

# The Academic's Guide to a Successful Summer

Here's what you can do now to make the most of the months ahead.



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For Your Academic Life

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# How New Graduate Students Should Spend Their Summers

You may be years from the job market, but it's not too soon to consider career options.

By Julie Miller Vick and Jennifer S. Furlong

One of the perks that still exist, at least in some parts of academe, is a slower pace of work during summer. For graduate students, it's often a chance to carve out large blocks of time for substantial research projects. Yet August often arrives too quickly, and many students find they haven't accomplished what they set out to do.

**Jenny:** We've written before about the need for new Ph.D.'s and postdocs who are about to go on the academic job market to use their summers wisely. If you don't start readying your job-search materials now, you may find yourself blindsided by the amount of time it takes away from your other duties in the fall. But we thought we'd focus this column differently, and look at how first- and second-year doctoral students can make the best use of their time.

**Julie:** Although your classes are over for now, you may not be looking at months of unscheduled free time. You may already be working in a summer research position or teaching assistantship. If you're in a lab-based science, you're still in the lab. But regardless of your commitments, it's important to make a commitment to yourself and your future, and take some time this summer to think and act strategically.

Peter Fiske, a nationally-recognized author and lecturer on leadership and career development for young scientists and engineers, once spoke at the University of Pennsylvania and discussed what he called the 80:10:10 rule: 80 percent of your week should be focused on your work itself; 10 percent on personal and professional development; and 10 percent on telling people what a good job you're doing. Even at this early stage you need to spend 10 percent of your time thinking about and working on your career.

**Jenny:** One of the first things graduate students should consider doing early on is applying for grants — even if you receive full financial support in your program. Begin by identifying

grant opportunities that fit your work. In this online era, that's easier than ever before. Your university career center, office of graduate studies, library, or research office should already subscribe to databases that can get you started, such as [Pivot](#).

Even if you don't have access to a subscription database, you can find plenty of other places to look on the web. [Grants.gov](#) is a good starting place. Scientists may find the grants content on [ScienceCareers.org](#) to be helpful. Similarly, those in the humanities and social sciences may find the [H-Net announcements list](#) to be of use. *The Graduate School Funding Handbook* is also a great source of information (full disclosure: Julie and I have contributed to various editions of the book).

**Julie:** When you're just starting out, it's important to become familiar with those who finance research in your field. Grant deadlines often are set a year in advance of the announcement of an award, so it's good to get a sense of the timeline. The grant-application process will help you articulate the importance and scope of your work. And if you receive a grant, it will look terrific on your CV — even a small grant. Every experienced fund raiser knows that small grants often lead to larger ones.

**Jenny:** Think about where you might get published in the future. To figure out which journals to submit articles to, read widely in your field. Study articles of interest to you not just for the content, but for what lessons they offer about your own future publications. Tell a professor you are interested in reading on a particular topic this summer and ask for good journal suggestions.

**Julie:** Summer is also a great time to work on your presentation skills. As a relative newcomer to graduate school, you may not have had many chances to present your work in public. You may not even be sure whether you would be any good at it. Either way, being able to speak in public clearly and confidently

is an essential skill in academe. During the summer, find ways to practice that skill.

**Jenny:** For example, set up a study group with your fellow students in which each of you is responsible for presenting to the group on a regular basis. Take the time to identify some upcoming regional conferences — ones that would be fairly easy to travel to — where you could present your work. Calls for papers often have deadlines that are nine months to a year before the conference, which is why it's good to start thinking about this well in advance.

If you find that your presenting skills are particularly weak, or if you are an international scholar and your English is shaky, consider joining your local [Toastmasters International](#) group so that you can practice your speaking skills regularly.

**Julie:** Building your presentation skills will also help your teaching, but that's just one of the skills you will need to be successful in the classroom. If you will be teaching in the fall, perhaps for the first time, explore the resources your campus offers to help you prepare, such as teaching centers. In addition, your graduate school or department may have programs in place to help you get ready for the fall.

**Jenny:** If you've taught before, and you know that you want to focus your career on teaching, use the summer to find opportunities. How is summer teaching organized in your department? Are there other local colleges and universities that might hire you as an adjunct? If you are in the sciences, summer may be the best time for you to gain teaching experience.

Another way to gain classroom experience is to volunteer as a museum docent, in a science institute, or at a high school. Such experience is unconventional, but it can help you get noticed by teaching-oriented institutions. We know a job candidate who worked regularly with high-school science students during her graduate career — experience that made her stand out to the teaching-focused institution that hired her.

**Julie:** Many people start to wonder if an academic career is really for them as early as their first or second year of graduate school. If you are one of those people, or even if you just want to make sure you understand all of your options, summer is a great time to do some career exploration. That might mean doing some informational interviews. Even talking with two or three new people a month can help you to investigate alternate career paths.

In addition, start reading different job descriptions and file away those that interest you. Reading job ads can help you articulate your interests and goals.

**Jenny:** If you have a bit of extra time, you might consider finding an internship, shadowing someone in a particular job, working in a short-term contract job, or volunteering. Talk with your university career adviser to get tips on getting started. Most campus career offices have extensive information on internships, but you may also be interested in creating your own which will involve doing some networking.

**Julie:** Besides looking ahead, summer is also a good time to look backward and assess the skills you have already developed. Did you learn a new computer program? Improve your ability in a language? Develop data analysis skills? Improve your writing? Guide an undergraduate? As a teaching assistant, did you develop a relationship with the professor as well as work with students? Did you learn the basics of field work or of setting up an experiment? Did you have a chance to enhance your public-speaking skills?

Identify and assess your skills as they stand, and keep a record of your development. It will come in handy later on in graduate school when you reach the point of drafting a CV or a résumé.

**Jenny:** This may seem like an alarmingly long list of things to do over the summer — in addition to the many things you are already hoping to accomplish. And we both feel that it's important to take some time to relax and daydream a bit.

So think of this list as something from which to pick and choose. What are the one or two areas in which you would most like to develop this summer? Set out a concrete plan for doing so, even if it's just a few hours a week, and you may find that you achieve more over the summer than you ever expected.

