

**Fish & Wildlife Service – National Conservation Training Center**  
**Critical Writing/Critical Thinking Follow-up Web Series**  
**Make an Appointment to Write**

Speakers: Michelle Baker (MB)

Karene Motivans (KM)

[audio start]

**KM:** Welcome to today's webinar for Critical Writing / Critical Thinking. Today, we have Michelle Baker with us. I think many of you remember her from the class. Her counterpoint in Region 6's class was Linda Tate.

We've got a great line up of monthly webinars here for the next several months. And Michelle is kicking it off with Make an Appointment to Write. Thanks Michelle.

**MB:** Thanks Karene. Hi. How's everybody doing today? Good. Good to everybody's happy voices from sunshiny locations.

Today's session is about time management, but to make it relevant to writing, it's also about task management. So we're going to talk quite a bit about the writing process, those six stages that we went through in class. Before we do that, we're going to look at some basic principles for time management.

The first rule in managing your time is that you can't change what you don't measure. So if time management is proving challenging, the very first step is to see how you're spending your time today. That's really a three-step process, and it begins with tracking your time.

One of the handouts that you have for today was an Excel spreadsheet that looks very much like your screen right now. It says Make an Appointment to Write. Measure to Change. So very simply for one week, keep track of what you do, during your work hours. One of the goals of today's session is to stop taking work at home and to stop working on the weekends, so I only want you to record how you're spending your time during the work week. This works best if you pause every hour or two hours and jot down what you've been doing for the last hour or two hours.

But that's really just the first step. You've measured where you are at that point. The next step is where it gets exciting. This is where you'll use the char to make a difference in your behavior patterns. On Friday afternoon, take 5 minutes to list what you accomplished during the week. These should be fairly high-level accomplishments, and so you should have 5 or less of these.

For example, you may have drafted 5 pages on a biological opinion. You may have created a website and you may have resolved an important matter with a colleague. Those would be three accomplishments that made during the week. So on Friday afternoon, list your accomplishments.

On Monday morning, leave the chart for the weekend. Come back to it when you're fresh. And on Monday morning, you're going to take this chart and code it. Now you can't see on this screen, but there is a grid pattern on the handout you received. So next to each time slot there's a little box. And in that box, you either want to put a checkmark, or an exclamation point, or leave it blank.

The checkmark is for those times when what you were doing felt good. Your energy level was high. Your concentration was strong. You liked what you did. You enjoyed it. That's what we call synergy. That's working in a synergistic way. It's also called being in the zone. Put a checkmark next to those times.

Then go back through and look at those accomplishments you listed on Friday. The activities that led to those accomplishments, put an exclamation point next to them. Because those were your most productive. So if you spent 90 minutes writing on your biological opinion, if you sent 2 email messages and had a conference call to resolve this matter with a colleague, those are activities that contributed to your productivity.

Hopefully what you'll find when you're done is the number of times when you were working with synergy and you were being productivity. So you're going to have a checkmark and an exclamation point next to the same activity. That is your power time.

You need to highlight those times of the day and those activities as the best times for you to work. And we'll talk later in today's session about what you should schedule during those times.

You may discover times when you have either a checkmark or an exclamation point, but not both. If that happens, take your productive activity, your exclamation point activity and move it to the time when you were feeling synergistic. So if you have a checkmark or an exclamation point, move the checkmark activity to the exclamation time, and that will make you more productive.

Where you have no checkmark and no exclamation point, you didn't feel like you were in the zone, and you didn't get anything accomplished, there are three things to do with that activity. Number one, consolidate it. And

I'm going to give you some tips for what you can consolidate and how. Number two, delegate it. Hand that task off to someone else who's better suited for it, who likes to do it, and get it off of your plate. Number three, eliminate it. Do you really have to do that activity? Maybe not.

Those three options are listed at the bottom of this spreadsheet. Everything I just said is here in the legend at the bottom of the Excel spreadsheet.

Now let's talk about consolidation. There are two tasks that most of us need to consolidate. They are email and telephone. My suggestion for email messaging is that you check your email and respond three times a day, not every time an email opens up on your program. My suggestion is 9 o'clock, 11 o'clock, and 3 o'clock. You'll notice that is not first thing in the morning and not last thing in the day.

