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Write place at the write time: A study of how writing contexts affect rates of productivity and perceptions of success in creative writing

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Write Place at the Write Time: A Study of How Writing Contexts Affect Rates of Productivity
and Perceptions of Success in Creative Writing

An Honors College Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

by Sydnie Rebecca Long

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Accepted by the faculty of the School of Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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Acknowledgements Page

I first had the idea for this project during a course in my sophomore year, where we had to write a project proposal on a topic of our choice. Even when I wrote that, I had a strong feeling I would use the same topic for my thesis, which I would begin working on about a year later. The professor who taught that course, naturally, became my adviser, and so I'd first and foremost like to thank Dr. Jen Almjeld for helping me along this thesis process for the year and a half I officially worked on the project, and for the time before that, when I was only pondering the idea. Having been through the thesis process before, she lent me great advice, feedback, and amusement. I'd also like to thank my readers Heather Comfort and Ginger Moran, who have also taught courses I've taken while at JMU, and have been beacons of light along the way. Dr. Scott Lunsford, although he wasn't officially a member of my committee, served as a valuable helping hand and supporter.

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Abstract

This research explores the writing contexts of a few creative writers in an effort to learn more about the habits and conditions with which creative writers prefer to work. My goal is to observe how different contexts affect the success or productivity a writer experiences. I will build my project off the central question, is there a correlation between writing contexts and success in writing? From there, I will divide the project into three subsections guided by four subquestions aiming to explore where and how writers write, and gain an insight to their views on what success and productivity mean to a creative writer.

Introduction

Many have heard about the archetype of the aspiring writer sitting in a coffee shop, clacking away on his keyboard from the first whiff of coffee in the morning till the chairs are stacked on the tops of tables at night, working hard on the next hit screenplay or the great American novel. In his article, “Coffee Shop Writing in a Networked Age,” Michael J. Faris, assistant professor of technical communication and rhetoric at Texas Tech University, said that coffee shops “offer something that the isolation of an office cannot: a lively, social atmosphere with ambient sounds, movements around me that serve not to distract but to help me focus, and my own ability to move” (Faris). What Faris describes here is his version of what I have termed a writing context. Context generally refers to the circumstances—physical, emotional, historical, and political—that surround a given situation or event. In this study, I am particularly interested in contexts surrounding writing and its process, and how specific writers are affected by the removal or alteration of their contextual preferences. Here, writing contexts include both writing conditions and writing rituals.

Writing conditions make up the *where* of the writing context; in other words, the physical space in which a writer writes and the mood set within that space. This may include the location, the time of day, lighting, decorations, the surface used to write on, whether music is playing, and so on. Often times, but not always, a space must meet certain conditions in order for a writer to feel comfortable writing there. On a similar note, Jackie Grutsch McKinney, a professor of rhetoric and composition at Ball State University, wrote that “Writing center spaces tend to be marked with particular objects to achieve a certain mood, serve specific purposes, or send a particular message to those who use the space” (2005). Writing rituals consist of the *what* of the writing context, or what is done within the space or conditions. Rituals are integral parts of the

writing process because they may help writers reduce their anxiety, promote a sense of control, and increase linguistic fluency (Dobie, Maher, McDonald, and O'Shaughnessy, 2002). Some examples include any preferred beverages, sworn-by or "lucky" activities done before, during, or after writing, rereading previously written words to figure out where to start that day, or even setting a goal for how many words or pages the writer aims to write in that session.

From conducting my study, two things became apparent as important conditions in a writing environment: lighting and sound. Lighting is important in many parts of our life as it allows us to see things. A home design website, for example, stresses that "light is the source of life, giving us needed energy and uplifting our spirits" ("Importance of Home"). Although, even for writers who write in little or no lighting, that darkness is still a type of lighting that may be very important for setting the mood. Sound, depending on the type, can also set the mood for writers, and it can just as easily distract. Some writers like complete silence, others may prefer the ambient noise of public spaces such as coffee shops, but many like to listen to music, often without words. During my study, I played with the factor of sound, telling study participants to write with headphones in one quiet location, but to do without in a location loud with chatter and movement. Nona Mae King of the writing blog *Helping Writers Become Authors* says that music can encourage focus, enhance mood, and inspire. As a creative writer myself, music does all of those things for me, as I often nod my head to alternative rock music (with lyrics) as I type out the next scene.

My own personal writing context is not far from that coffee shop writer cliché. I enjoy sitting in the café of a bookstore, smelling that new book and coffee smell, as I crank out the story I've been working on for way too long. I find myself most productive while writing at that bookstore. There's something about seeing others around me working as diligently as I am that

focuses me. It's a different location from my home, where there are a thousand little distractions or reminders of a thousand other things I could be doing instead. Being surrounded by all those bookstore books inspires me to get my own story on those shelves one day, where it may join the ranks of books from writers who've also poured their hearts and souls into a binding of paper. Like many other writers I know, I'm comfortable writing in more than just the one context, though all of mine are strikingly similar. All of them involve me sitting in or on a comfortable piece of furniture, situated at a desk or hard surface of some sort, and feeling a tingle in the back of my head that says I'm ready to write. I'm more creative at night when I'm in a semi-sleepy state, a hot cup of fruity tea is within my reach, and only a dim lamp and my computer screen light the room. In this study, influenced by my own awareness of my writing context, I want to explore the variations in writing contexts to find the differences and similarities in the productivity of writers.

Productivity can be measured in many ways. I measure my own through word counts. On average, I can write about 2,000 words in one four-hour sitting, so long as I have a very good idea of where I'm going once I start. But even that only happens when I'm really focused. On some of my best days, I can write between 4,000 and 7,000 words, but that's spread across many hours interrupted by many breaks with many moments staring off into space. On my best writing spree to-date, I stayed awake until seven in the morning and wrote over 11,000 words on the backend of some severe jetlag, and went on to write a total of 21,000 words that week. Other ways to measure productivity may be counting pages or chapters, or just by the feeling you get at the end of a writing session, as I discuss later in the Literature Review chapter. This study will consider several kinds of productivity writers face, including a lack of it.

The life of a creative writer is an interesting one, with so many particular elements

tailored to the liking of each individual involved. Some writers say that to write, one has to be okay with being alone, that one must have a love of reading, and that, most importantly, one must write. Always. A person should not be a writer if the intention is to be the next Stephen King or J.K. Rowling; people become writers because they have a story that needs telling, and it shouldn't matter whether one or one million people read it. Stephen King himself said in his book, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, "Writing isn't about making money, getting famous, getting dates, getting laid, or making friends. In the end, it's about enriching the lives of those who will read your work, and enriching your own life, as well" (269). What they don't tell you is that while an idea for a story can sometimes appear overnight, the process to turn that story from a figment of your imagination into a tangible thing others can appreciate is a lengthy, arduous process. Perseverance, vision, confidence, and often sacrifice are just a few of the many qualities creative writers need to survive in a world where there's an aspiring writer around every corner.

