

HOW THINKING ABOUT SEX HELPS YOU WRITE ESSAYS

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'For sale: baby shoes, never worn'

Next time you're agonizing over word limits, it might be wise to remember the famous six-word story above, attributed to Ernest Hemingway, which offers a reminder of the power of words. Chosen wisely, your words have the power to persuade, to invoke strong emotional responses or paint brilliant landscapes. Chosen badly, they infuriate markers and ultimately reduce your grades.

In this chapter we're going to start by looking at what you should know before you start to write and how to plan the perfect essay. Then, for the rest of the chapter, we'll look at the productivity of writing and things you can do to adopt the habits of successful writers (without the 10am whisky drinking, obviously).

FAIL TO PLAN, PLAN TO DICK AROUND ON YOUTUBE.

In both *How to be a Productivity Ninja* and *How to be a Knowledge Ninja*, I've dedicated whole chapters to the thorny issue of procrastination and how to get over it and create momentum. They deliberately appear near the end of the books as I want us to have ironed out some of the habits that cause procrastination along the way. But that also means I need to address it as a separate issue here. So before we dive into writing, let's address the planning that should go into an essay, report or assignment. A good dose of Ninja Preparedness here will save you lots of lost hours in the procrastination vortex. One of the scariest things for a writer is the blank page. Staring at a blank page is a terrifying part of every creative process, from writing songs to drawing pictures to writing books. You have nowhere to turn, nothing to cling to and it feels daunting. Facing the blank page with a plan, however, is empowering. So it's important, before you even sit down at your computer or put your hands over the keys of your keyboard, to map out a bit of a process.



PLANNING AN ESSAY THE TWERP WAY

I've always loved being in the flow as a writer, but it's taken me years (and three books) to recognize that writing is a process. I thought I just ... wrote stuff. I never really stopped to consider what I was doing. But in recent times as I've reflected on what I do and how I do it, I've realized that I have cobbled together something resembling a process. My process is to write the TWERP way. There are five stages:



THINKING

You'll notice that the first stage doesn't involve any writing at all. This is an important distinction to make. It's especially difficult if you feel up against a deadline to take time out to think about what you should be writing. It feels so urgent that you should 'start'.

The thinking stage is important, and needs to do several things:

1. Bring together the reading or research you've been doing (ideally into one central place – more of which shortly).
2. Start to structure the piece of writing.
3. Generate ideas for the 'scaffolding' (the beginning, middle and end).

4. Generate ideas for some of the key points or even tiny details such as little phrases you might use.
5. Give you the confidence to stare at that blank page.

Only once you've done all of these things are you ready to sit in front of the keyboard. It is my strong suggestion that you use physical pen and paper during the thinking stage. You can use Post-it notes, different colours, mind maps, the backs of envelopes, it doesn't really matter. But separating this out into an activity that you physically can't do at the computer is important. Without that distinction, it can be tempting to begin the writing before you're really ready, and that only leads to getting stuck.

Before you sit down to write, know the story you're trying to tell. Know the beginning, middle and end. Think about the 'struggle' in the middle part of the story – between good and evil, what you think is right and what you think is wrong, darkness and enlightenment.

WRITING

Once you've done some quality thinking, it's time to start writing. Now here's the bit that might freak you out. When you start writing, don't worry about whether it's any good. Seriously. Now let me explain why I say that. Writing sounds like it should be easily the biggest of the five stages. It might be, but in my experience it's usually not at all. Lots of friends and people I've worked with have asked me: 'How long did it take you to write *How to be a Productivity Ninja*?' The short answer is, 'well, I went off the grid for about 3–4 weeks and wrote every day, morning noon and night, until it was done'. So it could be said that I wrote a book in less than a month. But that's misleading for so many reasons. It ignores the two years before that where I was actively thinking about the book and the four or five months after that first draft was done where I was editing, rewriting and polishing. With all three books I've written, I've also engaged focus groups of typical readers to give me their reactions, before doing a final rewrite

and polish too. So what most people think of as the writing actually barely even amounts to the first draft.

You'll have plenty of time to edit it later; plenty of time to make those bad words good. You'll also have plenty of time (and a better perspective) to make the thing all hang together. So the worst thing you can do is procrastinate over needing the first draft to be brilliant. Give yourself the permission to write what Natalie Goldberg describes as a 'shitty first draft'. Relieved of that pressure to make it brilliant from the moment you start writing, you can really focus on your ideas and experiment – knowing that you can change it again later – and not crumble under the weight of personal expectations of perfectionism.