If you check your email right when you get to work or right before you leave, you will spend most of your time, putting out fires, resolving other people's problems. Thomas Jefferson once said that he only answered his postal mail very 30 days, because if it went for 30 days without his attention, either it got resolved, or he still needed to pay attention to it. That's an excellent example for all of us. We have too many people putting their problems on our desks.

9 o'clock in the morning gives you plenty of time to resolve any problems that really need to be resolved that day. 11 o'clock allows you to plan your afternoon before you go to lunch, and 3 o'clock allows you to resolve anything that needs to be resolved before the end of the day.

You should also set up an autoresponder so that the people who email you know. *I will be checking my email messages at 9, 11, and 3. Thank you for your patience.*

The other activity that most of us need to consolidate is our phone calls. I would recommend that you not take incoming phone calls unless they're from a superior. If you're receiving phone calls, someone, maybe your voice mail, needs to take a message for you. And again, you can leave a message saying, I return telephone calls two times a day. You can expect to hear from me at 10 o'clock in the morning or 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

You should also try to schedule your conference calls during those low energy times. The spaces on your calendar when you're not being synergistic or productive.

Finally one suggestion about how to manage your time in general. That is, the low energy activities like web surfing or sorting email or filing—

things that don't require a lot of brain power—schedule those in 45 minute chunks. For high concentration activities, like researching or writing—schedule this in 90 minute chunks. That gives you more time to get into your concentration and you can spend less time doodling or twiddling around before you really get started.

Second rule of time management. Tasks expand or contract based on the time we allot for them. If you say, this memo has to be out tomorrow, it will not get out until tomorrow. If you say, this memo has to get out in an hour, it will get out in an hour. So when you're planning your schedule, keep this in mind, and keep a tight rein on activities that could take a long time.

To do this, we're going to distinguish between small projects and large projects. The example I'm going to show you is for an encyclopedia article that I recently wrote. It is a large project, not because it's long. It is a large project because it took 6 weeks to complete. It's only a 5-page document. That's fairly short. But the distinction between a small project and a large is not based on how long the project is, but how long it will take you to get it done.

Small projects are generally those that you can complete within 3-5 hours. Many of you in the Critical Writing / Critical Thinking class were asked in one of your skill checks to write a letter to USARK. That would be a small project. Let's say that you needed 3 hours to write that letter. You should schedule that in 45 minute segments over the course of 1 or 2 days.

So perhaps from 11 to 11:45, you very carefully read the letter that we got from USARK, the instructions that you got from your supervisor. You identify topics that you need to address, and you identify questions that you have for your supervisor. Then in the afternoon, use your topic outline to draft what you can, and call your supervisor to get answers for your questions. Then the next morning, spend 45 minutes revising based on the answers that you got.

That's an example for a small project of how you can chunk 45 minutes to tiny tasks and get the job done.

Larger projects are far more complicated. We're going to take a look at how to create a schedule for larger projects. Before we do this, I'm going to open up a poll so that you can answer for all of us, what are two large projects that you work on at least twice a year? So there's a poll now open. Identify two large projects on which you work at least twice a year.

**KM:** Alright, Michelle, I see that we've got about 1/3 of the folks done.

**MB:** Yeah, we sure do. And I've got a final countdown on my screen. So you've got a few seconds left if you want to hit your *send* button.

Alright. Now, I am seeing a variety of answers here. Let me just share a few of them with you. Some of you are working on critical habits rule and guidance documents. Some of you are working CCPs, is that Comprehensive Conservation Plans?

**KM:** You got it!

**MB:** Alright! I see some Biological Opinions, some Annual Reports. And Elvira, can you tell me what a renewal form is?

**EH:** Yes. Every now and then we have to revise it how we're going to request information.

**MB:** Oh, okay. Wow! You folks have a lot of very different kinds of documents that you're working on. Because of that, and because I'm working in a very different field, the example that I'm using is for an encyclopedia article that I wrote.

As we go through this example, think about some of the prep work to go through before you sit down to write the document. Because we're going to take a look at a lot of those brainstorming preparation activities.

