

For Librarians & Other Academics

GET YOUR PAPER WRITTEN & PUBLISHED

**Overcome Procrastination, Remove
Roadblocks
&
Create a Map for Success**

by

Jerilyn Veldof

University of Minnesota Libraries

Fall 2013

“If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail.”
- Harvey MacKay

As an academic librarian for nearly 20 years I have worked with many, many bright junior librarians who, for whatever reasons, could not get a paper published. Many push right up to their tenure date, populating their barren publications section of their dossier with “in press” or “in progress” papers. Thankfully, most have national committee appointments and an impressive list of presentations which along with a high performing work history sometimes saves them from getting the boot. But really, is it so hard to get papers published in *the library science field* that you must put tenure on the line because you can’t get it done?

And what about the many librarians I know who aspire to move to full librarian rank, but who can’t get that book complete or that list of scholarly publications done? Again, is it so hard to write a book or get a paper published that they stay forever stuck at associate rank?

No. No on both counts.

If you’ve gotten through library school, if you’ve gotten hired, and if you’ve gotten this far in your career, **YOU CAN GET PUBLISHED.**

There are plenty of places where you can get help on your research topic, develop a strong thesis, target the publications you want to publish in, and learn to do things like write and code surveys or figure out a chi-squared distribution. Instead, what I’m going to focus on here are the blocking and tackling skills that so often get overlooked but are what separate the successfully published author from the wannabe.

The good news is that there only are **five main things you need to do**. If you’re like many of the people I’ve helped along the way it’s likely you’re going to want to blow off at least one or two of these things. But try to resist! Even if you have to incent yourself to do this (which is a fancy way of saying bribe yourself) - do it. Think of these five things as your ticket to tenure and/or fame (...but probably not fortune):

1. Get down on paper exactly what you want to accomplish and by when in regards to your publishing goal.
2. Figure out what is *personally* motivating you to actually get that paper published.
3. Create a detailed workplan.

4. Choose a few specific tried-and-true techniques to help you follow-through on your workplan.
5. Commit!

These are NOT difficult steps. In other words, you don't need an advanced degree to do these. Anyone can do these. What IS difficult is making yourself do them. Set aside one hour - just one measly hour out of your life to do these steps. Set the timer and do it! And if you're an extrovert, find some others in your same boat, get them in the same room, and do this together.

Okay, timer on? Ready for the **ONE** hour that will change your life? You can do this!

"The greater danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we hit it." - Michelangelo

STEP ONE

Write down exactly what you want to accomplish and *by when*.

I'm going to have you do two things before you get down to the specifics. First you're going to get totally clear about why you're going through all this and second, you're going to do some blue sky thinking.

But first, let's start with getting perfectly clear about why it's so important for you to publish. In other words, establish your publishing goal.

For example, let's say Bob wants to get two articles published before he goes up for tenure in 3 years. That's his goal. Write yours down here:

Next, depending on what your goal actually is, you may need to brainstorm some writing projects that will get you to your goal.

Just let the ideas come. You might have two, three, ten ideas. These might be a mix of topics and approaches such as an in-depth research study or presentation for a conference. Get your ideas down on a piece of paper. Stand back and take a look. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the feeling of getting kicked in the gut and throwing up, and 5 being the feeling that you can hardly sit there without jumping up and down and saying “When can I start, when can I start?!” rate your ideas.

Brainstorm List	1 (yuk) ---- 5 (yay!)

Now look at the item(s) that scored the highest. If you did that project and/or took that approach, would that move you toward your goal? In Bob’s case, we’d ask would that project help him get tenure (e.g. is it a substantive research paper with strong methodology)? If not, move to the next item down.

***“Planning is a process of choosing among those many options.
If we do not choose to plan, then we choose to have others plan for us.”
- Richard I. Winwood***

Once you’ve found your project (or projects) now you can work on making it more specific.

4. Write your project as if it is a SMART objective. If you have no idea what I’m talking about, what you want to do is make the project SMART (= Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Rewarding, Time-bound). Generically this might end up looking like, “I will complete a paper on x topic by x date and get it published in the top publication in my specialty area by x date.” ... But with the x’s filled in. Bob might say, “Finish a paper based on a study comparing an online version to a face-to-face version of the same workshop for 1101 Writing Studies and submit it to *The Journal of Library Instruction* by the end of May.” Nothing fancy, but it is specific, it is measurable, it is attainable, time-bound, and maybe to Bob, rewarding.