EDITING

Editing is different from writing. It requires more of a critical eye. Half of editing is the drudgery of spelling and grammar checking, but the other half of it is about readability. This is a difficult thing to do as you go along, as by its nature it requires you to put yourself in the mind-set of a reader, not a writer. It needs you to read your work as if you're reading it for the first time, and I find personally the only way I can do this is to put some distance between the time I finish writing and the time I start editing. Much like baking a cake or a loaf of bread, the worst time to taste it is the second it leaves the oven: you have to let it sit and let the flavours settle down.

REWRITING

Stephen King has a saying: 'writing is rewriting'. In his book, *On Writing*, he describes how he will write a whole novel, then leave it in a drawer for a couple of weeks before he takes it back out and reads it again as a reader. And then, he says, the work really starts, as he begins editing and rewriting, sculpting the words into something

often quite different from what that first draft contained. This is powerful as an approach, because it reinforces that permission to write the 'shitty first draft', safe in the knowledge that you are not yet committing to every word.

I also find that often, to work out what I think about something, it helps to first have something to disagree with. Putting your first ideas down doesn't always mean putting your best ideas down, but it does mean that when you come back to think about them again, you're not starting from a blank page and you're probably starting with something familiar enough that you can shape it to the conclusion you want. This, incidentally, is something I'm passionate about when it comes to productivity too: people are often so paralysed by the idea of finishing before they even start, and the 'something to disagree with' approach is liberating. Essentially, any decision trumps indecision: even if you make the wrong choice, you have something to reverse or undo, which is still easier than having nothing to work with at all.

As I mentioned before, when it comes to writing books, I usually operate a focus group system, where a dozen or so people get to see the first draft (easily the scariest part of the whole process for me) and then they provide feedback. This also leads to lots of rewriting. The more you write and the more you know your audience, the more you develop an instinct for what is going to strike a chord or entertain and what's not. But no matter how good this instinct is, it's frequently still wrong, and it's precisely because you're so entrenched in what you're writing that you can't see the wood from the words. So having someone – anyone! – read your work for the first time will give you a unique perspective. It could be that you swap with someone on your course and you read and critique each other's work, but it could just as easily be your housemate who does Geology or your mum. While there's some benefit in having someone read it who knows the subject matter, what they're really doing here is checking the flow, checking it's readable and honestly describing their experience as a reader.

POLISHING

The final step is polishing. Save references, page numbering, text sizing and formatting until the very last minute. Learn to live with imperfection in the text until then. You may want to compile parts of the bibliography as you go along, but resist the temptation to be distracted by this in the text too much as you work – forget about it looking polished on the screen. That only matters when you press ‘print’ or ‘send’ for the final time. The reason for this approach is that when you’re writing or editing or rewriting, you really need to have all of your Ninja Focus on the subject matter and the flow of the words, not half an eye picking up rogue extra commas or brackets. Do everything you can to keep the momentum going and resist every task or mouse click that stops the flow of the typing and thinking.




THINGS TO REMEMBER AS YOU WRITE

For the rest of this chapter, I’m going to focus on simple and practical writing tips. We’ll start with how to structure your paragraphs, then look at how to make your work ‘marker-friendly’ and then also look at some writing productivity tips to keep you focussed and balanced along the way. Whether you’re writing factual essays or persuasive arguments, there really are some simple rules to the process that will massively improve your ability to write and ensure your words attract more influence and of course, higher marks.

HOW THINKING ABOUT SEX WILL HELP YOUR WRITING

We’ve already talked about the structure of your work, with a beginning, a middle and an end. So now let’s talk about that pesky middle bit, which is usually by far the largest of the three sections. The middle bit is where you’re exploring the arguments, presenting the facts, showing the struggle or the journey that you need to complete before you can reach your conclusion. Far from this being one large chunk of words, it’s really a collection of paragraphs. And getting a good structure for your paragraphs will help you not just with the

planning but with the writing too. To make the perfect paragraph, make it SEX(Y):