What I'm showing you now is a to-do list that I created for this encyclopedia article. It was due on September 10<sup>th</sup>, and I started the project in the last week of July, so I gave myself 6 weeks to complete it. This is a fairly short list. It's kind of punchy and to the point. I'd like to point out that it took an hour and a half to create. So this is not just a brain dump where I sat down and said, what needs to be done? I had to actually do some research to create this list.

One of the activities that I had to do was to research all the available literature, and I found three books: *The Elephant Vanishes*; *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*; and *After the Quake*. I knew that I needed to do some internet researches, so I identified the specific databases I would be using. Those are Gale, MLA, and the others that you see there. I also knew that I would have to poke around online a little bit, but I didn't want to spend a lot of time doing that. So I only allotted 2 hours for that activity. Finally, I requested a biography of the author.

Now the first three books, in order to calculate the amount of time it will take me to research those, there's a very simple formula to determine just how many pages do you read per hour? I happen to read about 60 pages per hour. Some people read 120. some people read 30. So how many

you read per hour, and how many pages the book is, then you can identify how long it will take you to read. You should be applying this to maybe the research that you have to conduct on a species or a habitat.

The online information, the databases that I have to review, and the online materials, I'm only going to spend two hours on that. I'm restricting the amount of time there, because that's an activity that could waste hours and hours. The biography was about 600 pages, but I couldn't afford to spend 10 hours reading it. So I determined that I could afford 2 hours, and I would skim it and take notes.

Those first two paragraphs, if you will, or blocks here, took about an hour and a half of research to figure out how long each of these activities would take. The other activities I know from previous experience. I can compile an outline in a hour. It takes me about 8 hours to draft a 2500 word essay. And I need two days of rest before I look at the document to edit it.

This is a sample of a to-do list that you want to make for a large project. Any one of the projects that you just identified, like a CCP or a biological opinion. So the next question that I'm going to ask you is, take one of those projects that you just named and list three you have to do, or that someone else has to do, before the document can be written.

So we're opening another poll. Select one of your projects, and name three distinct steps that have to be completed before the document can be written.

And I see that most of you have already begun to answer the question. We'll give you about another minute to give us those details.

**MB:** Elvira, I see that you said active permittees have to be identified. Is that kind of a lengthy process?

**EH:** It is. Because we're backlogged. And then you have to identify what kind of permit.

**MB:** So it's a lot of information collecting and coding?

**EH:** Right. And then what applies to that permit. I meant to put a lot more, but for some reason it just.

**MB:** Oh, I'm sorry. Jennifer, I see for you, you said that you need to look at previous years' accomplishments. Is that information available in a single report, or does it have to be gathered from a lot different sources?

**KM:** And Michelle, you might be on mute, because we don't hear a response.

**MB:** Another one of Jennifer's steps was to develop goals for the new year. If that's something you can do by yourself, that's a brainstorming activity. If that's something you need to do with a group, then you need to have conference calls or meetings scheduled.

One suggestion I have for you is we're about to put these materials into an actual schedule. When you do that, it may be helpful for you to put notes on the schedule about who is involved in that step. If it's just you, fine. But maybe you need a field report from a field biologist. So you would put that person's name next to that task. On a large project, particularly one that has lots of layers of review, it can be really helpful to set up a spreadsheet identifying the tasks that you just submitted and who is responsible for those tasks.

Sometimes people working in the field don't understand how much is dependent on their little piece of the project. If they see that whole spreadsheet, they're more likely to get their work in one time.

So now I'm going to share with you the actual schedule.

**KM:** so your screens are flickering right now and you're going to be waiting to see an Excel schedule. Everyone see that?

[yes]

**MB:** You'll see that in week one, I personally have very low energy after lunch. That's a bad time for me. Reading is an activity that's low energy. And I can do that from 1 to 3 in the afternoon. My morning hours are very, my mental concentration is good. So I'm going to write notes on what I read on Wednesday morning. On my to-do list, I had one activity, which was "read *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*." But for me, reading includes reading the book and summarizing what I read.