Here goes:

STEP TWO

Figure out what is personally motivating you to actually get that paper published.

If you’re anything like our friend Bob, what you came up with might not be motivational. Like Bob, your goal might sound kind of dull and onerous, not something that would really get you moving (and if it were, what are you reading this for, anyway?).

What’s going to be more motivational is to get to the “why” underneath that goal. So if Bob were in front of me I’d ask, “Why, Bob, do you want to get two articles published in 3 years?” And he might tell me about how important it is for him to get tenure - that he and his dog are very happy in Great City and have a great house with a big yard. “I really, really, want to stay

here!” [Huge smile] Or, he might say he would be so embarrassed by not getting tenure he’d probably quit the field altogether and become a truck driver and live in his rig. [Furrowed brow.] Not good.

I’d tell Bob to pick the “why” that was most charged with emotion for him. But I would also ask him this - “Bob, think about the things that you’ve accomplished in your past that were sort of like this. Are you more motivated by optimistic visions of the future (fame, fortune, happiness, abundance) are are you more motivated by pessimistic visions of the future (the loss of something, making yourself miserable, embarrassment, guilt, futility)?¹ Okay, go with that answer. That’s your rallying cry. That’s the rationale you put on a post-it on your bathroom mirror or make as your screensaver. This is why you get yourself moving towards your goal.

Here’s some examples:

- I want to create and shape X, an entirely new sub-field in librarianship. (Positive)
- I don’t want to lose all my wonderful friends here in my library by having to leave because I couldn’t get tenure. (Negative)
- I want to be the go-to expert on X and get called in for consulting work around the country. (Positive)
- I don’t want to retire without having anything left to speak for my career in librarianship. (Negative)
- I want to learn as much as I can about X and writing this article would help me do that. (Positive)

Now, it’s your turn. What’s your “why,” what’s the thing that really motivates you?

How inspired do you now feel? If you can’t wait to jump in and get started, you’ve got the right motivator! But if you feel kind of chill about it, is there any way you can ramp up your motivators to get you to the super excited side of the spectrum?

¹ Heidi Grant Halverson has done a lot of research (and written a book) about promotion-based motivators and prevention-based motivators. You might want to start with:

<http://hbr.org/2013/03/do-you-play-to-win-or-to-not-lose/ar/1>

BONUS CONTEMPLATION

No, you don't have to answer these questions, but it would be nice if you did!

- What's so great about your goal? What is not so great about your goal?
- Are there any easier or better goals that you can think of that you might do instead?
- Regarding your SMART project, could this project be made any SMART'er?
- What do you like about this project idea? What don't you like?
- What things will you have to do or think to make this project happen?
- Might there be an easier or better project that might still meet your goal?
- Is your motivation statement still inspiring you or do you need to rethink it?

Are you anxious for the next step?

STEP THREE

Create a detailed workplan.

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." - Confucius

Now we're getting to where the rubber meets the road. This is where you'll create a specific work-plan - with dates - that you'll commit to. You can create a work-plan in a spreadsheet or just use old-fashioned paper with post-its. Pick whatever approach is most comfortable. For purposes of this process, I'll talk you through using good 'ole paper and post-its.