My interest in writing contexts derives from my position as an insider to both creative and technical writing fields. As a student studying technical writing, I'm trained to look at things with a critical eye, examining the impact of factors such as the positioning and design of a space—whether physical or digital—on an audience. Is the audience receiving information in the most efficient way? How can that delivery of communication be facilitated? In terms of this study, I was curious to learn more about the subject of writing in place and the potential adaptability of a writer in changing their writing context to shed light on my own process and that of others. Sometimes, I feel compelled to completely alter my writing context to a kind of place I haven't written before, just to see what happens. And I'm curious to know how others would be affected by the same type of change, especially those who are inclined to write in the same place each time. What I want to know is how and where other writers write, where they

feel most productive, and what kinds of habits they might have to get the ideas flowing. That's what this study will focus on: the conditions and habits of writers that lead them to be as productive or successful as they can be.

The next chapter will engage both scholarly and non-scholarly sources to assemble a rounded view of the different aspects of the creative writing process. I'll look at academic journals and blog articles alike—a combination of research and personal anecdotes, both of which I think are important to include. Academic research hardly covers all areas of this topic, and personal anecdotes lend the type of intimate perspectives of experience that academic studies lack. The people with the most experience writing are writers, and not all of them have require institutional backing to tell their tales.

Literature Review

While success is often thought of as accomplishing a goal or overcoming an obstacle, defining success in writing can be complicated. What does success look like to writers? Does a manuscript need to be completed before a writer feels successful, or do writers instead use smaller milestones to mark success? In an article for the *Harvard Business Review*, Boris Groysberg, a professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, and Robin Abrahams, a research associate, write about the difference between objective and subjective metrics in measuring individual success: “Subjective success is an individual’s response to an objective situation. A corporate lawyer may work for a highly respected firm...but if...practicing law seems merely a good way to make a living and doesn’t provide an intellectual buzz, she won’t *feel* successful” (“What Does Success”). Completing a manuscript can seem like the ultimate measure of success, but getting there could mean taking pleasure in the littler things, such as deciding the protagonist’s name or outlining a chapter’s events. By the end, the finished product could have more meaning to the writer because they took pride in every step along the way. Researchers Teresa Amabile and Steven J. Kramer write of the “progress principle”, stating that even achieving small wins and frequently experiencing a sense of progress while doing meaningful work can boost motivation and lead one “to be creatively productive in the long run” (“The Power of Small”).

Not only is success hard to measure for writers, so too is productivity. Ask any creative writer what they think productivity means and they might define it differently. To me, it’s more the feeling I get when I force myself to close my computer at the end of a wonderful writing session. I walk out of the bookstore café smiling widely, proud of myself for having written more words than I might have expected, and being satisfied with those words long after. A study

conducted by professor Adam Grant of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that “employees display[ed] higher levels of persistence, performance, and productivity when they experience[ed] prosocial and intrinsic motivations in tandem” (“Does Intrinsic Motivation” 8). For writers, then, it may be important to receive positive feedback from peers and teachers while also finding motivation within themselves. Writers can measure productivity by logging a certain number of hours writing, maintaining a certain level of focus for a period of time, pushing through an issue in the plot, and so on—but feeling intrinsically productive paired with thinking about the ideal potential outcomes of finishing a project, may be what motivates writers to keep going.

But for many, feeling productive and feeling successful are two sides of the same coin. In wondering what made so many of the great writers successful in their crafts, I looked into the habits or routines many famous writers engaged in to make themselves the most productive. Maria Popova’s article, “The Odd Habits and Curious Customs of Famous Writers,” based off Celia Blue Johnson’s *Odd Type Writers*, touches on the habits and rituals of many well-known writers. The habits came about for different reasons: some writers did them out of necessity, others were motivated by competition; some habits were merely practical, and others were obsessive and strange. Truman Capote’s habit of never starting or ending a work on a Friday and changing hotel rooms when the number had a “13” in it are on the more superstitious side of the spectrum. Toward the other end, Oscar Wilde wrote exclusively with blue ink because it dried faster than other inks, and therefore reduced smudging (Popova). Virginia Woolf wrote standing up, and though I initially assumed it was because of a health or posture issue, she did it solely for the purpose of competition. Her sister painted standing, and Woolf, not to be outdone, chose to write in the same manner, according to Popova. James Joyce, who was nearly blind from the

disease myopia, always wrote in crayon while lying in his bed wearing a white coat. At first, that may seem just as strange as Capote's triskaidekaphobia, but with Joyce's pragmatism that the white coat reflected light onto the paper, and that the large print from the crayon helped him see the words (Popova), his habit was more practical than strange.

It often seems that once writers uncover a method that works or that they are comfortable with, they continue with it as long as it's successful. Jack London wrote 1,000 words each day without fail, according to Popova, and Victor Hugo locked himself in his house until he finished writing *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Alexandre Dumas wrote his fiction on a specific shade of blue paper, while he wrote poetry and articles on yellow and pink paper, respectively (Popova). Stephen King reports he likes "to get ten pages a day, which amounts to 2,000 words. That's 180,000 words over a three-month span, a goodish length for a book" (*On Writing*, 149). From an onlooker's standpoint, many of these peculiar habits may make no sense, but to the writer, all that matters is that it produces satisfying results.

But surely, all these and more writers are just eccentric, and their habits don't really help them accomplish any more than they could without them. Even as it might seem so, psychophysiological researchers have observed that "rhythmic activities that can be performed 'mindlessly' alter brainwaves into a more relaxed, creative state" (Wyche et al. "Time, Tools, and Talismans" 32). Getting into the habit of something means being able to do it without having to put much effort as time goes on, and some activities allow the mind to wander freely. Habits can seem mindless, but the writer likely has put some thought into what they're doing and why, at least initially. There's a certain lack of pressure that comes with thinking during these "mindless" activities, as one could think about anything, but may *choose* to think about one's creative work. I know I'm not alone when I say some of my best ideas come while in the shower

or driving—also both places I never have paper or the ability to write—but taking walks, doodling in the margins, or even staring out a window can sometimes lead to creative breakthroughs, especially if the writer already has a problem in the back of their mind they want to solve.