So this *write notes* is actually part of the 5 ½ hours that I'm devoting to *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*. That afternoon, I read the next book, I write the notes the next morning. And then, my little treat for the week. On Friday afternoon, from 3:30 to 5, so an hour and a half before my week is done, I am dead beat. That is exhausted time. So I'm going to surf the internet. For an hour and a half, I'm going to look at all of these different databases. Gale, JSTOR, Project Muse. These are kind of like AGRICOLA, or the Federal Register. They are specialized databases that I use when I conduct researches.

What's nice about this schedule is number one, I get kind of a treat on Friday afternoon. It feels like I'm playing, and it's information that I like to

find. But second, I want to leave at 5 o'clock. So I'm not going to stick around and surf the internet for longer than the amount of time I scheduled. So that's why I scheduled it in this way.

The next week is very similar. I read in the afternoon. I write in the morning. And I do one last internet search for half an hour on Friday.

The next week, Monday morning, right before lunch, I'm going to sit down with a cup of coffee, review all of my notes, outline my document. And then for the next four days, I'm going to spend 2 hours every morning writing. That still gives me about 2 weeks, 2 ½ weeks of lee-way. So if something drastic happens in the month of August and my schedule is totally thrown off, I can bump these things back by a day or two, and still get my project in on time.

One other thing that I'd like to point out. Normally, high concentration activities, you want to schedule those in 90 minute chunks. But you'll see that I've got writing down for 2 hours a day. That's because the morning is a really solid time for me, and I can go for 2 or 3 hours and really concentrate on what I'm doing. The result of that is that in the afternoon, I can't do that again. So if I have something that requires a lot of concentration to do on Wednesday afternoon, I might only write for an hour and save some of that energy, because I know I'm going to need it.

That is an overview of how to set up a to-do list and make it into a schedule for a large project. Before we move on to talk about the stages in the writing process, do you have any questions or comments, any feedback that you'd like to share about those high level projects, those complicated documents?

**Tom:** When you block out your time for writing, I see how you could control your email and your phone, but how do you control your time so you're not interrupted from people just stopping by? If you have a doorway, just put a sign up?

**MB:** Country Treasures, which is a great store that we have in the mall around here, has a bunch of adorable little signs that politely say, Buzz Off. Just close your office door, and if you have a little chalkboard or something, just put a little memo or something that says, *I'm writing. We can talk at 11.*

Once you do it a couple of times, your office mates really get into that routine, and they say, Tom's writing right now. And that's how I would handle it. Does anyone else have a suggestion for Tom?

**KM:** Michelle, I think that's a great idea. I know that it's hard for me when I have a chunk set aside to reengage in that chunk of time if I am interrupted. It's like it's a whole wind up process that I have to go back to get into.

**Heidi:** I have office hours posted on my door. You have to stick with it. I've gotten out of it myself, and it really made a huge difference when I did that. I ended up scheduling 4 hours a day with times in between for people to come schedule meetings and stuff.

**MB:** Just on a personal note, I work from home, but I do have an office with a door, and my husband knows when the door is closed, he can send me an email, and I might answer. But I'm working, and that's my time.

Heidi, was there something you wanted to say about the steps in your large document process?

**Heidi:** I had a problem getting it up, but I have my list here. I'm cool.

**MB:** And did I hear someone else who wanted to contribute?

Alright, well let's talk about the writing process. You may recall that there are 6 steps in the writing process. Brainstorming is the first of those. Then we have arranging, selecting, crafting, revising, and editing. The best advice that I have for you is this. At every stage of the writing process, write.

It seems so simple to me, and so self-evident. And the reason that I have these pictures of all of these artists is this. I don't know of any painter who approaches a canvass without their palette of colors already mixed and ready to apply. And yet so many of us open up a Word document and think that we're going to just type out a document. I never sit down to write anything without pages of writing already in front of me that I've done from brainstorming. That's where my language comes from.

It doesn't come from thin air. It doesn't come out of my brain. It came out of the brainstorming work that I did earlier.

So let's look at some ways to do this, particularly in brainstorming. Some of you may have gone through an English class in high school or college in which you had to use note cards to create a research project. That is a really old-fashioned way of working, but it's extremely effective, for two reasons. On a little 3x5 or 4x6 note card, you can only fit one piece of information. So the note cards force you to separate things like evidence and argument. And that ensures that you're always analyzing your evidence.

