



The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations & Books

Eviatar Zerubavel

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations & Books

Eviatar Zerubavel

The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations & Books Eviatar Zerubavel
For anyone who has blanched at the uphill prospect of finishing a long piece of writing, this book holds out something more practical than hope: it offers a plan. *The Clockwork Muse* is designed to help prospective authors develop a workable timetable for completing long and often formidable projects.

The idea of dashing off a manuscript in a fit of manic inspiration may be romantic, but it is not particularly practical. Instead, Eviatar Zerubavel, a prolific and successful author, describes how to set up a writing schedule and regular work habits that will take most of the anxiety and procrastination out of long-term writing, and even make it enjoyable. The dreaded "writer's block" often turns out to be simply a need for a better grasp of the temporal organization of work.

The Clockwork Muse rethinks the writing process in terms of time and organization. It offers writers a simple yet comprehensive framework that considers such variables as when to write, for how long, and how often, while keeping a sense of momentum throughout the entire project. It shows how to set priorities, balance ideals against constraints, and find the ideal time to write. For all those whose writing has languished, waiting for the "right moment," *The Clockwork Muse* announces that the moment has arrived.

The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations & Books Details

Date : Published March 15th 1999 by Harvard University Press
ISBN : 9780674135864
Author : Eviatar Zerubavel
Format : Paperback 128 pages
Genre : Language, Writing, Nonfiction, Self Help, Productivity, Academic

 [Download The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations & Books Eviatar Zerubavel

From Reader Review The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations & Books for online ebook

Anne Libera says

Some useful information for how to plan for writing a longer piece of academic writing - some of the information feels a little outdated but it gave me some good tips for planning my next project.

Danielle Price says

A useful book on planning out your writing that you can read in little more than an hour. I think his strategies are worth trying. I have a short project to do, so I'll start there (the book is really about working on long projects, but the same principles would apply).

Suzanne Tanner says

Once again, read this as a homework assignment, but it was interesting and engaging enough that I'd thought I'd throw it up here. Zerubavel offers very practical, thorough advice on how to get a long piece of writing done, like a dissertation or a book. While I imagine his obsession with schedules and timetables is far more useful for academics working with more structured writing, there is possibly good advice for anyone wanting to write any genre here. I'll probably revisit this book before beginning my dissertation.

Alec Greenberg says

Clearly intended for academia, which is no longer relevant in my pursuits. A waste of time unless you're a college student.

Mya says

While I don't think of myself as an aspiring author at this point in my life, I am faced with the dreadful task of writing my master's thesis and I thought, sure why not, I will read a manual, it might help. Even though thinking about writing gives me instant anxiety and thoughts of how nice it would be if I could sleep forever and never face the act of writing ever again.

But yeah anyway, I am sure this little book could be helpful to somebody who has never written a structured longer piece of anything, however I did have a class called "Academic Writing" where they taught us most of what the author suggests. So the following steps are important 1) make a schedule 2) divide what you have to write into units/chapters 3) set a timeline/deadlines 4) when you're not feeling inspired, revise what is written or work on your bibliography 5) make a couple of drafts (the author's preferred number is 4) 6) ask for feedback somewhere between the beginning when you're still not so attached to what you have written but also when you have plenty of room to add and change 7) have lots of notepads everywhere so you can jot down ideas instantaneously.

There is a quote in here I actually like, something apparently John Steinbeck said: "Write freely and as rapidly as possible and throw the whole thing on paper. Never correct or rewrite until the whole thing is down. Rewrite in the process is usually found to be an excuse for not going on."

And I also agree when the author says: "Working on any given project for too long can generate serious problems. Aside from the philosophical question of whether, as Anthony Burgess put it, "the writer can be the same person...over a long stretch of time," there is also the psychological problem that what may have once been a source of great pleasure and excitement can become a source of boredom and frustration, and writers who have been working on the same manuscript for too long often reach a point when they actually come to hate it."

Basically I completely agree with this statement because I hate my thesis topic to the core now and it has ruined many aspirations I had for the future :'(.

So yeah I'm sure there are some more but I don't think I need to get that much into detail here. It's a short book so anyone doing work on a longer, freelancy type thing (be it creative or not) could certainly benefit from it. I think the advice can be pretty useful even for painters and the like because a lot of the suggestions can adapted to other forms of creative expression.

I cannot give this book a higher rating however since it is a manual in my opinion, and I already knew plenty of things the author mentions but I'm sure someone who is new to this would find it much more helpful.

J.L. Silvermist says

I highly recommend this book for anyone bookshelf really. This book was spoke to me not at me and the author left the decision on what to do in the reader's hands. The suggestions he made to his reader were made so gently that it made it that much easier for me to take them but he also backed up those advice with examples and his own experiences. I am still rereading some sections, it's that good of a read.