S UBJECT   
 E XPLAIN WHAT YOU MEAN
 E XAMPLES TO BACK UP YOUR ARGUMENT
 WH(Y) THIS RELATES TO THE REST OF YOUR ESSAY

So make each paragraph a little exploration into another idea. Begin each paragraph with the subject matter for that paragraph. Next, explain the idea in more detail and then follow this with examples so that the reader begins to understand the point you're making. Finally, you might finish a paragraph with the 'why', underlining the reason you believe in the idea or have come to the conclusion that you have drawn. So let's say I'm writing a paragraph about Hamlet's indecision in an essay about flawed protagonists in Shakespeare. I might begin with a bold statement like: 'Hamlet's indecisiveness at crucial moments causes his downfall.' Then, I would explain the point I'm making and the consequences indecision had on Hamlet's life. Then, I would provide some examples of particular moments in the story, or even a quote from the text itself, as an example to back up my explanation. And finally, a really great paragraph would link back to why this matters for the rest of the essay, so I might end this paragraph by saying: 'Ultimately, Hamlet's indecisiveness is his fatal flaw, and Fortinbras's focus and determination make him the natural antidote to the "rotten state" of Denmark.' That whole paragraph is really making one distinct point, but then the structure around it adds credibility and evidence for the reader, which makes your arguments easy to understand, believe in – and to give high marks to, of course.

Of course, it's useful to know these rules first so that you can break them, and there will always be exceptions, otherwise your writing would risk becoming formulaic. But writing in this way then makes your job of planning the essay really very easy, because you can plot out the entire essay as one-sentence paragraph openers. You can write out main points you're going to cover in each paragraph, and then this provides the structure for you to build your writing around. Here's an example of how I would structure an essay about how lobbying groups influence government indecision on the issue of climate change – it's simplistic because I'm trying to make it applicable for everyone, but obviously when you write you'll bring your own style and expertise to the table:

Beginning. My fundamental argument is that lobbying is playing a role in creating chaotic governmental indecision on the issue of climate change and energy security, and that the current political status quo is unable to solve the issue.

1. From the scientific evidence, it is clear that man-made climate change is real.
2. Governments and politicians have an interest in protecting their people and protecting economic interests.
3. Lobbying groups have immense power over politicians.
4. Often there are hidden links between the two groups, such as politicians receiving places on the boards of lobbying groups and oil firms.
5. At the same time, politicians rarely win votes for long-term strategic decision-making and 'short-termism' is prevalent.
6. The short-term profit of the oil and gas industries is favoured above long-term economic stability.
7. It is extremely difficult for the companies to abandon profitable methods, and CEOs risk their jobs when they do so.

8. While it is easy to blame lobbying groups, there needs to be a more joined up solution, which discourages the oil and gas companies from using lobbyists to protect short-term thinking.
9. There is a lack of global leadership and a need for an inspiring figure to bring the parties together with a compelling vision, creating pressure and making lobbying more difficult and less profitable.
10. Leaders such as Bob Geldof (Live Aid), who came from outside the political environment, have been more successful with big campaigns than leaders like Al Gore, who have political 'baggage'.

End. It is clear that lobbying is playing a huge role in creating the chaotic indecision that risks our future sustainability. However, my conclusion is that with a global leadership figurehead who can present a compelling vision for future energy security, the issue might be more easily addressed by politicians and companies because of the public and voter pressure this campaign brought about.

Once I have this structure, each of the sentences (1–10) becomes a paragraph, using the SEX(Y) model. This little bit of planning helps me to then stay focussed on the argument and make sure my points remain on track.

MAKING YOUR MARK ON THE MARKER

Markers have a tough job, but know this provides the key to getting into their good books. Just take a moment to think about how long it takes to critically review your essay. Then think about how many people are also handing in the same essay at the same time. Now think about how many other classes that tutor is teaching. And now you have some idea about the banality of marking that the average teacher or academic is faced with! Achieving top marks happens when you brighten up their day.

One of the best ways to cheer up your tutor is to make your work marker-friendly, so here are ten tips for giving bored and stressed markers what they want:

1. Look pretty for your first impression

Even though the common phrase is ‘never judge a book by its cover’, markers are already marking your work before they’ve even read the first words. How your work is set out on the page matters. There are two possibilities here. Firstly, let’s assume that your course has issued some kind of style guide, detailing the size of text, the fonts, the spacing and the style you should use. If they have, FOLLOW IT! This is a bugbear of many markers I’ve spoken to, where students are showing them that they can’t follow the simplest instructions. Not a great first impression. Secondly, where there is a little more freedom or vagueness at play (where only a loose style guide exists, say, or none at all), then make sure you use spacing, an easily readable font (Times New Roman is generally considered to be the quickest to read), leave good margins, use regular headings and other such devices to make your work attractive as it sits on the page. First impressions count. Make a good one.