**Julie:** In his talk at Penn, Peter Fiske quoted John A. Shedd as saying, "Opportunities are seldom labeled." Be open.

*Julie Miller Vick has retired as senior associate director of career services at the University of Pennsylvania and now works there part time as a senior career adviser. Jennifer S. Furlong is director of the office of career planning and professional development at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York Graduate Center. They are the authors of *The Academic Job Search Handbook* (University of Pennsylvania Press).*

# It's a Good Time to Get a Head Start on the Fall Job Market

Application season might be the last thing on your mind, but it pays to prep early. Here are five things you can do now.

By Dan Royles

For newly-minted and soon-to-be-minted Ph.D.'s, taking a first run at landing an academic job can be a scary proposition. Being on the job market, as the saying goes, is a full-time job unto itself.

Which means, of course, that it's a difficult proposition to balance the application process with the pressures of teaching or finishing your dissertation. So even though prepping for the fall market might be the last thing on your mind right now, it pays to start early. Here are five ways to prepare over the summer for the upcoming job season:

## 1. Update your CV.

This goes out with 99 percent of your applications, so it needs to be attractive and up-to-date. Give it a once-over: Does it list all the funding you've received? All of your conference presentations? If you've served on any committees or led any of your department's or college's groups, make sure to include them under "Professional Service."

But don't just add a new line or two. Look for chances to spruce up the document, too. For tips and tricks on how to pull that off, check out [ProfHacker's open thread](#) from last fall on CV formats. I've found David Kadavy's [blog](#) and self-published [book](#), *Design for Hackers*, to be very useful for thinking about font choices and basic design.

Whatever choices you make about the appearance of your CV should carry through to the rest of your application materials to give your entire packet a uniform feel. You might also consider creating a résumé version of your CV, especially if you think you might apply for alt-ac jobs. Columbia University, the University of Texas, and [The Chronicle](#) all offer [advice](#) on how to do this.

## 2. Get organized.

Create a spreadsheet — or whatever other method you use to get organized — to track job opportunities you want to pursue. I maintain a spreadsheet in Google Drive, which I can share easily and view from anywhere I have a wifi or 4G signal. Start by looking for fellowships that are offered every year, and drop those in. [Do a Google search](#) to see if any have been posted so far, and if you have any filed away from past searches, drop those in, too.

My spreadsheet includes columns for deadlines and application components. I also use a simple system of visual cues that lets me know at a glance the state of each application. Strikethrough means the application has been submitted, red means it's been rejected, and blue means I've received an interview request or notification of finalist status. A black background with white text means the application needs to be snail-mailed. (I used to put mailing information in its own column, but I realized that I needed a stronger visual cue after racking up too many express-shipping fees.) A blue background with white text means I've been accepted — hopefully you'll end up with a lot of blue on your spreadsheet!


## 3. Pull together your teaching portfolio.

A significant number of jobs and fellowships will ask for this, or some iteration thereof. It might include sample syllabi, a [statement of teaching philosophy](#), or "[evidence of excellent teaching](#)." Your teaching portfolio should have all of these. But don't include too much. The common wisdom around the Internet, as determined by a very unscientific survey, is that this part of the application should be between five and ten pages long.

## 4. Come up with a second project.

You will be asked about this, so you need to have one in mind — even if you don't plan on tackling it for a while or aren't sure what you want it to be. You need to be able to articulate a fu-





ture project so that interviewers can see you as a potential colleague with an active research agenda. You might even have more than one so you can tailor your answer to each specific subfield in which you might apply for a job. So if you plan to apply for teaching jobs in Victorian literature and postdocs in the digital humanities, you should have a plan for second projects — complete with funding and sources — for each of those fields.

### 5. Build your interview wardrobe.

[This post](#) (and the comments!) on conference interviews at The Professor Is In has some great tips for men and women on dressing. Clothing standards vary by discipline, so double-check with your adviser and mentors in your field about the appropriate level of formality. Then scour the consignment shops in your area, and keep an eye out for sales. Find a good tailor who can make sure your new duds fit correctly. You don't want to realize the week before a conference or campus interview that your wardrobe is too casual, or ill-fitting.

*Dan Royles is an assistant professor of history at Florida International University.*

# I Know What You Need to Do This Summer

If you're going on the tenure-track market in the fall, it's time to start your preparations.

By Karen Kelsky

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**Q: What should I do over the summer to prepare for the academic job market in the fall?**

**A:** Ideally, you should have started preparations in the spring if you plan to go on the job market this fall. So you'll have to play a bit of catchup. In the next few months, you should aim to solidify all of the elements of your record that you can. That includes your dissertation if you are still A.B.D., as well as your publications, teaching, conferences, and references. Perhaps you might even do some initial research toward new projects.

If you are applying as an A.B.D. candidate, you will want to enter the academic job market this fall with your dissertation well on the way to completion, and with a defense date scheduled. You must be able to show that you will — beyond the shadow of a doubt — complete, defend, and deposit the dissertation by next spring. A more than half-written manuscript and a defense date will go far in establishing your credibility. So use these months to lay the groundwork for that outcome.

If you have already completed your Ph.D., you will want to spend the spring and summer months lining up some kind of temporary academic position for the coming year. That will not only provide you with much-needed income but also with a campus affiliation. It's certainly possible to apply for teaching jobs as an independent scholar, or employed outside the academy, and people do it successfully. But in general a campus affiliation means your status will be more, shall we say, seamlessly legible with an academic position.

Beyond that, take a good hard look at your record, and use the summer to fill in any conspicuous gaps. If you have several publications, but have spent little time in the classroom, then your top priority should be gaining experience teaching a course that you have designed. Search for summer courses you might teach at nearby colleges and universities. Don't fret too much about the status of the institution. Of course the


ideal is to score a teaching gig at the kind of high-status place (an R1 or elite SLAC for example) where you dream of landing a job, but any sole-teaching experience at all, even at a community college, is better than none.

I am often asked about online teaching. For the purposes of the job market, online teaching is not a perfect substitute for face-to-face teaching. But if you have no other options, then it is worth pursuing.

The main task of your summer, however, should be research and publishing. A sole-authored (or first-authored, in some fields), refereed journal article remains the gold standard of the academic market, and you are extremely unlikely to get a tenure-track job without at least one such article. You probably need more than one.