The second reason note cards work really well is because they're flexible. You can spread them out on a conference table and rearrange your work without having to redo everything. The drawback to note cards is that no one wants to hand write all of those index cards.

One solution is called Writers' Blocks. I'm going to show you if I can the website. Writers' Blocks is a software program. It is not free, but they do have a free trial available on their website, which is at [www.WritersBlocks.com](http://www.WritersBlocks.com). It works the same way that the old-fashioned note cards did, except it's all on your computer screen. You can drag and drop the note cards. You can color code them. You can keep them in different file folders. And you can stack them one on top of the other.

This picture right here gives you a good idea of how they look on your screen. This is a screen capture from the program. So it really is like you have those old-fashioned index cards and you're just moving them around your computer. The greatest advantage is that you don't have to do all the handwriting that note cards require.

I'm going to return us to our Power Point. The second thing that we should all be doing during brainstorming is to maintain all of your information in folders and files. If you're writing a Biological Opinion for the Shenandoah Salamander, one of the first things you should do is create a folder on your computer for the Shenandoah Salamander.

Within that folder, create files for each section in your template. Most of those large documents have pre-ordained segments, and you know those from the past. So you should have a file for species' identification, another for history of the species, another for future of the species, and keep all of your research, conversations with other biologists, email messages, PDF documents, in those separate folders.

If all of the information can be kept in Word, use one single file. If you have multiple kinds of documents, like PDFs, Excel spreadsheets, and pictures, use a folder instead.

The third suggestion is maintain what we call a Working Bibliography. This is something you can cross-reference with your other materials, so you have one Word document with all of your Literature Referenced, and then in another file you give the last name of the author, or the title of the document. So you're cross referencing to your Working Bibliography, and then take all the notes you need from that bit of research.

Let me show you an example of how to do this. The comments on this Working Bibliography is practically impossible to see on your screen, but

you were emailed these documents, so you should have them available. And if you don't, please send an email to Karene. She'll be happy to get these out to you. What I'd like you to see is that on the Working Bibliography, there is full bibliographic information provided. Underneath of that, there is a brief summary of the source, which stresses the unique points that it made. Also to distinguish is my evaluation of the source. These are comments, reactions, evaluations that I had while I was reading.

Under the next source, while I still have full bibliographic information, I wrote a note to myself, which said "detailed notes incorporated into analysis." So I know that I did read that book, I did take notes on it, and they're in another section of the file.

I'd like to look now at the top page of these working notes. This is page one. As I research to brainstorm, I summarize all the material that I review. So this is a summary of a story that I read. Underneath of it, you'll see in italics, there are notes from someone else who read the story and wrote about it. Underneath of that is my evaluation. As you brainstorm, for each piece of information that you gather, for each bit of evidence that you put into your file folder, analyze it. Always add your own evaluation of the information.

No matter what you put down on the page, no matter where you got the information, write one quick sentence about how is this relevant, where will I use this information, do I agree with it or disagree with it? Those are important questions, and you'll have to answer them sooner or later, so you might as well get them out of the way while you're doing your brainstorming.

As far as scheduling your brainstorming, you need to consider whether it is a low energy, or a playful activity for you. Sometimes my brainstorming can be either one. If I have to read a lot of philosophy, it's a low energy, boring kind of process. If I have to think of all topics I'd like to address, it's fun. Schedule your brainstorming based on, is it a low energy activity that you want to schedule for 45 minutes, or is it a fun, play time activity that you want to do in those synergistic times?

The next three stages in the writing process, I've grouped together in this way. Arranging, selecting, and crafting. Arranging should only be done when all of your preliminary evidence has been gathered. You've done all your issue identification and you have all the information you need in order to start writing. Some of you are laughing right now, but there does come a stage in the process when you get all the information together.

If that doesn't happen for you, then start doing the arranging when you have most of the information together. Review those notes and come up with your topic outline. You need to do this kind of arrangement in a very high concentration time. Schedule it for 90 minutes and devote yourself to concentrating on it.