2. Feed them one bite at a time

This is possibly the most important thing to stay aware of as you’re writing. A marker is trying to do two things: read your work and then break off from that to think about the marks they’re awarding you. By using good spacing, clear paragraphs and good subtitles – depending on what is appropriate for your subject – you allow them to take a breath and do their job, without frustration. Feed them one bite at a time and they won’t feel overwhelmed. Splashing the page with a massive blob of text and letting them figure out the structure? You’re doomed. Make it easy.

3. Keyword scanning

These next three tips also help to make it easy for your marker. Think about the ‘keywords’ that a marker might be looking for. If

you're working on an essay about research methods into cures for cancer, your marker will likely want to scan down and see if you have included words like *In Vitro*, Oncogenomics or Protodynamic therapy. Luckily, the kinds of words that your marker is scanning for are often words that are easy to spot! Putting these words in the first line of paragraphs (and repeating them in the last line of the paragraph) is a great way to give your marker the confidence to say, 'this person knows this stuff' before they've even digested the first paragraph.

4. Break the flow

The use of bold type, italics, capitals and numbers are all, if used sparingly, great ways to highlight particular words (although you should check to see if your institution has a style guide that prohibits this). Used too much, these things lose their meaning and emphasis and actually have the opposite effect – they make it more difficult to navigate the text and annoy the marker. But slipping one in every page or two should just create that little tiny moment where the reader is forced to break their flow, which when your reader is a marker, allows them an anchor point to come back to while they think about and score your work.

5. Quote

If you're writing about a text, you need to give the message that you're familiar with the original material, so dropping in the occasional quote will add some reassurance. Again, overdoing this technique will be annoying, but a few knowing nods to quotes directly from the text shows that you've done your research and can be trusted in making your arguments.

6. Passion-pandering

Of course, if the person marking your work was also your class teacher or lecturer, you have another secret weapon: pandering to their passion! Think back to the class or review your notes. What was

the joke, fact, or the little obsession, where you suddenly felt their passion-level increase? Was there something you could tell they were particularly interested in? Teachers and lecturers are often motivated by wanting to share their passions and ideas with the world, and if you can show that they've made you passionate or interested in what they're saying, that's the best form of job satisfaction they can get. It gives them a warm glow! If you can, establish this by stealth outside of the class, and then you have the basis for an essay that the marker will enjoy reading.

7. Keep it simple

I often find that as I'm writing something I have more thoughts that could easily develop into different directions. Thus, a 1,500 word piece has the potential to career and meander into something closer to 5,000 words. It's not that those other ideas are bad, they're just good for different essays – that you're not writing! So stay Ruthlessly on-topic. Know when you need to rein in your own enthusiasm and keep the narrative structure simple so that you don't risk someone getting lost reading it.

8. Let sub-headings be your guide

One of the most powerful structural weapons you have is the sub-heading. These cunning little mini-titles should act as little signposts through the journey of your narrative. Choose the words carefully because they carry a lot of weight. You can make them occasionally witty and entertaining, but most of all, make sure they carry the reader through the sections, again focussing on the marker's ability to skim-read. Occasionally certain institutions have differing attitudes here about the use of sub-headings – some may encourage them, and others may not permit you to use them at all – but even if you can't use them in the final piece, using sub-headings to aid your own thinking and get clear on the structure of the piece is a great tip (you can always take them out once it's all come together).

9. Be yourself

Everyone loves to recognize the human being behind what they're reading. While it's easy to adopt generic styles, adding a little personality to your written work will make it more engaging. To do this, just be yourself. Throw away some of the rules and express what you want to express – and be confident in doing so.

10. All's well that ends well

Make sure your first and last paragraphs are well-constructed. The first paragraph should tell the reader clearly what the rest of the essay is going to tell them, while the last paragraph should remind them what you've told them and how you've answered the question. The last paragraph is likely to be the thing that lingers most strongly in the marker's mind as they make their judgement about your mark, so make it clear. If appropriate, make it a rousing and passionate conclusion. Burn fires and light fireworks in their mind.