Do not waste your time on any low-tier types of articles — book reviews, encyclopedia entries, conference proceedings, and the like. Those do nothing for your record for the purposes of the job search. Chapters in edited collections are better, but still lesser in status than sole- or first-authored journal articles. The reason lies in the level of peer review. A book chapter may undergo some degree of peer review but it will not be anywhere near as rigorous as a journal blind-review process. Everyone knows that. And therefore, at R1s and the like, book chapters “count” for only about half the value of a peer-reviewed article (in tenure cases where these things are actually tallied in a systematic and quantitative way).

So when you are just starting out and trying to generate an irrefutable record as fast as possible for the job search, focus your efforts on peer-reviewed journal articles. Try to publish in the highest-status journals you can reasonably attempt in the discipline of the job for which you are most likely to apply. Aim particularly at those journals with a reputation for efficient decisions.



Keep in mind, however: Articles that date from before your hire typically do not count toward your tenure case. Thus, while you are generating one or more articles this summer, be sure to also create a five-year-plan that lays out a research, writing, and publishing timeline that will carry you through a tenure case.

Things of secondary importance for you to pursue this summer include applying to new conferences (if those deadlines fall over the summer — they rarely do!) and continuing to promote your work by sharing it with scholars in other parts of the country (email is fine). If you've gotten to know any senior scholars particularly well, summer is a good time to ask if they will write letters of recommendation on your behalf. Remember, they may have their own Ph.D.s who are competing with you for tenure-track jobs, and they may decline for that reason even if they remain firmly supportive of your work.

Finally, if your dissertation research has already been published in articles and perhaps a book, but you are still looking for that first tenure-track job, then you will want to use the summer to solidify the research for your second major project. While it may be too early to publish that research as an article, you can use it as the foundation for conference papers, or a grant application to support more substantial research later.

Do not feel that you need to accomplish all of the above in a single summer. Just choose the one or two things that you need the most, and focus on those.

*Karen Kelsky is a career consultant who runs the website [The Professor Is In](#). She's been a tenured professor at two public universities (Oregon and Illinois) and has advised many undergraduate and graduate students, as well as mentored junior faculty. She answers reader questions as a contributor to *Vitae*.*



# Planning a Productive Few Months

No season is looked back on with as much regret as a wasted summer.

By Noah Shusterman

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Summer is both an academic's best friend and biggest challenge. Freed from routines and obligations in early May, summer beckons, promising you long days of productivity sitting at a desk and typing away, not so much thinking as recording the words that a muse is whispering in your ears.

Things rarely work out that way, of course. By August there is a mad rush to have something to show for your "time off," soon interrupted by the coming demands of the fall semester: syllabi, meetings, proposals. Your goal of three finished book chapters and a journal article ends up looking more like a half-way-drafted chapter and a bunch of jotted-down thoughts. For graduate students and faculty members, no season is looked back on with as much regret as the unproductive summer.

I know that because I have had my share of unproductive summers. But I have had some productive ones, too. And I have figured out some things along the way. No promises, no guarantees in what follows, but this is what has worked for me. And now is a good time to start thinking about it.

## **Treat your summer writing projects like a long road trip.**

Every summer we drive to New England from our home in Philadelphia, usually up to see my mom in Vermont. It is a long drive. There is no way around it if we're going by car. But that doesn't mean that it shouldn't take as little time as possible. Do the drive correctly, and we still have half a day to enjoy upon arrival. Do it incorrectly, and we spend the whole day in transit.

So when I say that you should treat your summer writing like a long road trip, I do not mean like Jack Kerouac hitchhiking across the U.S.A. — more like the long drive to Mom's. Driving speed is only one factor here. The far bigger factors are how quickly you get out the door in the morning and how long you spend stopping for lunch.

If you pack your bags the night before, wake up on time, and head out the door quickly, you're off to a good start. If you know the route you're taking and where to stop to eat, so much the better. But linger around the house in the morning, gaze over the maps pondering routes, take a few wrong turns, wander around looking for restaurants, and a seven-hour drive is now taking 10 or 12 hours, and driving 80 miles an hour in a 65 zone will not change that.

Summer writing is similar. If you want to have a productive summer, you need to know what you want to work on first and then start writing early. Make those decisions as the spring semester ends, and then start writing early. The key — and I cannot stress this enough — is to have something to show for May and June. Do not count on making up for those months later on. And when it is time to take a break, make sure you set a time for that break to end.

**Have an insanely ambitious plan.** A productive summer starts with a plan. Usually, that means a set of writings that you'll prioritize, and perhaps some readings as well, or even some archival work. Set your priorities before the summer gets under way. That will help keep you from starting five different projects and not finishing any of them.

But if you are making a plan, why not make it an ambitious one? One summer a few years ago — after three straight summers where I set ambitious goals and did not reach any of them — I set myself more modest, achievable goals. Guess what? I still did not reach them.

Lesson: Give yourself something to strive for. At the end, it is easy enough to be satisfied with what you have accomplished. Come September, the pile of pages you've written means a lot more than the one-page plan you wrote in April.

**Set achievable goals.** OK, that rule sounds like it contradicts

the have-an-insanely-ambitious-plan rule, but it doesn't. Because the key here is to set goals that you could actually achieve because they depend only on you. A goal like "write 30,000 words of publishable work in May" is a daunting task, but whether or not you succeed is up to you. On the other hand, a goal like "Get an article published in *The New Yorker*" isn't up to you. It's up to the editors at *The New Yorker*.

If you want to publish, you need to write work that's publishable. Once that's done, you need to go about getting it published. But at that second stage, not only is the decision out of your hands, so is the timeline.

**Never double down.** If you use a system of daily writing goals, be willing to accept lost days. In other words, if your goal is 1,000 words a day, and you only write 200 on Tuesday, Wednesday's goal should still be 1,000 words. That is true for weekly and monthly goals as well. The alternative is a growing goal that becomes harder and harder to reach. Sleepless nights soon follow.

**Focus early, wander late.** Curious about the latest developments in art history? Want to know more about the links between the Frankfurt School and poststructuralism? Summer is a great time to broaden your horizons. But wait until you have something to show for your time before you start doing exploratory work. To go back to the road-trip metaphor: Do your sightseeing after you get there and your bags are unpacked, not when you know you still have driving to do.