GET EQUIPPED

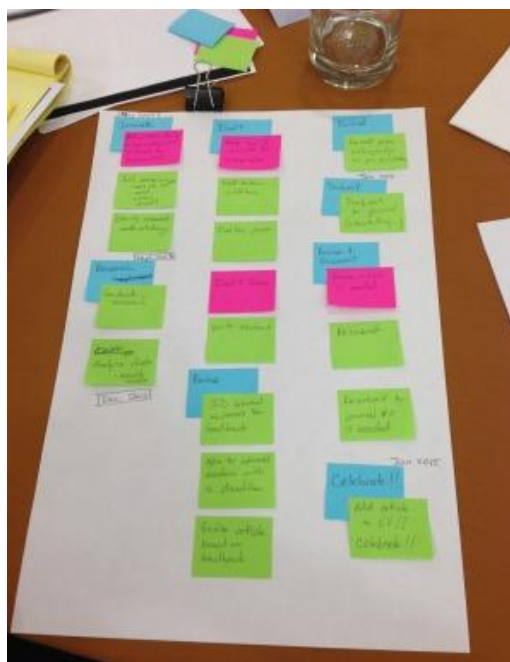
So, grab a stack of post-its. Ideally you'd have 3 colors in the mini size (and even more ideally they'd be yellow, blue and pink) but if you don't have 3 colors and you don't have those mini-sizes, just go with what you've got. If you don't have 3 colors find 3 different colored writing instruments (maybe a pencil, pen with black ink, and a pen with red ink). Also see if you can either find a large piece of paper (even flipchart sized) or horizontally tape together a few pages of blank paper.

CREATE EACH STEP

There are many possible steps in a writing project. Oftentimes people new to writing and publishing have no idea what's truly involved. This is often one of the reasons they can't get started or get stuck. Let's do something about it! Here are a number of possible steps to get you started. Pick the ones that work for you from the bullets below, add others, and put each step on a separate post-it. If you're using colored post-its use pink notes for those steps you think you'll need help or support with. Otherwise use yellow. If you're using different writing implements just make sure you keep track of which one you're using for what (regular steps or need-support steps).

Possible Steps:

- Brainstorm and select paper topic
- Articulate clearly and concisely what you wish to accomplish in the paper
- Clarify your research methodology
- Rank top 3 journals for submission
- Find author guidelines for top journal
- Write abstract
- Outline paper
- Clarify distribution of responsibilities and order of authorship (if co-authoring)
- Conduct research
- Draft paper
- Identify readers for feedback
- Submit and give deadlines for readers giving feedback
- Revise article based on feedback
- Format paper/bibliography given author guidelines
- Submit article
- Revise article if needed
- Resubmit
- Submit article to journal #2 if first journal does not except...
- Revise article if needed
- Celebrate!
- Add article to my CV



You should now have a large number of post-it notes with all your steps on them.

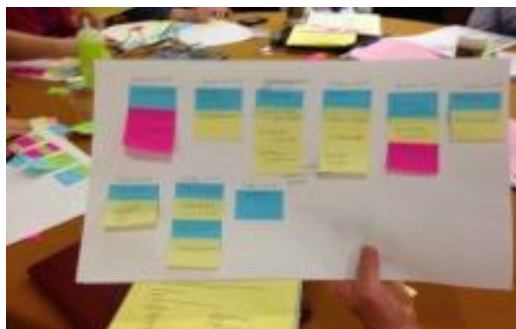
IDENTIFY KEY MILESTONES

Next start thinking about the key milestones in your project. These might be when you will complete a key deliverable (such as a first draft) or when you need to make an important decision (such as what journal to submit your work to). Eventually you'll assign times to these making them very helpful in determining whether or not you're on schedule.

Here are some examples for milestones you might use for a research paper. Write your particular milestones on blue post-it notes if you have them. Otherwise use a different writing implement than you did for regular steps and need-support steps.

Possible Milestones:

1. Identification of my Topic
2. Research
3. Draft
4. Input
5. Revision
6. Format
7. Submission
8. Revision
9. Resubmission
10. Publication and Celebration!



Once you have your milestones on your post-its find the steps you need to take to meet each of those milestones and group them together. You may need to add some steps at this point.

“A good plan is like a road map: it shows the final destination and usually the best way to get there.” H. Stanely Judd



MAKE A TIMELINE

Find that large piece of paper (earlier you either taped some together, found an 11x14 sheet or flipchart paper - that's the paper I'm referring to). Also have a calendar handy for this part of the process.

From beginning to end, transfer your milestones and steps onto this paper. Then identify when you'll start - and when you plan to complete the project.. Write these dates on the paper in the appropriate places - start with pencil. Now you're ready to fill in your timeline. If you have a firm end time, work your way backwards and give every milestone a deadline. If you don't have a firm end time, start at the beginning and work your way forward.