Contrarily, forcing oneself to write while staring at the ever-daunting blank computer screen might lead to the opposite state of mind—putting pressure on the mind to magically conjure something when it is in no mood to do so. Jonah Lehrer, author of *Imagine: How Creativity Works*, says “we’ve got this very narrow notion...that productivity is being well caffeinated and being chained to your desk and staring at your computer screen, but when you’re solving really hard problems...that’s the worst possible thing you can do” (Boone, “Stop Staring”). This alludes to the two-word combination most writers fear: writer’s block, a term coined by 1940s psychiatrist Edmund Bergler, who studied writers suffering from “neurotic inhibitions of productivity” (Konnikova, “How to Beat”). Not all writers believe in writer’s block, as some see it as an excuse not to work, or even as an inconveniently timed, but necessary break. Regardless of what you believe, if you experience that sensation when your brain seems to have stopped working, it probably *is* time to take a break from the writing. Alternating between involvement with a creative work and detachment from it allows for an active reflection or incubation, that is, permitting ideas the time to take root and grow in a subconscious, low-pressure environment, which may be necessary for creativity (Elsbach 472).

And yet, putting yourself in a low-pressure environment isn’t the only way you might get the words out of your head, as a high-pressure situation may also do the trick. Restricting the time you sit down to write may seem counterintuitive, as a writer often needs time to think, to let ideas incubate before getting them down on paper, but additional pressure can often facilitate the

process by speeding it up. There's a benefit to engaging in timed writing, whether writing creatively or as a student during a class assignment or exam. As English professor Dr. Kay Halasek at Ohio State University observes, "When a student is pressed for time...the important thing is to get the information down in a logical order" (Berkow, "Writing Under Pressure"). I'm an advocate of writing sprints: setting a timer and writing as many words as possible before time is up. Time spent daydreaming, pondering, or doubting is limited in this scenario, as progress is the main mission. Throughout April 2016, I added over 30,000 words to my in-progress novel by strictly adhering to 15- and 30-minute writing sprints, usually one right after the other with brief breaks in between. Timed writing may not be for everyone, but it works for some writers. Obstacles such as doubt, uncertainty, or confusion may be inhibiting words waiting to come out, and timed or pressured writing may be one of many possible remedies. In this study, I offer suggestions for things writers can try, however, no one thing may work for all writers. This study does not aim to find what works for writers so much as it aims to encourage writers to engage in trial and error to find the writing rituals and conditions that work for them.

But why do people select specific spaces as their writing contexts? Without drifting too far away from the intention of the study, I think there could be something in the *why* of the context that may even have a stronger pull than the *where*. One example of context reasoning is in Faris' aforementioned article, where he says, "writing in a coffee shop offers me a clean starting space, not cluttered like my office or apartment, but a place that I can shape and mold for the writing task at hand." Perhaps some writers do all their writing at their desk in the morning, or in a coffee shop on a Saturday afternoon, but writing needn't always be done in one spot at a designated time of the day. Sometimes, writers will write whenever an opportunity to do so strikes, even if they are traveling between locations. For some people, this constant change or

going with the flow may be their context, chosen or accepted. English professor Bradley Smith at Governors State University says, “This is writing in transit, a state of existence where writers work on the move, locations changing in a way that drives textual production” (“Writing In Transit”). I, for example, once wrote 3,000 words in a day riding in the passenger seat of my dad’s car, as we drove from one part of the city to the other. And as we ventured into shops, whenever I had a moment of downtime, my fingers found their way back to the notes app on my phone, typing out whatever scene I had thought of next before I had to move again.

Besides writing when time and situations allow, it may be helpful to designate specific spaces for specific types of work. For me, I write creatively in that oft-mentioned bookstore café and work on academic assignments in a study lounge on my college campus, and I never cross-contaminate the spaces. My spatial division began without much initial thought, but it turns out there may be a method to this madness. “With repetition and practice of a skill in a given setting, the cognitive processing that initiates and controls the response becomes automatic” (Ouellette and Wood 55). In other words, repeating an action, such as creative writing, in a given location, can condition the brain to think of that space as a place to write creatively. Of course, that means that writing is the only type of work that can be done in that space, lest the habit break, and it can further limit writers from trying out writing in new locations. However, it’s not just locations to which this tactic can apply—write only with a specific pen, or only on a tablet, or only while listening to jazz music, and similar associations as those to physical space will build themselves. Writer and content marketing manager Gregory Ciotti uses “task association” in this way: his desktop is only for “‘deep’ writing, such as writing an article”, his laptop only for “‘superficial’ writing, such as answering emails,” and his tablet only for reading. The takeaway here is that writers may be able to increase their overall productivity through the use of task association with

active practice. Once the habit is developed, it becomes easier to keep tasks separate and in their designated spaces, allowing for better focus overall.

Perhaps the major end goal of my study is to help and encourage writers to seek out the ways in which they can be most productive and successful—regardless of how they define those terms. However, one thing that needs to happen before a writer can improve their process and work ethic is to become more self-aware. Self-awareness is the “conscious knowledge of one’s own character, feelings, motives, and desires” (*OED Online*). In an e-newsletter aimed at increasing management skills, Dr. Scott Williams of Wright State University writes, “[s]elf-awareness helps managers identify gaps in their management skills, which promotes skill development. But self-awareness also helps managers find situations in which they will be most effective...” (*LeaderLetter*). A writer might be able to write 10,000 words a day, but how would she know that if she’s only ever written in her bedroom—a place that’s really only meant for sleeping and therefore often deflects attempts to focus? How can a writer change her current context if she isn’t aware of what it is?

During the abbreviated case study portion of this study, I used semi-structured interviews in which I questioned writers beginning with a set of planned questions, but diverting whenever the conversation drifted to something I wanted to ask more about. I often found myself asking the writers questions about parts of their process they often had not thought about until I’d asked. A writer can uncover the truths of their process by asking themselves questions, or by otherwise thinking deeply about their process and about how they might make it more efficient in order to propel themselves toward their writerly goals.

The next chapter is the Methodology chapter, where I will describe my methods for gathering data. Afterward is the Results chapter, in which I lay out my data and conduct an initial

analysis. Then, in the Findings chapter, I will conduct a global analysis and put my findings into context, describing how writers and teachers of writing may learn to think about themselves as writers, the student writers they may teach, and the places in which they write. I'll also discuss how considering one's definitions and goals in terms of productivity and success might affect a writer's process.

Methodology

Is there a correlation between writing contexts and success in writing? That is what I aimed to find out in my study, to see how different writing practices can help or hinder a writer in an effort to produce more words on the page, if those practices have any affect at all. In this chapter, I will review my study design and describe my methodology for gathering data to answer my research question: Do writing contexts correlate or cause success in writing? From this, sub-questions can be formed: (1) how do writers identify contexts that work for them?; (2) what role do contexts play in the production of creative writing?; (3) how do writers define “success” and “productivity” as it relates to their writing?; and (4) in what ways is a writer affected when they suspend their usual contexts in favor of experimenting with other contexts? Will they be more, less, or equally as productive?