WRITING PRODUCTIVITY

Writing, particularly if you are engaged in long essays or a thesis, can be a test of mental stamina (and sometimes physical stamina too if you're sitting in one position for too long). It's certainly an attention management challenge. Luckily, we've already made you a Ninja, so here is the Ninja way to handle long writing sessions and still come out on top.



THE TWO-HOUR RULE

When it comes to prolonged periods of writing, I tend to live by the two-hour rule: in any given session of writing, you have at most two hours of proactive attention to 'spend'. Knowing this allows you to quickly realize that spending half that time getting 'warmed up' while you check Facebook messages is a

criminal waste. It's not to say that you can't do more than two hours of writing in a day, but I think it's difficult to spend much more than two hours in one sitting, before having at least an hour's break and doing something else to refresh. I wrote a large chunk of this book from a beach hut in Sri Lanka, precisely because I wanted to put in a lot of hours and avoid distractions, but even then, you need to break off from the writing to refresh, otherwise you quickly find that you're spending hours and hours chugging through sub-optimal performance. So give yourself a break, and you'll notice the positive effects.

CLOSE YOUR EYES

Two of the best ways to press the mental reset button and enforce an attention break after a couple of decent hours of writing are naps and meditation. A quick power nap (no more than an hour) will leave you feeling fresh and raring to go again. Meditation is another great way to feel refreshed because it quietens the mind, so you go from thinking about everything in the world, to thinking only of your own breathing in this particular moment.

GET OVER YOURSELF

Napping or meditating in the middle of the day can feel a little naughty. So can eating meals at odd times, or craving a lot of snacks, or skipping your usual exercise routines. It's best to get over the guilt and more importantly, to listen to your own body. Disregard the rules and social conventions. Nap when you want, meditate if you want to, eat at times that suit you – and as long as you're not waking up everyone else in your house, keep whatever routine you choose. Don't feel guilty about any of it, and look after yourself instead.

CONSTRAINTS

Play with constraints. Rather than giving yourself all evening to write, decide that you're going to put in two good hours and then go out. Or go out for the morning and do your writing in the afternoon. This

sounds counterintuitive, but it will actually increase your productivity, whereas sitting at the desk all day forcing out that third hour, but getting no rest or Balance in your life is not just inefficient, but it will quickly turn your writing into a joyless chore (and I'm pretty sure if you asked your favourite authors which of their works were produced as a joyless chore, the answer would be 'none'). So play with constraints and mini-deadlines – Balance your day with writing and other things and you'll notice your productivity improving.

POMODOROS AND ATTENTION

You'll remember the Pomodoro Technique, where you work in 25-minute chunks? This is something I use a lot when I'm writing. 25-minute chunks are just enough to get one big section down, or a few key paragraphs. Then you break for five minutes and repeat. Typically I might squeeze five Pomodoros in before I take a longer break, so just slightly more than the two-hour rule.

I'VE STARTED SO I WON'T FINISH

As much as it is useful, the Pomodoro Technique can often be annoying when you're working on something big. The reason is it breaks your flow and forces you to have a five-minute break. 'Ah! How will I know where I was?' is the common fear. It can feel annoying having to get settled back down after your five-minute break and get back into the flow. To make it easier, here's my killer Ninja productivity tip for when you're writing. Never get up to have a break when you've just finished a sentence or section. Get up to go for a break when the cursor is flashing in the middle of a sentence, even in the middle of a word. This will feel really weird at first. But try it and I promise you you'll be amazed at how quickly it gets you back in the zone. Give your mind a place to latch onto as soon as you sit back down, rather than creating the thinking and backtracking that's necessary when you're looking at a completed section and wondering where to go next.

CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Self-control is overrated. We're often happier letting ourselves down than we are letting other people down. Luckily, there are ways you can turn this to your advantage. Create writing partnerships: pairing up with a friend and sitting in a room with your laptops writing is a great way to keep each other focussed, especially to overcome Distant Deadline Deficiency. There are all kinds of writing groups, both in-person and online, where you can sit and write with like-minded people to keep you accountable. You can also ask the people you live with to 'witness' you completing a thousand words, or getting to the end of a piece of work. We hate looking foolish or letting other people down, much more so than we hate letting ourselves down, so create some accountability.