Research shows that people are terrible at predicting how long things will take them to do in the future. However, we're much better when we look at the past. If you need to get a realistic assessment of how long it might take you to accomplish specific milestones, review your past history if you've done something similar already or ask colleagues to give you an accurate assessment of how long it took them to do something similar *in the past*. These are called "base rates" and are much more reliable than random predictions of future behavior.

Now, of course if you are forced to complete your project on the fast track, this is the time to think very realistically about how much time a week - or even a day - you will need. Having a 6 month deadline might mean 2 hours of work a day. In contrast a more leisurely 2 year deadline might mean 2 hours of work a week. *If* you can keep up the discipline to adhere to that kind of schedule.

And that's just the kind of thing you need to think about next.

STEP FOUR

Choose specific techniques to help you follow through.

"Doers get what they want, and everyone else gets what they get"
- Jim Kukral

Very few people can keep to a work-plan without full intention. Intention means identifying and *using* techniques that work for you to keep you taking action. Every week and often, every day. Without action you pretty quickly end up with nothing.

There's plenty of research about how people successfully attain their goals. I'll include some of my favorite books on the subject at the end. But rest assured, these techniques work. It's just a matter of you finding the

techniques that work the best for *your* situation. How do you know that?

Learn from your past successes and failures.

Take a moment to think about a time in your past when you had a project similar to the one you're working on now. Ideally, choose a project that you completed and another you did not. Jot down the reasons you attribute to why you completed project A and why you didn't complete project B.

It could look something like this, on the next page:

Project A: Successfully Completed	Project B: Not Completed
Book editor was a buddy of mine and needed the manuscript by a certain date. I didn't want to let her down!	No external deadline
I wrote the whole thing by myself and didn't need to wait for anyone or negotiate with anyone. I took a week off work and finished the entire first draft.	My co-author wasn't making much progress and I didn't want to write it all by myself while he took part of the credit.
I really enjoyed the topic.	My co-author and I weren't that interested in the topic and subsequently lost our steam.

In this case, what you might learn about yourself is that you work best if you have a deadline - a short one - and you work best in very concentrated periods where you're not distracted. You also lose steam if you're not that into the topic or have to wait around for someone else.

You could then surmise some techniques or approaches that you'd want to implement for your current project. Here's three:

1. "Negotiate with my supervisor to take a week of professional leave time during the slowest part of the year."
2. "Only write if I'm responding to a call for publications that has a deadline. Ideally it would be for someone I personally know, but if it is not, I will talk to that person on the phone or face-to-face at a conference to establish a personal relationship."
3. "Either solo author a piece or divide an article up into specific segments that I can complete on my own timetable."

Now you try it:

Project A: Successfully Completed	Project B: Not Completed

And the approaches that you'll take for your current project?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

ADD TO YOUR TOOLKIT

There are many, many other tested techniques and approaches that you can borrow from others.

In this chart below, check off in the left hand column the ideas that you think would work best for you:

	Approach/ Technique	About the Approach/Technique	Examples of ways to Keep Yourself Accountable
	Make an If/Then Plan	Be very specific about what exactly you'll do, and when and where you'll work on your writing project. Leave nothing to chance. Put this into an If/Then statement (e.g. If it is Tuesday at 5:00, then I am in my office working for an hour on my writing project).	" If it is Monday or Wednesday night at 10:05 pm then I have taken the batteries out of the tv remote and am sitting at my kitchen table with my laptop and my kitchen timer working on my writing project for 30 min."
	Make an If/Then Worst Case Plan	Think of the obstacles and temptations that might get in the way of working on your writing project. Make an If/Then Plan for each of the biggies.	" If it's Monday or Wednesday night after 9:30 and the phone rings, then I'll let voice mail pick it up and ignore it until 10:40."
	Focus on the "why"	Think about your goal in big-picture terms. Fully explore all the reasons why being published is important	"I will brainstorm all the reasons why being promoted is important to me, type these up,