Stage 1: Survey

Once I received approval from the Institutional Review Board, I began my study with a survey circulated to creative writers at James Madison University (JMU), which provided a general idea of the types of contexts these writers have used or prefer. I worked with the English department, under which the creative writing minor is housed, to send out an email survey request to 103 creative writing minors and 11 professors on the campus. The survey was anonymous, allowing responders to feel open to giving honest answers. If survey takers were also interested in participating in my case study, I included an option at the end that allowed them to read more about what would be expected of them. They could then include their name, email address, and whether they were a student or faculty. Of the 24 participants that completed the study, 4 expressed interest in participating in stage two of the study, the case study and

interview portion. I contacted them through email from there. Keeping the survey limited to this JMU campus community allowed all my data to be from the same general population from which I pulled my case study participants. Although my limited pool of participants cannot be considered representative of all creative writers, I believe it does offer a general picture of the JMU creative writing community. The questions I asked aimed to gain a general sense of where writers write and what about those chosen spaces appeals to them, what types of writing habits they may have, as well as what type of writers they are as far as discipline and productivity. For the full list of survey questions, please see the Appendix.

Stage 2: Case Study — Writing Sessions and Interviews

I use the term case study, however, my approach was more surface-level than in-depth, as I focused primarily on the data I collected from interviews and planned writing sessions over a brief amount of time. Once I gained a general picture of the importance of space and place in the lives of creative writers at JMU, I wanted a more comprehensive view of the preferred contexts of a few creative writers. I conducted studies of three creative writers—one female student who had taken several college-level creative writing classes, one male student who had only taken some classes in high school, and a female creative writing professor with many years of experience. While my initial design called for writers hailing from very different backgrounds and experience levels—e.g., a creative writing student, a creative writing professor, a published author, or even someone who has never formally studied writing—the type of writers that ended up in this study was limited to those who expressed interest after taking the survey and who responded to the email invitations I sent out. I did not seek to attain a diverse sample of writers from the JMU creative writing community so much as I sought to build a richer understanding of

three writers.

The case study was divided into three parts: a pre-study interview, first-impression interviews about contexts—chosen for or by the writer—in which they wrote, and the post-study interview. In an effort to accurately collect the writers' interview responses, I audio recorded the interviews with my phone and took detailed notes. The purpose of the pre-study interview was to gain an understanding of each individual writer involved in the case study sessions as well as of their writing practices. I asked them questions pertaining to their own personal experiences with writing, as well as the contexts they have used and ones they prefer. I wanted to find out what conditions a space must meet before they feel they can write there, as well as what types of habits they might have. I also hoped to gauge how disciplined they are as writers; are they able to write at the same time every day, or are they less rigid? And, perhaps most importantly, I wanted to know how they defined success as a writer, and in what ways they measured their productivity. For a complete list of pre-study interview questions, please see the Appendix.

The pre-study interview also served other purposes. I asked for each writer's schedules so that I could schedule their writing session at a time that didn't interfere with other obligations they had. In seeing what types of contexts they have used and/or prefer, I could select two new contexts to put them in during the study. While writer's chose the first of the three contexts—as I will discuss a little further down in this chapter—I selected the second and third contexts, which would be consistent for all three writers. Changing the writers' contexts allowed me to see how different contexts with varying rituals and conditions can affect productivity. Whether a context is private or public, what colors are most prominent, whether a clock is visible, what sounds there are and whether they can be controlled by the writer, how many people are around—these factors and more can contribute to a writer's ability to focus on their work, and therefore play a

crucial part in this study.

While the writing sessions for each writer were meant to occupy one day each week for three consecutive weeks, the approaching end of the semester, as well as the timing of Thanksgiving break, made for the need to lump two writing sessions within the same week for one participant, the creative writing professor. I will discuss this more in the Limitations section later in this chapter. The timing of the other two participants' sessions worked out fine. Writers spent an hour and a half each day in a different context—the first being their context of choice, the second being the Student Success Center on campus, and the third being an airport lounge in Madison Union on campus. I decided 90 minutes for each session was enough time for writers to adjust to and gain a perspective of each context, and to make some headway on their projects, while not eating up too much time from their schedules. After these 90 minutes, the participant and I would meet for a post-writing session interview, held in a library study room or faculty office. During the interview, I asked the writer about their gained perspectives of the context and their thoughts on their writing productivity. I asked similar questions after each session in order to capture the writer's immediate perceptions of the context, and see how their observations compared from week to week. For a complete list of post-study interview questions, please refer to the Appendix.

Each week, the writer wrote in a different context. For the first week of the study, the writer wrote in their normal context, or context of choice if they didn't have one, to act as a constant to which the data from subsequent weeks was compared. Each participant happened to choose to write in their home, understandable as one's home is convenient and easily controlled (Moeller, *U.S. News*). For the following two weeks, I changed the writers' contexts to a space of my own choosing, taking factors such as noise level, furniture arrangement, and privacy levels

into consideration. These two contexts were the same across all participants in order to reduce the variables as much as the study allowed. They were on-campus locations, and since all participants were regular attendants to campus—faculty or student—the contexts were also relatively convenient. The control the writers have within the spaces, however, was lost, as the campus has a total of 21,270 students enrolled and 2,328 faculty employed as of Fall 2016 (“Facts and Figures”, 2017), any of whom could be anywhere on the campus at any given moment.

The second writing session occurred inside the Student Success Center, a five-floor building catering to the academic needs of students from Career and Academic Planning to Financial Aid to a burger studio for meals. Several seating areas—desks, booths, tables, couches, benches—are scattered throughout the building, the largest of which on the first floor. The space is always crowded, noisy, and it can be difficult to find a decent seat. Naturally, I had my participants write there—though I stressed that if they were unable to find a seat, they could move to one of the upper floors. I also had them nix headphones, in favor of the potentially boisterous ambience of the space. I chose this space because it likely isn’t the first place a writer on campus would think to go to be creative and focused. However, some qualities of the space may appeal to writers. It’s a dedicated work space on campus, and being around others working can often spur in oneself a sense of focus and motivation to be productive (Faris). It’s a free space, and unlike a coffee shop, there is no obligation to buy something just to sit and work, a dilemma I often run into at my go-to writing spot: bookstore cafés. And, there are power outlets galore, so if one is writing on their computer, they have less concern over a dead battery being the thing that makes them have to leave.

Contrarily, several characteristics of the space can be huge turn-offs for creative writers.

With so many people all around, and few walls dividing up and sectioning off the space, folks are always moving around, talking to their friends and acquaintances, taking over desired seating areas, and otherwise creating distractions that can hinder a writer's focus. Having my participants try writing here was what I was most interested to hear about in the interviews, as I did not observe the writers in person. One of my goals in this study is to “shake up” creative writers' expectations and force them out of their comfort zones. If they don't attempt to write in new and extreme spaces, they'll never find out what else could work for them.

