in my rejections and even created a form text that read:

- 1) I love you.
- 2) I am still trying to finish my dissertation.
- 3) I cannot accept your invitation to [fill in the blank] because I need to fully dedicate myself to my writing.
- 4) I love you.

Saying no was hard. I vaguely recall a Joseph Campbell quote about how a heroine or hero must, "Say yes. Say yes to everything!" In my case it was more heroic to say no. I owe a lot to that word. Maybe you should say it more often. Then again, saying no in this regard is really just saying yes to writing. The people that truly cared about me, the ones that took the no responses well, stuck around and are celebrating with me now.

In heartfelt sympathy,

Dr. Daniel Gurska

—Daniel Gurska, PhD, is a 2017 graduate of Pacifica's Mythological Studies program. His dissertation is titled, *Peering Down the Bottomless Well: Myth in Thomas Mann's Joseph Tetralogy*.

How to Excel at Academic Writing—Five Tips for Success

By Sandesh Deshkar

1. Follow the Quote with Suitable Explanation

One of the most common, yet very serious academic writing mistake, is that writers quote a scholar or expert, and just move on to their next point. However, when it comes to making your academic paper impressive, you must give a suitable explanation to the mentioned quote. This is essential, as an apt explanation can help your paper stay focused and lucid.

2. Respect the Arguments of Previous Authors

When you are working on any academic paper, it is common that you will come across work that might be quite contrary to your point of view on the given topic. However, you must not simply dismiss the works of previous authors; you can in fact mention their arguments or point of view in your paper to add academic value to your paper. You can further add value to your paper, by mentioning why you think that the points of the previous author are not quite feasible or relevant in the current context.

3. Mention Relevant Examples to Support Your Argument

If you want to make your argument convincing, then you must first assume that your readers are averse to your argument. You must then use strong and convincing vocabulary to help them agree with you on the given topic or subject. If required, you must use relevant examples to strengthen your case.

4. Understand the Reader and Connect the Odds and Ends

Your readers might not be as intelligent as you assume and hence you must mention where you are heading to through your academic paper. It is crucial that you intelligently connect crucial pieces to make your paper coherent and impressive.

5. Be Precise and Cautious While Making Your Point

The choice of right words can make a world of difference to the quality of your academic paper. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that precise writing skills can take the quality of your paper to the next level. Avoid general assumptions and claims; also make points that appeal to you. Most importantly, don't say something if you are not willing to support it with strong arguments and factual data.

Deshkar, S. (n.d.). *How to excel at academic writing—five tips for success*. Writers' Treasures. Retrieved from <http://www.writers treasure.com/how-to-excel-at-academic-writing/>

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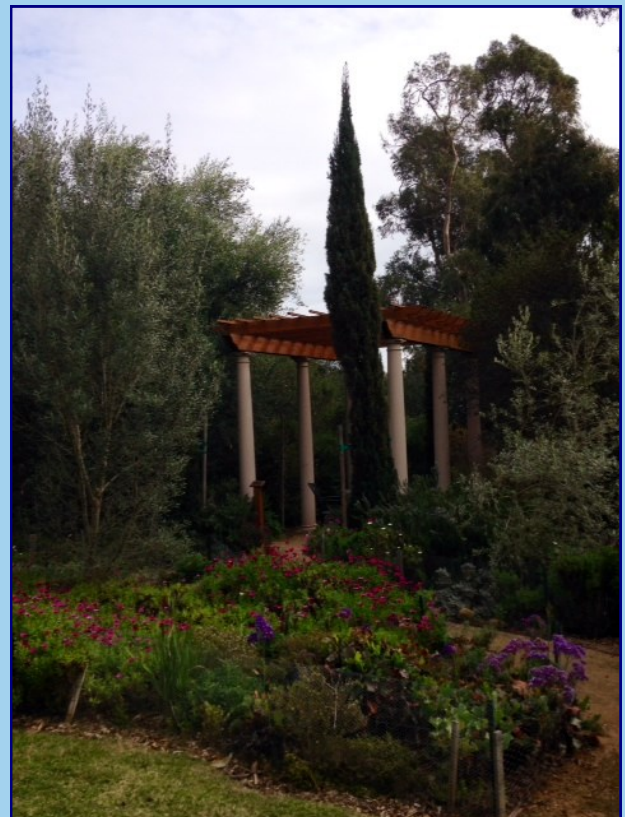
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