**When it's vacation, it's vacation.** Finally, it is, after all, summer. Looking back on a summer where you didn't have any fun is just as depressing as looking back on an unproductive season. Set aside some time to enjoy yourself, to hang out with friends and family. Then, during those times you've set aside, leave your books and your computer behind and actually enjoy yourself.

Those are tactics that have helped me. They may or may not help you, as we all work in different ways. But now is a good time to plant the seeds for a good summer.

*Noah Shusterman is an assistant professor of history at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.*

# Summer Survival Strategies for Adjuncts

The money you scraped together during the school year is gone, and you're 2 rent cycles away from the next paycheck.

By Josh Boldt

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I've lived through enough adjunct summers to know that things can get pretty difficult financially. What little money you managed to scrape together during the school year will soon be long gone, and your next paycheck isn't for weeks.

For adjuncts who aren't lucky enough to score classes, summer can become a deeply stressful period of doing whatever it takes — borrowing, penny-pinching, scouring Craigslist for odd jobs — to keep the eviction notices at bay until the first paycheck of the new school year arrives.

My adjunct summer survival strategy consists mainly of [selling my possessions](#) — furniture, music, clothes. By the end of July, my apartment is significantly more roomy than it was at the beginning of the summer. Once the school year starts and the income returns, I restock what I've purged. It's kind of like going to one of those payday lenders: a neverending cycle of borrowing and repaying, never earning enough to escape the pattern.

I'm also no stranger to the odd job. I've taken many a part-time gig to bridge the income gap between adjunct paychecks. I delivered pizzas for a few years during and after grad school, though I could never bring myself to deliver in the same town where I taught. The thought of ringing the doorbell of a current student was too much to bear.

I've also discovered the insalubrious world of Craigslist gigs. There's money to be earned for doing all sorts of random tasks, from moving furniture to painting houses to, uh, posing for "tasteful" photographs. With the help of Craigslist, I've been a mover, a landscaper, a wedding photographer, and a ditchdigger. I was also invited to meet a potential employer at a remote location in the country, but I turned that gig down.

In fact, Craigslist is a lifesaver for poor adjuncts, and my secrets to surviving the adjunct summer mostly revolve around

it. Each week during the summer break, I'm either selling my possessions or my labor in order to scrounge up enough cash to make it until September.

But I knew there had to be some other options for summer income. Tens of thousands of other teachers struggle through the dog days every year, and I was curious to hear more survival secrets. So I asked Twitter.

Based on the responses I received, it looks like the summer is pretty tough for most adjuncts. Some respondents reported trying to bridge the gap with part-time and odd jobs similar to mine.

**Josh Boldt @josh\_boldt**

*#Adjuncts, what do you do for money during the summer?*

**Matt Thomas @matthomas**

*One summer I worked as a mover.*

**Matt Thomas @matthomas**

*Yeah. A guy in my program and I posted something offering our services.*

**Joseph Fruscione @ProfessorEx74**

*Tutoring & writing consulting.*

**Joseph Fruscione @ProfessorEx74**

*Used to be independent (via Craigslist). Through two companies starting last year.*

**Jordan Loveridge @jtloveridge**

*Not an adjunct, but as a TA during summers I've done Craigslist gigs cleaning houses, mucking out garages, etc.*

**Laura Ayers @LEA628**

*Tutoring company. Paid hourly.*

**Laura Ayers @LEA628**

*I should mention we only get paid when in sessions, so if students aren't active, I just have to sit and wait. Not steady income*

**Kate Weber @k8simply**

*Last summer, I taught one class and worked in a shop selling nuts and dried fruit. Not a bad gig.*

**Kate Weber @k8simply**

*It's a touristy area; summer jobs are common. Actually stayed on for the fall because even my regular course load isn't enough.*

**Nat @oatsofwrath**

*In summer I have washed cars & delivered catalogues to get by. And not eaten much.*

**Megan McPherson @MeganJMcPherson**

*I worked in retail for many, many years.*

**Annie Moving In @AnnieMovingIn**

*Past 2 years I had to withdraw from an old 401k & pay fines. This year I plan to work at the mall. Also look for online courses.*

**Ishai Barnoy @IshaiBarnoy**

*During unpaid periods, I live on the graces of my support network, so to speak.*

Other adjuncts count on summer classes to keep bills paid during June, July, and August. However, it seems that summer sections can hardly be depended on as a reliable income source.

**Uncle Noodle @Adjunctular**

*During the last two years, I taught two summer sections. Prior to that time, I graded papers for a testing firm.*

**Uncle Noodle @Adjunctular**

*I was asked to teach two courses. One was an online section, the other at a specialized campus.*

**Joseph Fruscione @ProfessorEx74**

*I had a good run of 5 straight summers of a course (full semester pay for 5 weeks). Much tougher now.*

**Joseph Fruscione @ProfessorEx74**

*More students doing online courses for the summer. Hard to fill the brick+mortar ones.*

**Miranda Merklein @MirandaMerklein**

*Competition is indeed tough at my two schools. The key to getting classes seems to be "flexibility," track record & random luck. 10 Apr 2014*

Teaching a summer class or two appears to be an ideal solution for adjuncts who must support themselves throughout the summer, so I asked for advice on the best ways to get those coveted summer sections.

**m p & g s @mpandgs**

*Announce my availability for classes @ any time (usu there's an 8:00am nobody wants). If that fails, I scrape & beg until Fall.*

**m p & g s @mpandgs**

*I talk to the department scheduler (I usually get something at the last minute). I'm debating whether I'll do it this yr though.*

**Ishai Barnoy @IshaiBarnoy**

*I ask to teach, I give my availability, and I usually get something. Sometimes a class doesn't fill, though, & gets cancelled. 10 April 2014*

**Trent M Kays @trentmkays**

*I don't know many adjuncts who get summer sessions. :/*

**Laura Ayers @LEA628**

*Be able to teach online.*

**Laura Ayers @LEA628**

*I had to take 2 training courses: 1 in the interface, 1 about effective online teaching. Then make a course shell & have it reviewed*

**Annie Moving In @AnnieMovingIn**

*At my school? Good luck - my sections have been canceled due to low enrollment for the past 2 years.*

**Annie Moving In @AnnieMovingIn**

*Yup. I'm expecting it will happen again this year.*

A couple of department heads also weighed in, pointing out that ethical departments award summer classes to adjuncts first since they are the most affected by long pay gaps.