CREATE THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

We've talked already in this book about things that help you keep your Ninja Focus. Since writing requires a lot of proactive attention, you need to do everything possible to create the right environment. And allow yourself to indulge your 'inner diva' here to some extent. If you like working on a particular table, or listening to a particular type of music, or like the room to look or feel a certain way, then go for it. Get the environment right – partly because doing so gives you one less excuse to not work!

STAND UP

It's been said that sitting is the new smoking. It's not good for our bodies. Standing desks are now commonplace in many offices, and even available from places like Ikea as the idea of standing at your desk becomes more mainstream. I currently alternate between a standing desk and a sitting one and I find the variety really helps keep me focussed. But more importantly, when I stand up I have much less shoulder tension and back pain, and apparently I'm burning off a lot more calories, too, so that's a bonus!

Scrivener

Scrivener is an alternative to Microsoft Word, Mac's Pages and other word processing apps, and it's what I use when I'm writing. I'm a total fan. It has a few neat features that save a lot of time, particularly if you are writing something that involves a lot of research documents or chapters. What makes it different? Put simply, it avoids some of the 'fiddlyness' of those other packages. Imagine that instead of writing one document like you do in Word, you have a different document for each chapter, you can create new ones and move them around with ease, and you can save them as one complete piece as well as individually. This allows you to flit from the top to the bottom to the middle of your work easily, and without the continuous scrolling that Word documents necessitate. Underneath all of the chapters I'm writing, I have all my research material so I can refer to it instantly, all of which open as I click them, and then I don't need to close them once I've taken what I need, I just click back to the chapter I'm working on. It's hard to describe or emphasize just how much friction this removes from the writing process, but basically it keeps you firmly in the zone.



It saves your work every ten seconds, without fail. So if ever your computer runs out of juice or crashes, then you know you won't lose any work in the process. I have mine automatically saving my work to Dropbox too, so if I left my computer on a train, or if it was stolen, I'd know my work was safe.

It also has some brilliant settings like the 'distraction free screen' that puts all the settings and other windows you have open in the background and forces you to focus only on what you're writing. And at the end of the process, if your tutor wants the final version in Microsoft Word (or any other file format) it takes a matter of seconds to export the whole thing to a Word document. You can even export your work into e-book format and have it for sale on Amazon within minutes, if you so wish!

Scrivener isn't free – an education licence is £24 at the time of writing – and of course there are many free alternatives, but if you're going to spend so many hours of your life writing essays and compiling research, this probably isn't the place in your life I'd advise scrimping to save £24! Scrivener is available to purchase from www.literatureandlatte.com

PRÉCIS WRITING

Finally, in this chapter, a few (short) words about writing a précis. A précis is a short summary of a longer piece, usually no more than a third of the original passage. Learning to write them is a useful skill to help you understand longer pieces and exercise critical thinking. It's also a useful revision tool. Here are four quick rules to help you write précis quickly and easily:

- ▶ Read the whole piece first (at least speed-reading, if not feast-reading).
- ▶ Be clear in your mind what the piece is about, and write the first sentence or two, which should summarize the main point of the piece.
- ▶ Next, work paragraph by paragraph. If you are writing a précis of your own work, this should be easy, as you're using the first sentence in each paragraph to introduce a new point in each paragraph. So if you've followed this rule, it should be as easy as taking the first sentence of each paragraph and compiling these to make up your précis.
- ▶ Finally, read your précis from start to finish, making sure that it 'stands up' on its own. You may still need a few little tweaks, edits and polishes.

TWO ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR SUMMARIZING KEY CONCEPTS

Learning to summarize is a valuable transferable skill. Here are two quick tips to get you thinking along the right lines here:

1. Use the 'curious, intelligent six-year-old test'. If you don't know how to explain the concept to an intelligent, curious six-year-old, then you don't understand it. When asked by people who don't like football what the 'offside rule' is, so many people start talking about players being level and two players in front of the goal and various babbly jargon. Using this test, what I say is: 'it's a rule to prevent people just hanging around by the goal, or "goal-hanging", as it's sometimes called.' Get to the nub of *why* this matters.
2. My friend Rosie from the National Union of Students often asks students to summarize an issue in a tweet. Whittling down the main point(s) to just 140 characters takes discipline – a great example of a constraint being a useful tool.