Claire Bonello says

The best thing about this book is that this guy is teaching you how to create the best situations in which to write really well, and his book is actually GORGEOUSLY written. So I'm going to be taking his advice, for sure, yeah.

Elizabeth says

As a graduate student who has just started work on a dissertation, I have become very interested in strategies for efficient writing. I don't want to be ABD forever!

Zerubavel's book has some excellent advice in it, although he admits in the introduction that not all of it will work for everyone (however, he does also imply that this might be due to personal failings among more schedule-averse readers). Overall, the idea of setting aside specific blocks of time for uninterrupted writing makes perfect sense. Zerubavel's suggestions for choosing reasonable blocks of time, both in terms of length and in terms of placement within an already packed schedule, are also very practical. I will be taking his advice on these issues.

However, Zerubavel's suggestions suffer from the fact that, aside from a few quotations from famous novelists like John Steinbeck, his plan is entirely based on his own experiences and preferences. Among the examples he provides are outlines of his own books, which are not clear to begin with and which are made more so by the fact that I am unfamiliar with his academic work. His description of the revision process is also unclear and probably could have used a separate section all its own. On the one hand, Zerubavel suggests that you produce an entire first draft, including all chapters, as quickly as possible. On the other, he also includes sections about sentence-by-sentence and paragraph-by-paragraph revision without specifying where that kind of work should fit into a timetable that is designed for productivity, not for getting caught up in painstaking revisions too quickly.

Christiana says

Overall, I think it is good for new writers to read this. Even tho I'm 40 and working on my dissertation, employed as a curriculum developer (think writing), I found the book helpful to think about this very different kind of writing. There are fabulous examples of project plans, or what you should be planning for your project.

Some quotes that struck me as I read.

p. 48 "In reality, writing is virtually inseparable from the process of developing our idea." Too many people I know think you sit down with the idea. I think it comes out as you sit and type.

p. 73 "If you are facing an inflexible external deadline, set a slightly earlier one to avoid unnecessary pressure later, as you begin to approach it." Seriously, who doesn't need a reminder to NOT wait until last minute.

My blog post about it: <http://cupofgoodintentions.blogspot.c...>

Elizabeth says

With amazing reliability, I find that the most useful advice sounds (at least in retrospect) obvious. In the case of Eviatar Zerubavel's *The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books* this advice can be succinctly summarized: to become an author, you must complete a manuscript. On paper, this looks painfully obvious. However, as a tenured sociology professor and author of ten, single-authored books, Zerubavel knows why it must be stated; over the course of his academic career, he's maintained a steady commitment to writing by making strict completion deadlines paramount. Moreover, he's watched countless colleagues and students fail at the same, evidence that, "in writing as in other professional activities, accomplishment has to do with more than just ability" (10). Thus, with completion in mind, Zerubavel guides his readers through the steps he takes to turn his ideas into books.

As a scholar who's written extensively on the standardization of time, Zerubavel explains how romantic notions of writing as a fundamentally spontaneous practice are social constructs that impede the regular writing process large projects demand. In contrast, Zerubavel positions his advice as procedural rather than psychological in nature. He begins by detailing how writing sessions should be scheduled, and that writers

should work hard to deduce the ideal length of a given session (neither too short to be at all productive nor too long to hit a point of diminishing returns). Next, Zerubavel counsels breaking a large project down into chapters and sections, noting that even a rough outline at early stages is better than no outline at all. From here, he offers advice based on how writers should integrate their segmented writing plan with their scheduled writing sessions. For him, page numbers are the easiest unit to work with when setting deadlines (I find word count equally useful), and he usefully cautions writers to keep in mind that not all pages are created equal. Rather, certain drafts or sections of a chapter will likely take longer than others, and deadlines should be allocated accordingly.

Of course, in scheduling his own writing, Zerubavel has the benefit of years of practice, and some of his advice may have to be implemented on a trial and error basis for more novice writers. However, in my own experience with completing a dissertation and working with dozens of graduate students doing the same, I have found that keeping track of writing progress over just a few weeks enables writers to get a sense of what they can accomplish during writing sessions of various durations. Moreover, I strongly heed Zerubavel's counsel (and practice) of both overestimating the amount of work you have to do (e.g., setting the number pages in a section a couple higher than you actually anticipate the completed section will be) and underestimating your ability to do the work (e.g., setting the number of pages you will write in a given day slightly lower than you believe you can).