**Fabián Banga @fabianbanga**

*In my department TT do not teach & we try to give #adjuncts as many classes as we can during the summer.*

**Fabián Banga @fabianbanga**

*Many of us do this here and not as charity but dignity and solidarity.*

**Stacey Lee Donohue @BendProf**

*all our adjuncts who want summer classes get them....maybe only one, alas, as enrollment is falling.*

**Stacey Lee Donohue @BendProf**

*...but most get 2 or 3 sections depending on seniority.*

Unless your department is particularly sensitive to adjunct needs, getting a summer class can be pretty difficult. The trick, it seems, is to make yourself available and to make it clear that you're interested. Having additional training to teach online also doesn't hurt.

But what about adjuncts who don't get summer classes, who struggle to find temporary employment, and who have already sold everything in the apartment that isn't bolted down? After all, most employers are not interested in hiring and training people for just eight weeks worth of work, and the uncertainty of the odd job search can be pretty stressful.

The fourth option for surviving the adjunct summer is the least dependable of all, but it's great for those who actually qualify.

### **Filing For Unemployment as an Adjunct**

I've talked to a lot of adjuncts who have battled schools and the government in order to gain unemployment benefits. The problem with advice on unemployment claims is that the circumstances differ widely from state to state and even from school to school. No claim is like any other, which makes it difficult to argue precedent in unemployment cases.

Schools find ways to sneak through loopholes with cleverly-worded contracts that walk the line between termination and "reasonable assurance" of renewed employment the following year. The result is contract language that neither promises nor denies future employment. Adjuncts are not guaranteed a new contract, but they are confoundingly ineligible to draw unemployment during the summer. Hence the precarious existence under which adjuncts labor each year.

Those attempting to decipher the unemployment filing process should check out two helpful resources.

- [Access to Unemployment Insurance Benefits for Contingent Faculty](#) was published by the Chicago Coalition on Contingent Labor (COCAL) with the help of the National Education Association, the American Association of University Professors, and the American Federation of Teachers.

- The New Faculty Majority's [Unemployment Compensation Initiative](#) asks adjuncts to inform the organization when they file for unemployment so the group can offer assistance and track the results across different states and schools.

The very fact that this piece needs to be written is a shame. That professional teachers have to depend on the government and the kindness of strangers to survive the summer reflects poorly on the universities that employ them. Any employer whose workers live this precariously should be ashamed. Perpetuating this low-wage cycle of economic crisis hurts not only the adjuncts, but also the students, the university, and the broader economy that is underwriting this irresponsible compensation structure.

Hopefully these practices will change one day, voluntarily or otherwise. Until then, adjuncts must continue to figure out new ways to piece together a living. As for those who are trying survive the adjunct summer, I hope some of this advice helps.

*Josh Boldt is an information designer and writer at the University of Kentucky and a recovering adjunct.*



# A Realistic Summer Writing Schedule

You risk burnout if you commit yourself to overly ambitious goals.

By Theresa MacPhail

The grueling grading period is over. The semester is finally finished. You've probably taken a few well-deserved weeks off, but now it's time to start working on your own research and writing projects. Many of us use our precious summer "vacation" to churn out articles and book chapters. But as the tenure-track market tightens and pressure to publish increases, many people — especially junior faculty — feel intense anxiety over their summer writing schedules.

"I'm going to write my book."

"I have to write and submit three articles this summer."

"I need to write every, single day. At least 1,000 words a day."

Do any of those pledges sound familiar? If so, I have some bad news: You may be setting yourself up for failure. Even worse, crafting an unrealistic summer writing goal might actually be harming your ability to write at all, creating a vicious vortex of procrastination, anxiety, and guilt.

The solution is to set realistic goals and maintain a regular writing schedule. Instead of being rigidly attached to an over-ambitious writing schedule, it's better in the summer to think of your writing time as somewhat more flexible than it might be during the academic year. It's summer, after all, and you do need to recharge your batteries. There is a way to relax and be productive, trust me. Just follow these simple rules:

## Stop thinking about your writing in terms of large projects.

You may indeed be working on a book. But no good has ever come from sitting down in your writing space and thinking: "Ok. I'm going to write my book today." Ditto for thinking you are sitting down to write a chapter or an article. No, you're not. You're sitting down to write a small section of *something*, be it

an article or a book chapter.

That bit of advice may sound like semantics, but the words you use really do matter in terms of your motivation and goal-setting. After a day of writing, you should feel as though you've accomplished something. If your goal for the day was "to work on my book," then you will usually end up feeling as though you didn't accomplish enough by the end of that day. Because how could you? No one can "write a book" in a day, a week, a month. It's the accrual of days, weeks, and months that produces a book. It's the motion that's important.

## Set up a realistic writing schedule and then (mostly) stick to it.

The key word there is "realistic." If, at the beginning of the summer, you promise yourself that you will write "every day" or write "8 hours for 5 days a week," you are probably trying to do too much. I do know professional writers — think journalists — who could accomplish that, but for the rest of us, it's just not feasible.

If you insist on producing a rigid daily word count or writing without days off, you're priming yourself for a burnout. I've seen it happen time and time again: People start off their summers by working nonstop and then, only a few weeks in, hit a major wave of fatigue. That can be very hard to recover from (I speak from experience here).

You're better off scheduling your writing in blocks of two to four hours, with regular breaks. For the summer months, I don't recommend trying to write more than four days a week. We all have families, friends, and lives. You will be more productive during your writing sessions if you're happy and relaxed instead of stressed out.

## Writer, know thyself.

Craft a writing schedule and goals that work for you. That's tricky because it requires you to really be honest about yourself and what kind of writer you are. Do you tend to be focused for a couple of hours and then do very little at your desk after that? Then schedule writing blocks of one to two hours to accommodate your style. Do you need a deadline in order to work at all? Then set one up with a friend (again, however, be realistic about it).