		to you personally.	and post my Top 5 Reasons on the refrigerator.”
	Focus on preventing something bad from happening	If you more motivated by disaster type scenarios then keep your focus on the terrible things that would happen if you didn't get published. For example, think to yourself how if you don't get published and you don't get continuous appointment you'll be incredibly embarrassed, will likely have to move for a new job and have to sell the home you love, and will hardly ever be able to see your best friend again. Sob.	“Whenever I think about my publishing goal I will think about the terrible things that will happen if I don't achieve the goal. I'll type those up and post them on the inside of my office door.”
	Focus on making something wonderful happen	On the other hand, if you are motivated by possibilities and dreams (and especially if you need to be extra creative with your writing project), keep your focus on the potential gains you'll get. For example, think to yourself about how fantastic it will be to be the national “go-to” person in your area of expertise once you've published a few articles or given a number of presentations in your area.	“I'll pretend like it's 3 years from now and will write a few pages in my journal-of-the future about how great is is that I've accomplished my goal. And now, in the present day, I will read that future journal entry every night just before I turn out the light and go to bed.”
	When things change, don't just think it, INK IT	As circumstances change, commit to keeping your work plan current.	“Every Friday afternoon before I leave for the weekend I will revisit and update my work plan.”

	Get a mentor/coach	Find a willing mentor/coach who will work closely to assist you on those troublesome steps you captured on the pink Post-its.	I will meet with Writer Bob on September 15, just as I am starting to draft my paper to get a pep-talk. I will send him my in-progress and final drafts on 9/22, 9/29 and 10/5 for his input.
	Get an accountability buddy	Partner up with a colleague and commit to being the monkey on their back, and them yours. Decide on what that means exactly. For example, agree to text each other the total minutes spent on the writing project each evening, even if that means sending "0" as a text; schedule IM or phone check-ins based on your work plans or scheduled on a certain day each week.	My Accountability Buddy and I will keep and share our work plans on Google Docs and we'll call each other at the start of each milestone to check-in.
	Set up accountability check-ins with your supervisor	Make a deal with your supervisor that the very first thing you will cover in your one-on-one meetings is progress on your work plan and discussion of any roadblocks you may be experiencing.	I will share my work plan with my supervisor and make work plan progress the first item on the agenda for each of our monthly meetings.
	Always be starting	If you can't ever seem to finish anything set start-lines instead of deadlines. So instead of worrying about finishing in some far off distant time, create lots of small starts.	I will revise my work plan to focus on starting dates.
	Work in 15 minute increments	If you're feeling overwhelmed by a large writing project, promise	I will commit to working on my project for just 15 minutes the

		yourself to work on it only for 15 minutes at a time. It might be helpful to even set a timer so you know that 15 minutes is all you have to spend.	first thing in the morning, before even checking my email.
	Use the Compound Effect	You know the saying “Slow and steady wins the race”? The Compound Effect says that small efforts, repeated over time, create compound effects - that is - they build into a much larger accomplishment. Use this if sitting down for hours to work on your paper sounds way too daunting.	I will set my alarm and spend 30 minutes after lunch each day working on my writing project.
	Focus on getting better, not on being good	Identify what you want to get better at related to your publishing goal and keep your focus on that. [Research shows that if you use your writing project to show what a good researcher/writer you are, once the road gets rocky, you’re more likely to give up.]	“I tend to be overly verbose and so I would like to be better at communicating succinctly, eliminating as many extraneous words, sentences and ideas as I can by the time I submit the paper.”
	Use financial or material <u>dis</u> incentive	Give a friend or colleague x amount of money and make them promise to donate it to the most horrendous source you can think of if you DON’T meet your publishing deadline. If you do, you get your money back!	“I will make out a check for \$200 for the X political campaign and give it to Buddy Bob to hold.”
	Use financial or material <u>in</u> centive	Hold back on getting that great thing you’ve always wanted until you get published. Combine with	“I will finally get to buy a new watch when I finish my project.”

		the idea above and say you'll get that great Whatever with the \$200 (and the revolting politician gets nothing!)	
	Set the bar high and compete against a colleague.	If you're a competitive person be sure to make your goal challenging; set the bar high and then find a colleague to compete with. Obligate the loser to some onerous task like emptying your trash can every week for a month.	Bob and I will compete to see who gets their paper published first. Whoever loses has to bring the winner lunch to their office for an entire week.
	Create triggers	Let your unconscious mind work for you by adding visual reminders and triggers that will cue you to pursue your publishing goal. You might tack up by your computer the last article that you published or make your draft paper your background image on your computer.	I will always leave a book or article for my literature review open in the center of my desk.
	Make a SMART plan	Sit down and discipline yourself to make a SMART plan for achieving your goal. SMART = Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Rewarding and Time-bound.	I will use the approach in this article to break-down my workplan into specific, measurable steps with milestones and explicit deadlines

“The last time you start is when you'll finish.” - Neil Fiore

STEP FIVE

Commit!