The third session took place in Madison Union, where there's an airport lounge with several couches in a relatively quiet environment. The layout of the large, open room is not unlike putting nine living rooms in one room in a grid-like manner. In the middle of each of the nine sections of couches is a rectangular block-shaped table, low enough to the ground to put one's feet upon, but high enough to use as a desk surface as an alternative to using one's lap. On one side of the room is a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows that overlook a patio seating area, a grassy hill, a few nearby buildings, and several trees. In my experience, sitting next to the window can serve as its own distraction, as people are often walking by, and the scenery is enticing enough to keep admiring. On the other hand, looking through windows helps to keep my mind clear enough to focus on my work without getting too stressed out. Though, windows provide plenty of great lighting—an important factor of context each study participant mentioned in their interviews—and a multitude of ceiling lights brightly light the lounge space. The floor is carpeted and, in my opinion, adds to the atmospheric comfort the space is in abundance of. I asked the writers to bring headphones so that they could listen to whatever music they wanted. Otherwise, they'd only hear the sounds of people silently working—the space simply evokes an unspoken quiet rule—and the distant chatter of those in the offices and passing through on the

floor below.

I chose this space because it is my favorite spot on campus, and though I don't allow myself to write creatively here because I use it as an academic study space, I thought it might be a good space for my participants to try writing. It's a space that mixes the best of both worlds—the comforts and quietude of their home spaces, and the bit of crowds and others diligently working of the Student Success Center.

Once all three contexts were selected for each writer, I conducted a brief contextual analysis of each space. Since each participant chose a space in their home, I asked them to send me a picture. That way, I could observe the space without invading it. From the images I received, I took note of the characteristics of the spaces, and compared it to those of the contexts I selected. Doing a contextual analysis allowed me to assure that each context was different enough from one another to be worth using for the purposes of this study. I will go into greater detail on the characteristics of each participant's chosen space in my *Results* chapter.

As for what the writers wrote during their sessions, that depended on the type of creative writers they are. For writers of longer fiction such as novels, I encouraged them to work on a project they had already started, one that could be worked on for all three sessions, but the final choice of what to work on was ultimately theirs. My thinking was that starting a project from scratch could lead to many moments of inactivity or unpredictability, and could deter the results. Working on the same project each session allowed for consistency—as jumping from one project to another could create other variables—however, with certain forms of creative writing, that consistency isn't always possible. Writers of shorter fiction such as poems or short stories would have more freedom, in terms of time, with what projects they worked on. It should also be noted that some writers, such as myself, can be more productive when changing projects. For example,

when I get stuck on one project, switching to another of my projects can help me look at my work with fresher eyes when I return, and a change of pace can help generate creativity or new ideas (Elsbach 472).

Upon the completion of the three writing sessions for each writer, I followed up with my participants in a post-study interview. My intentions with this interview were to gauge how each writer's productivity and success changed, if at all, and why they think those changes may have occurred. I also wanted to allow the writers a chance to reflect for themselves on the changes in their processes and attitudes towards contexts. Did other factors come into play with their ability to write? How did their opinions of writing contexts change from the start to the end of the case study? Did they discover anything about themselves as a writer?

Stage 3: Measuring Data and Contextual Analysis

For the survey, I coded my data using key words that came from reading the survey responses, listening to the interview audio files, and reading my interview notes. Some of the survey questions were straightforward—yes or no answers or multiple-choice answers—while others were short-answer responses.

Coding data for the interviews required both quantitative and qualitative approaches. With the case study participants, I first compared each writers' word or page counts for each session in their different contexts. Which sessions did they write more or less in, and was that what they expected? With the study responses, quantitative data came in the form of multiple-choice questions, in seeing how many people selected a specific answer, or in the question, which was not multiple choice, that addressed the average word (or page, or chapter, and so on) counts, in which respondents gave numbers as answers. This provided me with quantitative data

for considering the impact place and space may have on writing production. I then analyzed the interviews, looking for both small- and big-picture ideas and themes. I took a grounded theory approach (Corbin, 1990) and allowed themes and key words to emerge naturally from the interview answers. Small-picture ideas may include how study participants felt about individual contexts before and after writing in them. Big-picture ideas may include how participants and survey respondents felt about writing contexts in general. Once I understood each writer's perception of writing contexts and how they affected his or her writing, I compared these perceptions to the other writers in the study, and furthermore, those perceptions with the results of the survey to understand how a writer's productivity is affected by contexts.

I allowed the writers to define for themselves what contexts felt most conducive to productivity, and how successful they felt working in that context. Different writers may measure productivity in different ways. Whereas I measure productivity through word count, others might measure it by chapters written, whether they finally figured out what a character's motivation is, or even by the feeling they get in their gut after a writing session. Furthermore, how a writer measures productivity may differ depending on whether they're at the brainstorming stage or writing the final few words of the story. These variations in productivity management were crucial to how I analyzed my data, and led to findings that were more qualitative and individualized than they were quantitative or generalizable—which was exactly what I expected.

Limitations

With this study, there are a few limitations that may either shrink the scope of the purpose of the study or alter the results, whether or not they fall within my control. For one, I am

only focused on creative writers for this study, as opposed to those who write for other purposes such as academic, professional, or general purpose. As a college student, I am limited to the resources I have access to, such as writers who attend or work at or near my university. Were I able to reach a broader range of writers, my results might be different. That said, my findings will not be generalizable to all or even most creative writers, but might serve as a small step to better understand the creative writing process.

Throughout the course of my study, and particularly during the writing sessions and interviews, I often wondered what effect there would be from the participants knowing they were writing for a study? Would they be writing anyway? They might, but likely not at that exact time and location. Furthermore, there seems to be a sort of pressure in the back of the writers' minds that might focus them a little, because they know they are not just writing for themselves at that point, but for me, the researcher. It can be just about impossible to monitor a person for a study without telling them, and not doing so can become an issue of ethics. Therefore, I did not shy away from this limitation, and even asked the writers about it directly. Professor Carter said that "a study can set up these artificial frames to see how a subject acts in particular circumstances, simulated, constructed." In real life, she would never choose to write in SSC or the lounge, and wrote there more out of her duty to participate in the study. Normally, she would write at home, but for the study, she had to get up, get dressed, and go to another place—"it's almost like an errand." Writing at home is not an errand for her. There's an interruption here. She has to be a little formal and put on a face, but at home she's in her sweatpants. Somewhat contrarily, Vivian didn't think having to write for a study was a factor in her productivity, as she "probably would have tried to write anyway."