Divided into five chapters, *The Clockwork Muse* provides succinct, actionable advice. And while the details that Zerubavel provides about how he schedules his own deadlines may not work for everyone, the gist of his advice should resonate for anyone who struggles to complete or even fathom large-scale writing projects. More centrally, this brief manuscript took me just over an hour to read, making it the perfect advice book for the struggling academic writer who (if anything like me) is prone to put off writing in favor of reading. Providing only the briefest interlude away from writing, *The Clockwork Muse* will also motivate you to return to your writing with regularity and clarity.

Tobias says

Lots of helpful advice, although not all of it is entirely practical.

Terri Lynn says

This book is wonderful. I used it in writing a thesis. I read it some time ago but never wrote a review for it. The author begins by explaining that he is not going to teach the reader to write but how to set up a writing schedule and organize a large project like a master's thesis, doctoral dissertation, or even a book. He is an experienced writer and academic who has written all 3 so he knows what challenges we face in writing large projects.

He first offers help in setting a schedule for writing. All of us have things we have to do regularly such as work, committee meetings, volunteer activities, eat, sleep, commute, exercise, spend time with our spouse/kids/friends, etc. The author has us block out those times when we are absolutely not available for writing and that way we are more able to see when it is realistic to schedule our writing. Yes, we are to schedule our writing sessions just like appointments or a class or job so that it can be written down and adhered to. He reminds us that there will, of course, be unexpected events that crop up- accidents, sickness, a business trip, etc- we might have to work around.

Next, the author asks readers to consider when they work best. Some people work best in the morning while others prefer afternoons, evenings, or even late night. Some writers might have to write after work or when the kids go to bed. Some of us are night owls who just can't function let alone write in the mornings. He urges us to examine the time we feel freshest and most alert and when we can have the fewest distractions. This is very practical advice because many people don't consider their body rhythms, family life, activities, etc and just decide to sit down and write when they can. Too often "when it's convenient" or "when I can" never arrives and the deadline arrives and the thesis or dissertation is not completed or else the deadline looms ahead and the student panics and rushes off some sloppy work.

While planning the best times to write and scheduling it into your week is important, there is the matter of how many hours a day you will write. If you are doing a master's thesis, you may need to write 100 pages or more as I did for it to be accepted and a dissertation may require a 300 page book. This is vastly different than if you are choosing to write a nonfiction or novel because you want to and can set your own deadline. If you are in a master's thesis course or dissertation course, you will have a firm set deadline. I had 6 months for it to be researched, written, rewritten and edited, and finished. In an academic program, you will also have readers. I had to send each part and each chapter to 3 professors who made up my academic committee and get everyone's approval of it all. It then had to be approved by the dean of the college of Liberal Arts and Sciences. This means writing anywhere from 4-6 hours a day. The author explains how to select the right number of hours for your project. My only complaint is that he seemed to think that master's and doctoral students can take years to write a thesis or dissertation and this is not really true.

Finally- and this might be the juiciest bit of info- the author shows how you can take stress off of yourself by dividing your huge project into short baby steps. He says it is like dividing a large piece of food into smaller manageable bites or climbing stairs and focusing on only one bite or step at a time. This lifts the pressure off of you. First you outline your project then divide each chapter into smaller segments and then divide them into bite sized bits. My project on Nazi camps from the viewpoint of those inside them from Nazi officers and soldiers to those imprisoned from different countries for different reasons and of different religions, etc was a huge undertaking and seemed overwhelming until broken like a loaf of bread into tiny pieces. This means that I don't have to brood about the whole project one week but instead focus on the art and poetry done by children imprisoned in one particular camp during 1941-1942. This is doable!

I highly recommend this book if you are working on a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation and even if you are writing a nonfiction book or a novel for any age level. As the author says, this book will help you personalize your writing habits for the project to suit your own special needs.

AFMasten says

Good ideas for structuring writing time. Many I have observed while here at NHC. Break work into sections, think of your manuscript as a collection of smaller pieces, write outline or roadmap but revise it when necessary, make schedule or timetable, make deadlines, writing is perseverance, balancing life and writing, write a first draft before editing, write linearly (not in circles) even with editing, move on by closing the section, let go and write first draft in a relaxed manner, don't reread, stick to deadline, put new ideas into writing and store for retrieval next time through draft, be disciplined yet flexible. What I will need to do when I get home: establish a regular weekly schedule: play out the best times in the day for writing, times when writing will be impossible, to minimize your chances of being interrupted. Write as frequently as possible, i.e. try not to be away from your manuscript for too long at a time.

A time = writing time

B time = thinking about your work, researching, reading, talking about your work

Jennifer says

Practical advice on scheduling and writing a major work.

B.K. Forsyth says

I read this book about 15 years ago. I feel the need to reread it.
