



How I Write by Leanne

Snacks = Success

- Keep a 3:1 water to coffee ratio so the only thing shaking uncontrollably is your brain waves
- Something from your childhood to keep you from aging from stress (i.e. Scooby Snacks)
- Fruit and veggies to make you feel like you're a healthy adult. Ramen, to remind you that you're not.

What to Avoid: Ice cream (because as it melts, you can feel time slowly ticking away), energy drinks (because your body will hate you later) and Imgur (because there are just too many cats in this world).

Tricking Yourself into Doing Work

As a competitive humanoid, I motivate myself by pretending I'm in a video game with a limited amount of lives and unlimited amounts of ammo.

Word Wars: Chances are if you're working on a paper, one of your friends is working on a paper. Challenge them to a word war – set a time limit and see how much you can both write in that time. If the competition doesn't get you moving, the soul-crushing guilt will. Reward yourself intermittently with Scooby Snacks (Essay: "I would have gotten away with it, if it hadn't been for you meddling kids!")

Study Dates: Pick a friend, any friend. Well, not any friend – preferably one who's more studious than you so they force you to level up your work ethic. Feed off each other's energy and use the presence of another person to hold back your stress-induced tears. Teamwork!

24-Hour Challenge (24 hours optional): My problem with essays and studying is that you can always do more (and I never want to). A weird thing that I've done since first year is set aside exactly 24 hours before an exam to study. Nothing more, nothing less. I find that the pressure drives me, and I use time more efficiently than if I leave myself 3 days. It usually ends up being 2.5 days of Netflix and 0.5 days of freaking out anyways. The important thing is to know yourself, and create a timeline that works for you – not just a generic Internet suggestion.

Getting Back on the Homework Horse

There are two types of essays – essays where you know exactly what you want to write about, and essays where you don't want to write at all. Unfortunately, I usually wind up with the latter. I combat this procrastination monster by utilizing what I call “The Young Jean Lee” method. Young Jean Lee is this amazing playwright who begins her writing process by thinking of things she would never want to write about in a million years – and writing about them. This is why her credentials include plays such as *Straight White Men*, *Untitled Feminist Show*, and *We're Gonna Die*. This is how I ripped off her philosophy:

1. Do research (yes, research): You can't expect to write a great essay without having a thorough understanding of your topic. I also go all super sleuth and use the bibliographies of the sources that I like to find additional sources that I like. Source-ception.
2. It's okay to disagree: When you find something (a quotation, theory, study) that you absolutely hate, be grateful! That's a fantastic starting point for your essay. If you don't know what you want to write about, at least you know what you don't want to write about.

Follow through: When you come across arguments and ideas that contradict your thesis, don't be mad, bro. Really great academic discourse comes from contrasting ideas, and if you only ever watched stuff on TV that agreed with your worldview, you'd be pretty limited in your scope. Take it as a blessing and don't be afraid to fuel your paper with conflict.

The Sorting Hat

This is the hardest part for me. I'm a pretty relaxed writer, but I find that it helps when my ideas are sorted like high school – you know, every argument has a lunch table and the evidence sits accordingly. I'm the kind of person who types up all my quotes in a single document and colour-codes them to match my essay structure. Don't be intimidated – I'm also the kind of person who uses a waffle iron as a panini.

One of the most important things in academic writing is striking a balance between your own ideas and academic evidence. By pre-grouping this evidence in terms of your arguments, your job becomes a million times easier. Structure-wise, do not fall into the hamburger trap. Your thesis does not have to list three arguments. You don't have to squish it into an uncomfortable sentence. A good thesis promotes the natural flow of ideas and allows you to build upon your original arguments at every step. It's not a script. It's an adventure. Don't leave your reader in the same place that they started!

The Part with the Words

I don't want to tell you how to write. I want you to do it in a way that makes you comfortable, that makes it a treasure instead of a travesty. I write with horrible posture in my bed, for hours at a time. I often write chapters of my book in one sitting, and essays over the course of a day. You could try to give yourself more time than you need, but don't be hard on yourself if you can't. Just do your best to set yourself up to succeed. Otherwise:

Get a Second Opinion – This will make your paper stronger no matter what. If they point out stuff you hadn't noticed, bonus points for you. If they point out stuff you really don't agree with, then you have a clearer focus of what you are trying to articulate. If you bring it to the Writing Support, you are using a valuable resource and the writing gods will applaud you.

Remember Office Hours? Totally Still a Thing – Your professors want you to succeed. They hold office hours because they want to be accessible to you. But very few people actually use them, which is a shame because a) they're sitting there lonely, b) you could end up sharing common interests and becoming BFFs and getting a wicked reference (true story), and c) who better to help you with your paper than the person who assigned your paper? If you make an effort, good things happen. For Gryffindor!

Read It Out Loud – There is a weird impulse among students to thesaurus-bomb their papers. You are good enough. Simple, direct language is all you need. Read your paper out loud (even better, to an audience or your dog) so you can identify the parts that don't make sense or need improvement. You'll hear those run-on sentences, comma splices, and poor transitions louder than EDM at the bar. So loud.

Take it Easy

If you ever get anxious, don't stop writing. Take ten minutes and do some journaling – write out your fears and frustrations so they're not taking up room in your brain. This is a paper – only a paper. Don't let it have so much power over you. Go set your last paper on fire and come back (not your computer though; we need that for Netflix). Take a deep breath, hug your dog, and rock this paper's world.