

Five Steps to Realistic Balance

While it's great to know that balance is possible, what can you do TODAY to start better managing your heavy workload and make sure your core needs are getting met?

1. Sharpen Your Focus

The more you have going on in your life off-campus, the sharper your focus must be during the time you spend on-campus. If you have limited time each day, make sure a significant amount of that time is spent on activities (such as research and writing) that contribute to your long-term success as a scholar. Likewise, if you find yourself working long hours and having little time for anything else, make sure that the things that are important to your relationships and your health receive attention.

2. Stop Thinking You Are Selfish

I often hear tenure-track faculty (especially women) describe the act of setting aside time for writing every day as "selfish." These same people describe long days of putting everyone else's needs first and "hoping" they will have the time and energy to write at the end of the day. If you're in a similar situation, release yourself from the idea that taking care of your own needs (not to mention making time to tend to the primary criteria in your promotion and/or tenure decision) is "selfish." It is not selfish to prioritize your writing. In fact, it's your job.

3. Identify ONE Problem Area That You Need to Resolve in Order to Be More Productive

This week, try to identify the primary problem standing in the way of your productivity. If there are lots of them, then pick the biggest one. If you need some help identifying your problem, take a look back at the list entitled "What's Holding You Back?" If you still can't figure it out, try talking with one of your mentors and/or check in with others in the NCFDD Discussion Forum.

4. Take One Small Step Forward to Make a Change

Whatever problem you identify, come up with one concrete step forward you can take to resolve it this week. It doesn't matter how small that step is; just figure it out, and commit to it. Maybe this is the week you are going to start writing every day for at least 30 minutes, saying "no" to any additional service requests for a month, developing a rubric instead of giving in-depth written comments, delegating non-essential tasks to someone else, and/or hiring someone to do your taxes, clean your house, or shovel your snow. Making just one concrete change will create positive momentum, help you to begin surfacing the deeper problems, and motivate you to take another step forward next week.

5. Be Gentle, Loving, and Patient with Yourself

Learning to manage your workload and maximize your productivity takes time. Several years ago, I decided I was going to start running for exercise and stress reduction. At first, all I could do was walk around the track while other people flew by me. I told myself, "Don't compare yourself. You're just getting started, and you're doing the best you can for

right now." After two weeks of walking the track, I was power-walking so fast that I passed several slow joggers, and it occurred to me: "I can do that!" Each week I jogged one lap further than the previous week, and before I knew it, I could run three miles, three days a week.

I could tell the exact same story about learning to work efficiently. When I finally understood that I could no longer physically work 80 hours a week, I started to make the changes that my mentors suggested. Once again, I told myself, "Don't compare yourself. You're just getting started, and you're doing the best you can for right now." I took small steps forward, one week at a time, and pretty soon I was writing every morning, completing drafts, publishing my research, and feeling confident. I wasn't perfectly balanced, but I was confident that I could publish and flourish without sacrificing my health, relationships, and sanity. And that was a good start.

The Weekly Challenge

This week, I challenge each of you to:

- Acknowledge that there will always be more work to do than time to do it.
- Release yourself from whatever negative self-judgments and criticism are keeping you from aligning your time with your priorities.
- If you're unhappy with your productivity, gently ask yourself, *what's holding me back?*
- Identify one CONCRETE step forward, and commit to executing that change this week.
- If you need support in making writing a daily priority, consider joining one of the *Writing Challenges* in the NCFDD Discussion Forum.
- If you haven't created a *Strategic Plan* for the term yet, it's not too late!
- If you want to learn the skill of *aligning your time and priorities* each week, sign up for our next core curriculum webinar today.

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