Now the reason I have a plus sign next to the arranging is because you're selecting ideas at this point to add to your outline. If you do this well, then by the time you start crafting your document, you shouldn't have to add anything new. I'll talk about what happens if you do have to add something new. But first, after you come up with your good topic outline, your crafting should also be done during very high concentration periods. Your crafting should be done one paragraph at a time.

If this topic that you're working on is more than one paragraph, make a small miniature outline that covers that whole topic so you can work on one paragraph at a time. Use the paragraphing module to check your paragraph as you go for a topic sentence, unity, coherence, and development.

If as you're writing, you suddenly discover a whole area of untapped information that you have to start back at square one, here's what you do. Do a quick issue identification. What do you need to know? Number two, schedule a brainstorming session for later. And number three, move on. If you spend that good high energy, high concentration crafting time on brainstorming, not only did you waste that time, but you probably set yourself back, because the next time you sit down to write, you're going to be in a brainstorming mode instead of a crafting mode.

So do a quick issue identification, schedule a brainstorming session for later in the day or the week, and then move on.

In the course itself, we covered the process of revising fairly extensively. And because that process involves layers of material, your surnames, and your colleagues, I'm not going to talk about it in any detail today. What I am going to talk about today is editing. It is very difficult to estimate the amount of time it takes to edit a project for these reasons. Number one, the levels of review. A substantive edit takes more time obviously than a copy edit. And it takes a different kind of time. I can do copy edits during very low energy times of the day, but I have to do substantive edits at very high concentration times.

Also there is a difference, and it is huge, between page counts and word counts when you're trying to estimate how long it will take you to edit a document. And finally, if you have tables, figures, or literature cited, those are separate edits that have to be calculated differently. I have found two

resources that are incredibly helpful for determining the amount of time you need to conduct an effective edit.

The first of these is an article that was published in a journal called *Lines and Letters*. It's called "Estimating Editorial Tasks: A Five-Step Method." The first steps are ideas that we just went through. It's the third step that you'll find really helpful. It's a formula for estimating what these folks call *draft equivalent pages*. So if you have a huge document like your CCP, if you pictures and tables, then the number of words per page is going to vary incredibly. This formula helps you determine how many *draft equivalent pages* you're working with.

Step four helps you establish a productivity rate for each function on your master task list. Those functions are like the substantive edits. So one function might be review the conclusion for its soundness. Another function might be recalculate all the tables to make sure the numbers are correct. So those are the separate functions that you have. These are covered in more detail in the review and editing section of our module. If you go back to the course notebook where it talks about setting up a review plan, that's where you'll find the functions you can calculate. And then the last step here is to put it into a spreadsheet so you can estimate the amount of time it will take for you or anyone else involved in the project to conduct a successful edit.

Another resource I found that I thought was very good was benchmarks for estimating editing speeds by David McClintock. He provides a graph in terms of words per hour. So instead of draft equivalent pages, he goes by words per hour. His heavy edit is the equivalent of our substantive edit. His medium edit is the equivalent of our copy edit, and his light edit is what a surnamer might do before they sign their name to the document. He gives you the words per hour here so you can calculate the total number of words in the document, what kind of an edit are you doing and then how long will it take you to get it done. It's a slightly less precise system than the one that I just showed you, but it's also less complicated, and so it might be more helpful.

What I would suggest is that you divide your document into three parts. The first part is the prose section, the language of the document. Calculate your time for those using either the draft equivalent pages or the words per hour, like you see here. The second part of your document are the figures and tables. They require a different kind of edit. They usually have footnote, they're labeled in the text, and they have to be cross-referenced. You need to measure how much time does that take you to edit so that you can start estimating that on a forward-going basis. And then the third is literature reference. Checking a bibliography and cross-referencing it against a large document is a different kind of editing. And

again, calculate the time it takes you to do that, and then use that estimate on a forward-going basis.

So those resources are listed right here on the last page of your PowerPoint presentation. And the best advice that I have for you comes from my contracting, construction family. And it's this. It's always better to build fresh than it is to remodel. Spend the time while you're brainstorming actually writing as much as you possibly can and then when you craft your document, work very carefully paragraph by paragraph. You will save tons of time on the back end by doing it that way.