Ninja Cheats

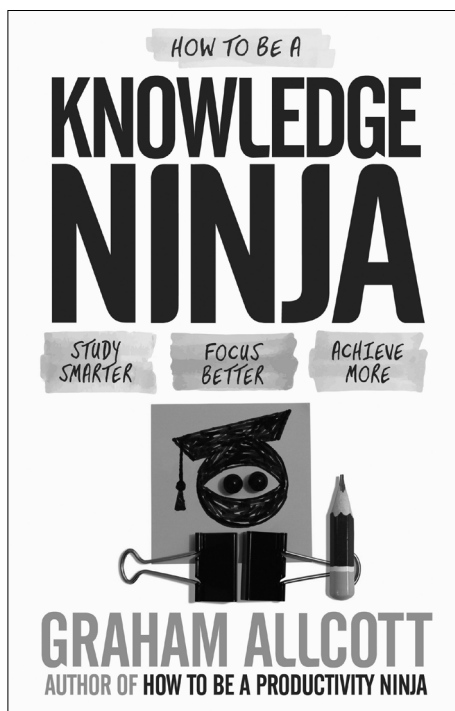
- ▶ If you have a big essay to write and you're running out of time, I'd recommend starting with the 'Writing Productivity' section on **page 13**. This will give you some shortcuts to crack on at maximum speed.
- ▶ Instead of writing an outline structure of the essay, use the 'SEX(Y)' model by writing the 'subject' sentence for each paragraph. This will give you the structure and then you can fill in the gaps later.
- ▶ Create accountability – tell someone when your essay will be finished. And then the race is on!



Are you a Knowledge Ninja?

- ▶ A Knowledge Ninja knows Ruthless Focus is important for writing. This is the time to put other bits of your life on hold (for a few hours or a few days) and rack up the Fun Points to spend when the work is done!
- ▶ A Knowledge Ninja is Prepared. Tools like Scrivener offer the best possible chance to stay in the zone.
- ▶ A Knowledge Ninja uses Stealth and Camouflage to protect writing time and avoid interruptions and distractions.

— AVAILABLE NOW —



HOW TO BE A KNOWLEDGE NINJA

STUDY SMARTER. FOCUS BETTER. ACHIEVE MORE.

Fed up with procrastination? Studying hard, but not getting anywhere? Overwhelmed by everything you have to learn? Whether you're studying for exams, trying to get essays done or simply need to improve how you absorb knowledge in your day-to-day life, it's time to think like a Ninja!

Let bestselling author Graham Allcott show you how to:

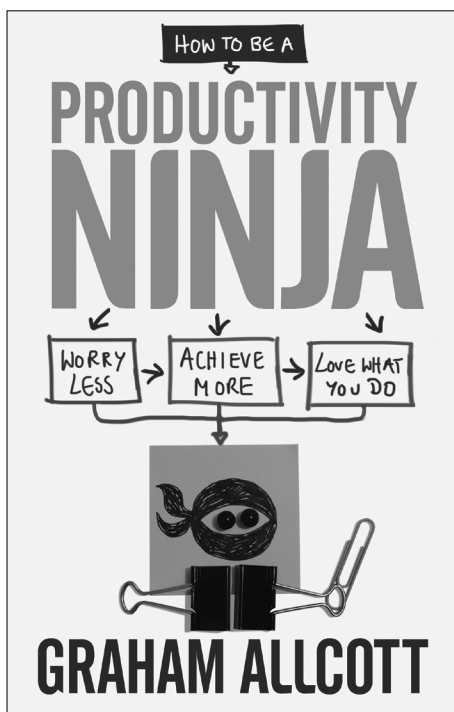
- Harness Ninja techniques from Agility to Zen
- Work smarter, not harder
- Control exam nerves
- Love learning again

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If you want to boost productivity in your organization, Think Productive runs a full range of in-house workshops to do exactly that. We started in the UK and are now making our way around the world, too:

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*'Entertaining and packed with useful ideas.
Extremely useful and thought-provoking.'*

– Heath Heatlie, GlaxoSmithKline

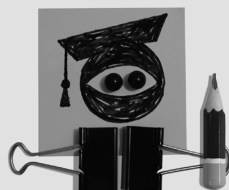
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Graham delivers a range of keynote talks and workshops on the productivity of work and learning, all around the world.

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