Experiment a little before you construct your writing schedule. If you usually write at night (something I highly discourage, since our creative reserves, ability to focus, and willpower tend to be drained by the end of the day), then try a morning shift. If you use the [pomodoro method](#) (typically that involves working for a 25-minute block, followed by a break), then try writing for a longer period of time. If you write every day, try writing for three or four days in a row and then taking two days off. Play around with your writing schedule and habits until you hit your groove. You'll know what works because you'll start seeing dividends in your productivity level. When you've found what works for you, stick with it. That's the writing schedule that should become standard and (mostly) nonnegotiable.

It's possible to feel like you've used your summer months wisely, I promise. But not if you're starting out with impossible goals and a completely unrealistic writing schedule. Professional writers don't write *all* the time. In fact, many of us goof off a fair amount and yet still manage to churn out essays, talks, grant applications, op-eds, and books. The secret sauce is that we've discovered sustainable writing practices and we stick to them. If I can work on a new book project and still find time to go to the beach, so can you. Pro-tip: Don't forget the sunscreen.

*Theresa MacPhail is an assistant professor in the Science, Technology & Society Program at Stevens Institute of Technology.*

# Summer Prep for New Teachers

The season of panic approaches for those faculty members entering the college classroom for the first time.

By James M. Lang

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Painful as it may be to think about, the fall semester is only a few months away. And so the season of panic and anxiety approaches for those teachers who will be entering the college classroom for the first time.

Many new faculty members and TA's have had some teaching experience or training by the time they face their first classroom of students. That is much more the case today than it was when I was a graduate student in the mid-1990s.

Still, in my conversations with graduate students and new faculty members around the country, I find a depressing level of inconsistency in the quality and quantity of guidance they have received from their departments, graduate schools, and institutions. That some Ph.D.s and TAs walk into the classroom for the first time with no help or training at all is still far more common than many of us who write and speak about college teaching would like to think.

Whatever your level of classroom preparation, I offer here three exercises that any newcomer to the college classroom can undertake during the waning days of summer break.

**The big picture.** In the final weeks and days leading up to the semester, you are most likely to focus your anxieties on the little things — imagining that moment when you first walk into the classroom, thinking about what you will say, wondering how the students will respond and whether you will have remembered to zip your fly or check your teeth for spinach.

Like almost every other teacher in the world, you will probably have at least one or two anxiety dreams about the classroom. Mine, for some reason, always feature me as the student rather than the teacher: I've missed an entire semester's worth of calculus classes, and now I have to take the final exam. Then there's the classic naked-in-front-of-the-classroom version, among many others.

Nightmares about the practical matters of day-to-day teaching are, typically, a reflection of the fear that you're not ready yet. Before you let those anxieties overwhelm you, step back and look at the big picture.

Ask yourself two questions: At the end of the course, what specific skills and knowledge do I want my students to have learned? And how will those skills and that knowledge benefit or improve their lives?

Your responses to those questions can help remind you why your discipline matters in the world. That can be easy to lose sight of when you're caught in the crushing time demands of the semester.

Equally important, your responses should help you determine the learning objectives of your course. Settling on those objectives will give you a better idea of how to organize the course and how to design assignments, major projects, and exams. So, for example, if you don't care about students memorizing facts from your discipline, then don't give multiple-choice exams that test for memorization. If you want students to develop the ability to translate complex ideas into prose fit for the public, then make them give presentations.

In other words, don't simply imitate or inherit assignments. Be sure that your assignments, projects, and exams are developing and reinforcing the big-picture skills and knowledge that matter to you.

**Compare syllabi.** Ask your new colleagues if they would be willing to share their syllabi. (If you're brand new, ask your chair.) Or search online for courses with posted syllabi. You will find at least one syllabus online for just about any course you can imagine.

Before I came to the liberal-arts college where I am an associate professor, I taught at a research university. The first syllabus I put together for a course in my subfield at my new college did not reflect any real changes from a syllabus I had used at my old university.

Just before the semester started, I showed the syllabus to my new chair. “Students here would not be used to doing quite this much reading in a course on the novel,” she said to me gently. “You are, of course, free to assign as many novels as you want, but you might be facing an uphill battle with some of the students.”

I took the hint, cut back the reading list, and learned an important lesson about the way that workload expectations can vary from one institution to the next.

Reading the syllabi of more experienced instructors at your institution might also help you foresee other challenges. Say you did so and found many policies regulating the use of laptops in the classroom. You would know that that’s a common problem at your institution and that you should think about how to deal with it.

At my college, by contrast, such laptop policies would be wasted space on a syllabus. In eight years of full-time teaching, I have yet to see a laptop in a classroom.

Syllabi comparison can help you get a better handle on specific cultural and academic differences between your previous institution and your new one, or between your experiences as a student and what you will face as an instructor.

**Trial run.** Neither of the first two suggestions will help you alleviate your anxieties about opening day. And those anxieties can eat up lots of energy and space in your brain, so I don’t want to ignore them. You can beat them back a little bit with two simple activities.

First, before the semester starts, visit the classrooms where you will be teaching. You are anxious because you are facing the unknown, so trimming away as many unknown elements from the situation as possible will reduce your fears.

Get in the classroom, walk around it, write something on the board, try the computer projector or the overhead machine, and make sure you are comfortable in the space.

I once heard a senior professor describe how, just before he started teaching a new course, he went to the classroom and walked once entirely around the perimeter, trying to make the space as familiar and small to him as possible. A presemester

excursion into your classroom can accomplish the same objectives for you.

And as long as you’re there, take a second step to alleviate your anxiety: Pretend it’s the first day of class and practice your lecture or opening monologue. No doubt you’ll spend a lot of time rehearsing it in your head, but 100 internal repetitions will not help as much as actually speaking the words aloud a few times.

Practicing aloud will help you remember more effectively what you have to say, reducing your reliance on notes or slides. A neurologist or psychologist can explain that better than I can — all I know is that if I speak my notes aloud once beforehand, I don’t need the notes anymore when I actually get into the classroom.

Even if you do all three exercises, you’ll still be anxious in the first week of the semester. No getting around that. And some nervousness can be a good thing if you can redirect it into an energetic performance.