Any questions or comments before we wrap up today?

**HC:** Do you have any suggestions for some online stuff for outlining? I have a couple of staff that have difficulties preparing outlines, and I would like to point them in some good directions.

**MB:** Karene, you're really the one to answer that question. You've got a ton of good material in that pre-writing section.

**KM:** Heidi, I move away from outlines, cause I myself am a little messier of a person, and I can't line up those Roman numerals and work that way. I have a couple of templates. I'll email the whole group on the webinar some templates that we use. It's a paragraph by paragraph blocking. And then during selection, you can reorganize these.

I also think it's really great for some people who are a little more visual to use whiteboards and post-it notes. Anything that can be rearranged and moved with your hands. More visual, to connect things with their hands and block things out rather than on the Word document and trying to type things out. Does that make sense?

**HC:** That definitely helps. We have to outline for our senior management here. So any ideas you have for helping them to get to that stage, like the post-it notes That will help. I just want to give them some other suggestions.

**TS:** It sounds like the Writers' Block program might have some similar characteristics.

**HC:** I like that.

**KM:** I want to check into that myself.

**MB:** Heidi, I started doing all of my outlines on a completely blank sheet of paper with no lines. And I lay it out sideways in landscape instead of profile. And I review my brainstorming notes, and I just write down the

topics that I want to address. And I just see the connections between the topics as I write them out.

**HC:** Yeah, that's a good idea too. That's what I've been trying to tell my staff. A lot of the documents are rules, a couple hundred pages long. I'm hoping they can use that outline as a living document to have sitting on the side and using that as they're creating the master document.

**KM:** do you see that people that it's harder to start with some of that boiler plate language and getting that in there first and filling in around the edges? Do you think that causes any kind of writer's block?

**HC:** I don't think so, not based on the discussions I've had so far. I think it's some people have never used outlines and have just started writing. I've talked about 3-4 different staff of mine have been that way. Never used outlines. Now they're concerned because we have to use them now for senior management request. So it's just rethinking the way they prepare themselves, and I just want to give them ideas for getting themselves set up.

**KM:** I'll think about that and give this whole group a couple more hints on that in case that's a common request in other offices for these outlines. Great. Are there other questions?

**Carrie:** Hi, this is Carrie. I have a question about the 45 and 90 minute blocking for your long and short projects. I see on that one short where you showed us, writing all morning. So I guess I'm not sure what you mean by putting it in 90 minute chunks, and then what, you take a break and come back? Or you swap back and forth between 90 and 45 minute chunks? I'm not clear about that.

**MB:** Okay. The 45 minute chunks are when I'm doing low energy activities. Like the reading in the afternoon. What I do on a pretty practical basis is I sit down and read from 1 until 1:45, and then from 1:45 to 2:00, I get up and do something else. And for that 15 minutes, and I alternate those between rewards and nagging tasks. So for my first 15 minute break, I might get caught up on my filing, which I hate to do. But I've been sitting, and that gets me standing up and moving, so that's kind of like a break. But then for my second 15 minute break, I go get a cup of coffee and just chit chat with someone.

So on my schedule, you see that I have blocked out 2 or 3 hours, but in practicality, I'm working 45 minutes, taking a 15 minute break. And sometimes those 15 minute breaks are working breaks like when I'm filing, and sometimes they're break-breaks.

**Carrie:** That makes sense. What about like the 90 minute, then. You still have half an hour?

**MB:** It depends. And that was what I was saying. For me, if I get started writing early in the morning, I really can go for 2 or 3 hours without a break at all. If I do that, I can't do anything else high concentration for the rest of the day. So if I have a bunch of low concentration activities in the rest of the afternoon, I'll go ahead and write for that whole 2 or 3 hours. But if I have to lead a webinar, for example, then I can only do 90 minutes. So I might have it blocked off for 2 hours, but in reality, I only work for 90 minutes.

**MB:** Okay. That makes sense. Thank you.

**KM:** Michelle, thank you so much. I think this is inspiring a few of us to go ahead and start blocking out our time. It's an important thing to do to write effectively. Thank you very much.

**[audio end]**