



Integrating Healthy Balance (Transcript)

Hi, I'm Laura Birkin Norman, an adjunct professor of English for GMC, and this presentation is about integrating healthy balance during a large writing assignment. Hopefully this presentation will give you some tips and tricks to help you maintain your mental and physical well-being while working on a lengthy writing project, create the best product possible, and avoid burnout.

In this presentation, we're going to journey through the writing process step by step. Let's start from the very beginning when you receive your assignment. Try and read over the assignment instructions carefully as soon as you can, and make sure you fully understand what you're being asked to do. Here I'm thinking about things like the page length required, the number of sources you have to include. The type of essay you're being asked to write, whether that be argumentative, compare and contrast, or something else, and other requirements of that nature. Take note if there are going to be related assignments along the way, such as a discussion forum post containing your thesis statement, for example, or maybe an annotated bibliography. And be sure to ask your professor if you have any questions about the assignment, ideally before you start working on it, so you don't waste any time potentially going down the wrong track.

Next, when you're planning how to prepare for and tackle the assignment, do not wait until the last minute, if at all possible. We never do our best work when we are rushed, stressed, and haven't slept. Instead, it's a good idea to try and split your assignment into manageable chunks. As I mentioned on the previous slide, often professors will try and facilitate this by asking you to perhaps first come up with a topic and a thesis statement, then find some sources that you're going to use in your paper, and so on before you submit the final assignment. But if they don't do this, you should definitely try and split the assignment into smaller steps yourself.

I would suggest writing down all important dates in a planner, particularly the final deadline for the assignment, as this will help you to visualize how much time you have and if it works for you, to create a timeline or schedule for your writing. Try not to schedule anything big like a vacation or your kid's birthday party in the final week before the assignment is due. If you do have something scheduled and you're not able to move it, try to factor that into your schedule to make sure that most of your work is done ahead of time. Make sure that your friends and family know that you're working on a major assignment. Not only can they help you, but they can also give you some space during those busy weeks and might even be able to help you to find time to work and prepare for the worst case scenario. Don't assume that the few days before your assignment is due will be perfectly peaceful and quiet, and try to take that into account.

Now as we enter the writing process, as I said on the last slide, try to split your writing up into smaller sessions rather than one long all-nighter. Apart from anything else, your brain will not be working at its best when you're under stress and running on no sleep. Breaking your assignment into smaller tasks also helps it to feel less overwhelming. You can even make a checklist of the different steps you need to take towards finishing the assignment, and you can check them off 1 by 1 as they are accomplished. Try to be realistic when you're creating any kind of writing plan. Don't schedule five hours of writing for a day

when you know that you're more likely to only have 30 minutes. It can also help to try and make writing a habit. Perhaps you can make time to write each day for 30 minutes after breakfast, or just before you have to pick your kids up from school. So you have some time set aside to work on your assignment each day.

Remember that you're not just going to sit down and write the perfect paper all in one go. Instead, there are many stages to the writing process. Brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading. Start off with some low pressure activities. Even before you start writing properly, allow ideas to start percolating. Give some thought to your topic while you engage in other activities, and you can always write down a note or idea in your phone if something pops up during the day. Chat with family and friends about your topic, and perhaps even do some light reading about it. Then you can move on to activities such as brainstorming, outlining, and free writing before you build up to writing the assignment itself. And remember that you do not have to write a perfect essay first time from beginning to end.

You could, for example, write a short draft 1st and then expand on it. You could consider writing your introduction last. After all, you'll have a better idea of what to say in it when you know what your paper is all about. And if you get stuck on a particular paragraph, make a note of it and move on to another paragraph or section that you find easier to write. How can you prioritize your health and well-being during the writing process? Try and minimize distractions while you're working. Let your family or roommates know that you're working and will need some peace and quiet. Put your phone on silent, or you can even put it in a drawer or in another room if needed, and try to focus on one assignment or task at a time.

Stay hydrated and eat healthy food and snacks while working. Ideally, avoid drinking excessive amounts of caffeine or eating a lot of sugary snacks, as both will eventually cause you to crash. Take regular breaks to relax, rejuvenate, and avoid mental fatigue. Try doing some light stretching or take a short walk if you can to get some exercise and fresh air. Any kind of exercise can help to reduce stress, improve your mood, and boost cognitive function. It's also a good idea to regularly take a bit of space from your writing, as you can come back to it later with fresh eyes and ideas, and you can even set a timer on your phone for every 30 minutes or every hour to remind you to take regular breaks. Try to prioritize sleep and practice self-care by making time to do some activities you enjoy to support your cognitive function and overall well-being.

If you're struggling, talk through any problems you're having with a friend or a family member, and remember that you can always reach out and ask for help from your professor, GMCs librarians, or a writing tutor. And while we should all strive for excellence in our work, remember that absolute perfection is unattainable for most of us. Try to set realistic expectations, don't fuss over unimportant details, and practice self-compassion if you encounter setbacks.

So you did it. After your assignment is submitted, take some time to celebrate your achievement and acknowledge the work and effort you put into it. Give yourself a treat. Maybe you can order your favorite takeout or relax and watch a movie. Then, after some time has passed, it might also be helpful to reflect on what worked well during your writing process and what you can improve on so that you can continue to make each experience working on a large assignment better and better.