But if all else fails and you still find yourself fretting away the days before your classroom debut, rent one of those classic movies that feature people breaking down in high-pressured situations: Albert Brooks sweating profusely as a first-time news anchor in *Broadcast News* or Richard Dreyfuss stammering and twitchy on a morning talk show in *What About Bob?*

If you’re a sports fan, watch YouTube clips of Bill Buckner losing the 1986 World Series by missing a slow-rolling grounder, or maybe Chris Webber calling an illegal timeout in the 1993 NCAA basketball championship game.

Sure, you might stumble over your introduction, trip on the overhead projector, or lose your place during your opening lecture, but at least you won’t wind up in Wikipedia for it.

*James M. Lang is an associate professor of English at Assumption College and the author of On Course: A Week-by-Week Guide to Your First Semester of College Teaching, published by Harvard University Press.*

# What We Did on Our Summer 'Break'

**For administrators, the summer months aren't much of a vacation.**

*By Gary A. Olson*

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It is common on college campuses to say that “the faculty are gone for the summer.” Of course, many faculty members really haven't gone anywhere: Professors are still conducting research in their labs, teaching summer courses, and working on long-delayed research projects. But there are fewer people and a noticeable slowdown on campuses during the summer months.

How faculty members spend their summers is well known. And summer is an obviously hectic time for the folks in buildings and grounds who are busily painting dorm rooms, trimming trees, and resurfacing parking lots in preparation for the students' return. Less visible is what college administrators do in the summer.

Even with a quieter campus, the typical summer for administrators is as busy as the fall and spring semesters, and at times, busier. Regularly scheduled meetings continue for us during the summer. And many administrators also use those months to assess our progress on goals set forth in the institution's strategic plan and to determine what areas need special attention in the coming school year.

Many offices — human resources, the academic departments, the provost's office — spend the summer working hard to prepare for the influx of new hires that will soon be arriving on the campus. Administrators issue contracts, arrange for office space, purchase computers, and plan a new-faculty orientation.

Other offices plan the institution's fall convocation and the complicated new-student orientations that most institutions sponsor. In fact, the student-affairs division often works in overdrive during the summer, preparing residence halls, student events, and myriad other tasks that must be tackled before all of the students come back.

Most taxing is the work that must be done in preparation of that dreaded June 30 deadline: the end of the fiscal year for most institutions. Throughout May and June, administrators in every office scramble to reconcile their books. They might need to transfer funds from one account to another to cover a deficit. Or they might hurriedly purchase equipment and supplies because they have money left in their accounts. (Institutions often “sweep” unspent dollars back into the general fund at the end of a fiscal year.) It is a time of great anxiety and activity on the part of many administrators and staff assistants.


And, of course, budget planning for the next year proceeds throughout the summer. As one provost quipped to me just the other day, “You don't simply flip over a new page of the checkbook and begin again on Check 101. Exhaustive planning has to take place.”

Then there are the countless summer retreats. The president may organize a retreat with the vice presidents and other key officials to review the past academic year and plan programs for the new year. Various vice presidents sponsor their own retreats with key officials in their divisions. The provost, for example, will probably hold a planning retreat with deans and other academic administrators. Each dean may organize a similar retreat with department chairs and program directors. Even department chairs will hold retreats for their faculty members, although those events tend to happen late in the summer when “the faculty have returned” to campus.

What are we talking about in all of those retreats? Things like: how to handle Homeland Security issues on campus, deal with sexual-harassment complaints, organize procedures for disaster preparedness, and adapt to a new computer system.

In public higher education, many systemwide coordinating boards use the summer to conduct workshops aimed at briefing different groups of administrators on new regulations





and at coordinating efforts among the system's various institutions. Trustees at public and private institutions also make use of the summer hiatus — holding long formal meetings with their presidents, evaluating their performance during the previous year, and discussing plans for the institution going forward.

The summer is also when many administrators take advantage of professional-development opportunities. The major associations typically offer summer institutes and workshops for college presidents and other officials. The American Council on Education, for example, offers separate institutes for new presidents and new chief academic officers, as well as specialized sessions, such as a recent one focused on how chief financial officers and chief academic officers — perennial rivals — can work together more effectively. The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities holds summer meetings of its Council of Presidents, Council on Student Affairs, and Council on Research Policy and Graduate Education. And the American Association of State Colleges and Universities holds a summer retreat for presidents, this year devoted to a single topic: “embracing the opportunities for positive transformation that come with rapid change.”

So how have most administrators been spending the summer?

The same way we spend much of the academic year — in meetings. That might not appeal to many professors. But for us, those meetings are an opportunity for professional renewal and education. Just as faculty members typically shift their attention and work during the summer months, so do administrators. College business may have its seasonal rhythms, but it never comes to an end.

*Gary A. Olson is a scholar of rhetoric and culture and president of Daemen College in Amherst, N.Y. His most recent book is *A Creature of Our Own Making: Reflections on Contemporary Academic Life* (SUNY Press).*

# On the Pleasures (and Utility) of Summer Reading

Reading serious, substantive books can make you smarter, but it's OK to save time for some light fiction, too.

By Rachel Toor

Like many professors, I've always been a promiscuous reader. From cereal boxes to 19th-century novels, if it's in front of me, I'll read it. Especially in the summer.

I'm usually reading at least five books. Late afternoons I'll be deep into a work-related volume, usually a piece of literary nonfiction, something I'll either want to teach or study to see what moves and tricks I can steal to use in my own writing. That is when I indulge in any John McPhee work I haven't gotten to, parse the sentences of Joan Didion, or wallow in the essays of E.B. White.

In my car I have audiobooks from the library. The new Tracy Kidder, or a novel that's gotten critical acclaim like Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, or a classic I've somehow missed (I just finished listening to *Lord of the Flies*). Books can make driving around doing errands a pleasure.

I like to take my iPod on superlong runs. I love to hear Malcolm Gladwell's books in his own voice, and currently I'm listening to Michael Pollan read *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. My electronic library is full of things like Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club* and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*.

I don't leave home without my Kindle. If I have to wait in a doctor's office or for my car's oil to be changed, I can sample a Sherlock Holmes story, a book or two of *Paradise Lost*, a couple of pages of *The Autobiography of Ben Franklin*, the stories of Mark Twain, or any of the novels of the Brontë sisters. I've downloaded all of those and more, many more — for free — and read to suit my mood. I'll also download whatever new blockbuster mystery Amazon is offering up gratis.