While less of a limitation to the study per se, and more of a personal limitation to the

writer, a writer's writing mood plays a big part in his or her overall ability to write and/or feel inspired, sometimes regardless of the writing contexts. I define a writing mood as the desire to write at any given moment. Through my own experiences as a writer, I already knew how a poor mood could hinder my ability to write at that moment, but this was reinforced by the study. Sometimes, a writer may not feel like writing, and that can affect their productivity. This can hinder my ability to properly measure the effect writing contexts have on productivity, although some writers may be productive regardless of the writing context. Similarly, discipline can be just as influential to productivity and success as anything else. If a writer does not stay disciplined in his or her context, that can affect the outcome of my study. The innate discipline of a writer is a factor altogether independent of a writing context. Consistency is important with sticking to each context for the duration of the case study, as is the status of the writers' project. If a writer is in the planning stages of the story, what they consider to be productive will differ greatly from a writer in the process of actually writing the story.

In the last two contexts—the Student Success Center and the Airport Lounge—the only variables I changed were the location and whether the participant listened to music or to the ambient noise of the place. In public spaces such as these, the lack of control is not only on the writer, but on me as well as the case study coordinator. The lighting of the space is regulated, the amount of people there are there of their own volition, no candles could be lit without creating a hazard, and so on. In a larger study, locations could be further manipulated, such as by closing off these public spaces during the designated writing time to allow for more control, or by creating an environment within a controllable space such as a large office, vacant classroom, or conference room.

Another limitation was that due to the rapidly approaching end of the semester, Professor

Carter's writing sessions and interviews were compressed into a couple of weeks, whereas participants Larry and Vivian's sessions and interviews were spread out to one session and interview per week. The limitation of this comes into the fact that Professor Carter had less time to decompress between sessions, and when it came to her post-study interview, she had less time to think about the study as a whole. Somewhat similarly, Vivian's post-study interview occurred one day after her final writing session and interview, in order to fit it in before everyone went on Thanksgiving break. Waiting until break was over to do Vivian's post-study interview might have been too much time to ponder over her participation in the study, although I suppose one could argue otherwise. Larry's participation in the study was spread out perfectly evenly, with one writing session and interview occurring at the same time every week. In the future, researchers might consider the timing of sessions and how that might affect their participant's perceptions of their role in it.

The next chapter is the Results chapter, which contains sections on the survey responses, profiles on the study participants as writers, and the trends found in the overall data collected. Later is the Findings chapter, in which I will put my findings in a practical context, impart what I learned from conducting this study, and more.

Results

Survey Response Discussion

In this chapter, I summarize the responses to five of the most relevant survey questions I asked of creative writing minors at my university. The survey was distributed to the entire creative writing department, which is made up of 103 students and 11 faculty. From those, a total of 24 people responded to my survey, indicating a response rate of 21%. Below you will find five questions I judged to be most relevant from the survey and their varied responses, from the most common to the unique and even a little strange, that reveal some uncovered trends that emerged about writing contexts. The questions and answers get at the importance of physical space, the rituals conducted in those spaces, and the differences in what terms such as “success” and “productivity” mean for writers. For the entire question set, please refer to the Appendix. I also include several quotes from the writers, and have minorly adjusted a couple of the writers’ responses for clarity only when necessary.

Q4 - Do you have a favorite place to write? If so, what is it and why?

Most people listed their homes or areas in their home as their favorite place to write with specific places like their bed (4 responses), desk (6), room (4), living room, office (which, according to one response, allows for “Habit, familiarity, routine”), and kitchen named. One respondent explained the potential reasoning well, stating that one’s room is “an environment I’m comfortable in and I have the ability to limit distractions.” Another respondent said sitting in bed “allows me to be comfortable and isolated enough to properly and genuinely reach into my own mind.” Several public places were also mentioned, including a coffee shop, park, restaurant, and the campus library. Some of the more unique answers featured trains (“They just feel so

literary”), an artist residency, and the University Recreation Center on campus (“I can concentrate the best when I’m away from others, but have a promise of activity after”).

Q5 - What other places have you tried to write in? How did they work for you?

Seven responders noted attempts to write outside with varying levels of success: “it’s really easy to get distracted from a lawnmower, people walking by, etc.” and “Outside is a favorite, but it’s cold now.” The library (7) was an equally common answer with comments such as “...it’s meant for doing work but it can get too loud” and “...halts my creative process.” Another responder said “I find they’re better for focused academic writing and comfortable spaces are better for creative writing...” which relates to a point I made in the Literature Review about using different spaces for different types of work. Some interesting answers only mentioned once included the bathroom (“it keeps away the restlessness”), the kitchen bar (“it’s up high, comfortable, good for being disciplined, light comes in from the sliding glass windows behind it”), while walking (“I often start something while walking, and then write it at a desk or table”), and the bookstore (“it was too quiet”).

Q6 - Do you have any specific habits or superstitions when you write? If yes, what and how often do you observe them?

Half (11) of the respondents answered that they did not have any specific habits or superstitions while writing, leading me to wonder whether they really don’t, or they just aren’t aware of them, or even that they don’t consider what they do to be a habit or ritual. Respondents who did have them noted things such as eating or drinking (“I also often eat before or during writings so hunger won’t distract me”), setting goals (“I also try to hit a good word count usually. I love to fill up a page”), listening to music (“Listening to music on itunes or spotify, but not a specific playlist unless I’m writing a specific scene/story”), and even limiting distractions

(“and I like to keep my phone out of reach so it doesn’t distract me”). One responder even justified lighting a candle: “it seems like a way of asking for spirit to participate with me!” A few writers said things that sound like writerly advice, particularly in terms of how long they write: “If I can’t make the first line work, the rest of it won’t work. Daily” and “I just go until I don’t have time or I don’t have any more words” and “Hemingway once said that the best time to stop writing for the day is when you know what comes next. I always try to do this.”

Q8 - How would you define being successful as it relates to your writing?

The most common definition (9) of being successful for these writers was writing a story they are proud of or that they still like later. One respondent summed the feeling up well: “...when I go back and read something and think, ‘Wow, I wrote that?’ That’s how I know I wrote something [good], when I amaze myself.” The second most common definition, with 6 writers, was finishing a story or getting published. Seven writers wanted their work to have an effect on readers, with statements such as “if I make people feel something” and “If someone wants to read more” as proof of success. Others leaned more toward the effect writing has on the writers themselves: “I’m in competition only with myself to become a better writer, so if I’m a better writer this year than last, or if the newest draft is stronger than the last, then that’s success.” Another respondent said success is achieved when, “writing a line, section, or entire piece that I feel has best captured the theme or story I have in my head.” Also, “Staying persistent with a piece of writing, even when it’s not going smoothly. Trusting the creative process with all its ups and downs!”