Without this step you might as well have watched an episode of “Mad Men” in the last hour, because none of this will work with your true commitment.

You cannot likely commit to ten techniques. Maybe not even five. This is when the 80/20 rule comes into effect. Choose the techniques that will give you the biggest impact. Yes, you can bribe yourself to finish your project by promising that you’ll get a new watch or tech gadget, but if these things don’t really float your boat they’re

likely not to work well. Yes, you can stick a list of the reasons why it’s important to you to finish this project on the fridge, but if you know you’ll never pay attention to it there, it’s not worth it. Push yourself a little.

Maybe get out of your comfort zone. Pick the one or two or five techniques where you say, “Wow, if I could actually do *that* it would really make a difference!”

Then commit. Follow-through. You are not through with this process until you have implemented your techniques!

“Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work.” Peter Drucker

First, capture the techniques you plan to use here and the way you’ll use them. This second column will look like the column on the far right, above, except tailored to you.

My Approach/Technique	My Way to Keep Accountable
1-	
2-	

3-	
4-	

Next you need to implement your techniques. This means you've actually found your Buddy and s/he knows what they're going to do for you. Or, it means you've finished the screen saver and loaded it on your computer. Take the time out now to do that or find a time on your calendar when you will commit to implementing your techniques.

Once, and only once you've implemented your techniques, you're ready to start your project!

Congratulations! You're on your way to being published!

Recommended Reading

The one book I recommend over all others (and the one I leaned on heavily for this article) is ***Succeed: How We Reach Our Goals*** by Heidi Grant Halverson. Halverson is an academic and her book is solidly based on research, but it's very readable and practical. This is a fantastic book!

Another fascinating book I highly recommend is ***Mind over Business*** by Ken Baum. Baum is a performance coach who has worked with countless athletes and business people. This book will help if your issues are more based on performance and not so much on discipline or self-control.

There are a number of books about goals, discipline, and habits. Here are some others I gleaned for this article:

- ***Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*** by Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney is fascinating. Using study after study the authors provide tangible ways to accomplish your goals by harnessing self-control. Baumeister is an academic, Tierney is a journalist. Great read.
- ***Goals!: How to Get Everything You Want -- Faster Than You Ever Thought Possible*** by Brian Tracy. This guy has written a million books, much of which reframes his other books. Lots of repetitive stuff- *Eat That Frog!: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time* and *No Excuses!: The Power of Self-Discipline* are other examples of what he creates. Tracy is a self-made millionaire and has a number of companies. Basically he talks from his experience and offers his advice – but his advice and experience is a huge seminar and book generating industry.
- ***The Compound Effect*** by Darren Hardy. Hardy publishes “Success” magazine which gives him the opportunity to rub elbows with a lot of productive, high-powered, successful people. He’s also a self-made entrepreneur. He’s built on that experience to create this hybrid book and workbook that steps you through his program for success. Nothing struck me as terribly original, but the ideas behind the compound effect could change your life. ;-)
- ***The Now Habit at Work: Perform Optimally, Maintain Focus, and Ignite Motivation in Yourself and Others*** by Neil A. Fiore. This is another program for success. Like with Hardy above, this reads like a workshop. Don’t buy it, but worth a check-out from the library.

From the Author...

This was originally a workshop I developed and gave a few times locally before enlisting a colleague, Jon Jeffryes, to do this with me at the 2013 Association of Research Libraries Annual Conference as well as several other venues.

Join a group

Following ACRL we created a Google Group for attendees who wished to join. We'd like to invite you to join the same "Get Writing" group at <http://bit.ly/1bvDKCy>

Let me know how this worked!

Please let me know how following the steps in this paper worked for you and do send me your suggestions for improving or tweaking this process!

Email: jveldof@umn.edu

Twitter: [jerilyn](https://twitter.com/jerilyn)

And remember...

***"If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail."
- Harvey MacKay***