And then, well, I have the stack beside my bed.

When I first started teaching, I had a powerful and misguided need to be popular. So I brought a giant bag of trashy paper-

backs I had read to my creative-writing course, and tried to donate them to my graduate students. You would have thought I'd offered these people a stash of child porn. No one wanted to touch the books; they only wanted highbrow novels. My students looked at me in a new way: That's what you read?

There was a time when I wouldn't have been caught dead with a less-than-serious book. I remember when my boss at Oxford University Press, now a longtime director of another prestigious scholarly publishing house, told me what he read at home. He would leave behind manuscripts on postmodern theory and incomprehensible lit crit and indulge in Robert Ludlum. Sometimes, when I was feeling snarky and superior — or, more to the point, wasn't getting my way on something — I'd say "Well, what can you expect from a guy who reads *Patriot Games*?" I didn't get it.

When you're young and thinky, you feel like you have to hurry to catch up, to read the things that everyone else has read. You have to make your reading time count. In college, I would go to an excellent used bookstore and look for the paperbacks with orange spines. The Penguin classics provided all the pulp I needed. While I wouldn't have recognized it at the time, I suppose that I harbored a recondite fear that if I didn't keep reading the good stuff, I would slip into the literary equivalent of having Cheez-Its for dinner. I suspected that reading crap would make me crappy.

And so I went to the opposite extreme, brandishing my dog-eared copy of *Ulysses* like a pride flag. The paperback I carried in my purse was *The Palm at the End of the Mind, the selected poems of Wallace Stevens*. I truly loved those books, but I also loved what they announced to the world about me. And I can't fault my graduate students for not wanting my recycled, salt-stained novels.

We read in different ways. Academics learn to ingest not only

content, but also to analyze and critique an author's argument. Writers read to see not whodunit, but how the author did it. All the writers I know say they have lost the pleasure of reading in their own genres. It's constant work: How did he manage to earn that ending? How does she get away with those shifts in tense?

But we all need an off switch for our weary brains. Some of us activate it by watching soccer. Others by knitting baby hats. I wish my leisure activity were more different from my day job, but I can't help it. Reading is what I do for fun. And so I allow myself to suspend critical judgment and surrender to a plot-driven, fast-paced novel. I can ignore shoddy sentences (most of the time — *Twilight* proved too challenging even for me). I can handle flat characters and improbable twists. I hope I never stop shuddering at clichés, but sometimes a little shuddering is the price you have to pay to shut down your monkey mind.

Usually I'm diverted. Sometimes I learn stuff. I can't do every subgenre. You couldn't pay me to read fantasy or science fiction. Not that I haven't read some good ones and enjoyed them, but as Jessica Rabbit said, I'm just not drawn that way.

But chick lit can be a delight. Jennifer Crusie's novels are sharp and snappy, and I'd rather settle in with one of them than watch Tom Cruise strut his short stuff on a big screen. Give me a sociopathic serial killer and I'll spend hours in bed with him. I'll take a cozy murder mystery, a legal thriller, a medical suspense novel, and escape. Some of those authors are smarter than their books, but some of those books are darned good.

Ruth Rendell's American editor told me that she was one of the most brilliant authors he had ever worked with. This from a guy who had also published Stephen Hawking. Joseph Finder, brother of an editor at *The New Yorker*, is someone whose new thrillers I look forward to. But you're not likely to see his writing in *The New Yorker*.

I'm not immune to normal puritanical fears about wasting time. But during the school year, when I feel overwhelmed with deadlines, grading, and meetings, and am stuck in ruts of worry, or in the summer, when I need a break from writing, I'll take an afternoon off to lose myself for a few hours in a Michael Connolly, a Lee Child, a Margaret Maron, a Lisa Unger. Lately, like millions of others, I'm into Scandinavian noir.

What I hear from academic friends and graduate students is that they have too much to read and can't take any time to read for pleasure.

That attitude surprises me, since they are people who are en-

gaged in writing. Reading outside of your discipline, for form as well as content, for pleasure as well as productivity, is one of the best things you can do to improve your work. Listening carefully to well-wrought sentences, paying attention to how an author keeps a reader engaged, can only help your own prose.

And it never hurts to be reminded of how books work. Plot-driven novels tend to vary paragraph and chapter length. Would it help the pace of your dissertation to have some smaller chunks amid the big blocks of content-thick text? There are cheap ways to make things seem immediate (using the present tense; having breathless short sentences), but there are also more sophisticated methods to make your manuscript compelling. When you read fiction, you pick up on those. Dipping into poetry reminds me to think about language, about the sounds as well as the sense. When I want to get psyched for writing, I find me some Gerard Manley Hopkins. All that juice and all that joy? Bring it on.

This summer I will continue to read five books at a time. I know that I will be sharing pulpy novels with some of my colleagues, those who can steal time away from kids — and mowing the lawn, paying the bills, and preparing new classes — to read for relaxation; those who understand that while imbibing serious, substantive work can make you smarter, reading less sober stuff doesn't necessarily make you dumber.

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# Links and Resources

## **Summer Schedules**

<http://chronicle.com/article/Summer-Schedules/44272/>

*For assistant professors, the most important thing to keep in mind is that the tenure clock does not stop.*

## **Hey, Young Scholars: Here's a Personal-Development Plan For the Summer**

<https://chroniclevitae.com/news/620-hey-young-scholars-here-s-a-personal-development-plan-for-the-summer>

*Now's the time to get smarter and better connected. Here's a guide to getting started, in eight simple steps.*

## **Is There a Cure for the Summertime Blues?**

<http://chronicle.com/article/Is-There-a-Cure-for-the/65746>

*It's time to throw out the self-punishing idea that each summer must be a symphony of accomplishments.*

## **My First Faculty Summer**

<http://chronicle.com/article/My-First-Faculty-Summer/148461>

*In graduate school, Rachel Herrmann had no money but loads of unrestricted time. Now she's got a bit more money but a lot less time.*

Front photo: typewriter on the beach, by Karen Cox/Flickr Creative Commons