Q9 - How would you define being productive as it relates to your writing?

Similar to success, the definition of productivity is in the eye of the beholder. Many writers (8) said that writing at all was productive, emphasizing quantity, progress, and getting

ideas down as crucial to their definitions of productivity. And similarly, 4 writers commented on the quantity of time, aiming to write “at least once a day” or “a couple times a week”. Contrarily, 3 writers stressed quality over quantity with one respondent explaining, “I would rather write one magnificent piece than a bunch of subpar pieces in a given amount of time.” Just like with defining success—as the terms *productivity* and *success* can overlap—3 writers commented that finishing a part or even a whole piece of work made them feel successful, while one writer said that “Productive for me is probably the same as successful.” One writer sets big goals for the year: “At least one novel or screenplay a year, plus miscellaneous essays and shorter works.” Another said their definition of success began when they’d “written to the point that I stop thinking about the act of pressing buttons to create words and the words flow by themselves even if what they’ve created doesn’t sound all that great. When the act of writing becomes subconscious and the writing itself is consciousness, then I’ve been productive.”

Conducting the survey and collecting the responses were stage one of my study, and was completed before beginning stage two: the abbreviated case studies including writing sessions and interviews. In the following section, I provide profiles of the three writers—two students and one faculty—that include their experiences with creative writing, their ideal and not so ideal writing contexts, and their personal views on what “success” and “productivity means. Whereas survey respondents answered anonymously, I spoke in person with these participants, asking from a set of questions that had the flexibility to change as the conversation did, and thus I was able to learn more about these writers on an individual level.

Participant Profiles

This section offers an in-depth look at three writers interviewed as part of stage two of the study. In an interview with each writer prior to their participation in the three writing sessions, I asked questions to understand their process and preferences as they relate to writing. Participant names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

Participant 1 – Larry

History with Creative Writing

Larry has only just declared the creative writing minor, so he has yet to take any creative writing classes at JMU. He took creative writing classes in high school, but found he didn't like the constriction of the assignments. He prefers to write screenplays, but thinks they don't really have much plot or go anywhere because of his enjoyment of writing characters.

Writing Context Preferences

Within a space, he prefers to sit on the edge of his bed or on his couch at home, with his laptop on his lap. He finds he has more energy when standing, but can't do so for too long or else his back will start to hurt. He listens to music 100% of the time, as it drowns out the general noise level of a space. While writing, he prefers music without words, usually classical—he finds violins soothing—or movie scores, and ends up not really paying attention to it. Occasionally, he'll hear a song he wants to write a scene for, and that inspires him.

He drinks coffee, but tries to write without it unless he's writing for an extended period of time. He used to write everything in a notebook first, and would then transcribe the text onto his computer, but reported doing so took too long, so he stopped. He writes for as long a period of time as he can. Sometimes on weekends, he gets up early to “race the sun”, writing as much as

he can before the sun comes up. Although not a morning person, that's the time of day in which he writes best.

He dislikes writing at desks—he has a bad back and it hurts when he's hunched over. In the library, or in any place where people move around him, the possibility of seeing people he knows often distracts him.

Defining Success

He feels successful as long as he's writing, and even more so if he still likes that writing later on. He's really bad at finishing stuff to his liking, so he would consider doing so to be successful.

Defining Productivity

Writing, putting words on the page, is productive for him. On his most productive day, he said that he “wrote so much—a few scenes—that I just dropped it and didn't like it later”.

Measuring Writing

He doesn't really measure the quantity of his writing, though finishing a scene is the closest he'll come. He uses the screenplay writing word processor Celtx, which he says doesn't measure the words, and just makes the entire screenplay into one long page.

Writing Discipline

Sometimes he disciplines himself to write, particularly on weekends. He doesn't feel he has to write a certain amount per week; some weeks, he doesn't write at all, and sometimes, he'll write a few days.

Participant 2 –Vivian

History with Creative Writing

Vivian is a creative writing minor at JMU and has taken a creative writing class almost every semester. She has been writing creatively on and off since elementary school, usually in the context of a class project or assignment. She enjoyed the activity, but found she needed to be made to write. Her go-to form is poetry. She is also the co-president of a creative writing organization on campus.

Writing Context Preferences

She considers herself a versatile writer as far as location. For example, she's written on the first and third floors of Carrier Library, in bed, on the bus, and she sometimes records herself while driving and will write it down later. She likes to be around people in busy spaces where the sound level is not too loud, but stuff is still going on. While she prefers sitting on a couch, she doesn't know if that makes her write better. Her lighting of choice is natural sunlight, or even just having light in general, even if she's up late. Like Larry, she prefers writing in the mornings when everything's fresh. Occasionally, she listens to music, and if so, instrumental. She'll drink anything, but prefers Frappuccinos because of the ice, or eating something small like pretzels. She uses Google Docs to write in because she's bad at saving her work, and tries to make that the only tab open in her internet browser. She's more productive with timed writing. Because of her current schedule, she writes more spread throughout the day (rather than in one sitting).

Lighting seems to be very important to her, as she dislikes writing in the dark with only the brightness of her laptop. She has written at night, but again, prefers mornings. When she listens to music, she finds she gets into it too much and moves around a lot, which isn't helpful.

Defining Success

She defines success as when she's written something that's relatable and brings people to an emotional state. Something that makes people think. Or she wrote something different or in a new way.

Defining Productivity

In thinking about how she defines productivity, she wonders if it's writing a bunch of poems or just one that she goes back to edit. It may be writing a lot and writing more poems—quantity over quality. The more she writes, the better she gets. The longest she ever wrote at once was 3 or 4 hours on a personal essay, and she spent most of that time writing, and less time thinking about it. Sometimes she doesn't start writing something new, she works off something older. She thinks participating in the study, and writing in different places, will positively affect her.

Measuring Writing

In discussing measuring her writing, she stated that some poems take half an hour to write, while other times, a word or phrase is in her head for weeks before she writes it down. Perhaps, the average time to write a poem is about 45 minutes of just getting it out and slightly editing it. But she doesn't know if poems are ever really finished.

Writing Discipline

She's not the most disciplined writer, but she's passionate about writing, which makes her seek out discipline for it. She tries to find places and people and situations that emphasize and encourage writing: classes, clubs, and so on. She's not self-disciplined. She would still write if she weren't doing the study, but she may not write as much or be as concentrated.

