

A solid writing community is vital to productivity

In setting up a writing group, the rules are yours to orchestrate, and you'll know if they are working. "Results will tell you right away."

Layers of support are necessary to writing success.

Dr. Patricia Akhimie – who juggles her teaching responsibilities with three writing projects and two small children – credits her publishing success to a ruthless schedule and layers of support. Akhimie has had more work published in 2020 than any previous year.

For her, writing support – including a weekly accountability group and a daily writing partner – are key. A writing coach adds another layer of intensity. "It has meant the difference between getting stuff done during this unprecedented time and getting nothing done."

Akhimie, an associate professor of English at Rutgers-Newark, teaches Shakespeare, Renaissance drama, and early modern women's travel writing. She is the author of *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference: Race and Conduct in the Early Modern World* (Routledge 2018). She is co-editor, with Bernadette Andrea, of *Travel and Travail: Early Modern Women, English Drama, and the Wider World* (University of Nebraska Press 2019).

Akhimie, who is editing an anthology, editing a version of Othello and writing a second monograph on race and travel, offered her writing advice during our February 2021 Writing Retreat.

Layers of accountability and feedback

Accountability leads to success, and many faculty members are aware of the need to create and keep a regular writing schedule. Akhimie's group has met weekly for six years; they are four tenured women with eight children between them, and share (and work through) similar sets of challenges.

Akhimie also meets daily with a writing partner; she and her partner write for 45 minutes, break, then write another 45 minutes.

A writing coach, however, creates another level of discipline. Akhimie's coach tracks her short-term and long-term writing goals and develops strategies and deadlines for execution. Akhimie views the \$250 monthly fee as a necessary investment; the writing coach prevents her from her natural tendency to procrastinate and offers strategies when she hits a roadblock.

Building a writing community

Which strategy will work for you? How do you choose the right partner, group or coach?

Akhimie recommends experimenting. Try different strategies and try the same strategy with different people. Some writing partners, for example, like to begin a session by setting their intentions; other

groups say hello and begin typing. The rules are yours to orchestrate, and you'll know if they are working. "Results will tell you right away."

Akhimie also recommends taking the bold step of reaching out to experts in your field. Akhimie has reached out cold to top scholars, emailing a chapter and asking for feedback.

"I knew that that in order for me to get across the finish line, I needed to have the manuscript that I was writing vetted by the scariest people in my field," she says.

If a scholar said no, she persisted, circling back a month later.

"Not only did I get that feedback, but I also got to know someone whose work I deeply respected," she says. "I highly recommend it. But I won't sugarcoat it. It's definitely scary."

*Note: The Rutgers **Office for Faculty Development** helps connect faculty looking for [Writing Accountability Groups](#). The [National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity](#) maintains a list of coaches.*