Participant 3 –Professor Carter

History with Creative Writing

Professor Carter is a creative writing professor at JMU. She didn't necessarily think she'd become a professor—though she'd always been drawn to teaching, especially at the college level, as that's the age group she most related to—because the field is extraordinarily hard to get a job in. So, she worked as an editor for 3 years, and when a job at JMU opened up, she applied and got it. She wrote her first story in second grade, but dropped creative writing for a long time, instead reading plenty of fiction and some nonfiction. She didn't pick up writing again until college, when she felt there were stories she needed to tell. At that time, she wrote mostly fiction, not nonfiction. She said that not a lot of young people were writing nonfiction in college unless it was journalism. She joined the Peace Corps after college and went to West Africa, and the things she witnessed as well as the sexual discrimination she experienced being an American were things she needed to write about in nonfiction, and not treat them as fiction. She wanted her audience to know the stories she wrote about the women in Benin were true. She received her MFA in nonfiction. She feels that writing is hard, and sometimes she can't find the right way to say what she wants to say.

In discussing where she's written before, she mentioned her aunt's house, as her aunt is as quiet as she is in the morning, and coffee shops around Harrisonburg, particularly when she gets cabin fever or when she feels stuck in her writing. Lately, she's found she wants to stay close to home. When she travels, she brings her laptop for when there's time to write. She will carve out a space and time, typically in the morning while others are still sleeping. She has participated in a writers' residency where she was able to write every day from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m.

for a month, with breaks for meals with 6 or 7 fellow artists. There's no pressure, errands, or distractions in those spaces.

As for writing on campus during the study, she has to imagine herself as a younger person or a graduate student. When she was a grad student, she remembered writing in different places, and would run into people and wouldn't get as much done. While writing, she can create a pod around herself, so that she can focus and still be productive even through music playing and people talking.

Writing Context Preferences

Her ideal writing space is at her house at her own desk early in the morning, usually beginning at 5 a.m., however, 7 a.m. has been more common as of late. Her husband sleeps later and it's quieter in the house. She has a clearer mind in the morning. She's also a long-distance runner, so when not teaching, she will write from 5-7 a.m., run for an hour, then continue writing until 1 p.m. When she's stuck in her writing, she'll go for a walk to see if something will dislodge. No matter where she's writing, she needs a window to the outside. Sometimes she writes on her couch with a flat surface underneath her computer such as a thick book or notebook. She's pretty happy with just a table and a window, and not much occupying the table or desk space. At her writers' residency, she only had a dictionary and the book of poems she was currently reading on her desk. At home, she only has a dictionary and a stack of books by the window, her favorite books she's read recently—in two of her favorites, the narrator had a characteristic to which she greatly related. It's difficult for her to access the emotions associated with that characteristic, but reading about people who go through it make it easier. Some advice she received from the author of that book was that, with writing strong emotion, "All I had to do was think about my character and how he felt, rather than looking at it from the outside."

She dislikes writing at night, because her mind is sort of shot. She never puts the computer directly on her lap because she has superstitions that it gets hotter faster.

Defining Success

Success to her is the same as productivity.

Defining Productivity

Productivity to her is about getting the sentences right, and the stories right, rather than the goal of having a product. She knows there are a lot of writers who, in order to survive, really need to produce a product, and she's glad that pressure isn't on her. Her kind of writing requires deep thinking and honesty, and it takes a long time to see yourself and others, and be honest and say it well. With journalism and deadlines, that's a different kind of writing. For a literary book, getting the sentences and the words right, and leading up to a focused story.

Measuring Writing

She tends not to measure her writing quantity, but generally goes by a page count when she does. What that page count is, though, depends on what her goal is—now (during the time of the study), she's revising chapters of a book she's writing. When revising, she's not thinking about how many pages she'll edit that day. It has taken her from early September to early November to write 9 drafts of the piece she's working on, with micro-tinkering while teaching. Her goal at her writing residency was to revise the first half of her book, about 150 pages. She got through a chapter just about every other day.

Writing Discipline

She's a disciplined writer because she's a disciplined person.

In the next section, I wrap up the Results chapter by synthesizing the responses received from both the survey and the interviews and discussing the trends that emerged. What rituals and conditions must be met for a writer to feel comfortable writing in a certain context? How do perceptions of productivity and success compare among writers?

Trends in Results, Responses, and Interviews

The survey was distributed to all 114 students and faculty who make up the creative writing department. With 24 writers responding to the survey and 3 writers studied in depth (one of which also took the survey), this sample is hardly enough to represent the larger creative writing community, but it is a good representation of the JMU creative writing community. Thus, some key findings from both the survey and the interviews follow. For many of the questions I asked in the survey, respondents were allowed to choose all answers that applied.

History with Creative Writing

Respondents have had a variety of experiences with writing, both personally and professionally. Nearly 92% of survey respondents (22) said they write in their free time, and the same amount also stated that they have taken at least one creative writing course. Almost 38% have written for a job or internship. One participant noted having published four novels, and another noted teaching creative writing as part of their experience. Ten respondents, or about 42%, had never had any writing published. Fourteen responders, or 58% said that they had at some point in their lives, in places such as newspapers, magazines, or articles associated with JMU, books published through houses or via self, grade school publications, or through internships. As for study participants, their experiences vary as well, with two creative writing students and one creative writing professor.

This shows that most if not all participants in my study have a decent amount of experience with creative writing, which may mean that experience writing in different contexts is likely among participants. For the purposes of my study, this means that respondents have enough experience with creative writing to be able to provide thoughtful answers to questions about writing practices when asked, and may have thought about their experiences enough to know some things they like and dislike, need and don't need.

Discipline and Motivation

Writing is an activity often compared to running a marathon, in that it takes a long time, goes through many checkpoints, and rewards hard workers who keep at it through the highs and lows. A large part of being able to get through all the hurdles and being able to see progress made on one's own work in progress, is sitting down often to actually write the work, and even being able to do that requires discipline and motivation. Career, academic, or life goals were important writing motivators to 92% of respondents (22). About eighty-seven percent of respondents (21) marked both self-motivation and inspiration as contributors to writing motivation. Half of respondents (11) said they needed external motivation—such as writing groups, friends, or participation in National Novel Writing Month—to write. Seven, or 29% of respondents, used their own discipline to get themselves to write. Fifteen respondents, about 63%, described themselves as somewhat disciplined, setting aside time to write when possible. Seven, 29%, were not disciplined, writing really only when inspired. One, 4%, marked being very disciplined with a strict writing schedule, and one marked that discipline was irrelevant and that they were able to write at least most of the time.

When asked how often they wrote, 50% (15) of study respondents chose "Some days," 38% (9) chose "Most days," and 12% (2) chose "Every single day." I was relieved that in a

survey of writers no one answered “Rarely” or “Never.” With so many things that can get in the way of writing—obligations to others (79%, 19) or oneself (58%, 14), laziness or lack of motivation (75%, 18), writer’s block or lack of motivation (67%, 16), staying on track with stories or overcoming discouragement from rejections (8%, 2)—it can be hard to keep at it sometimes. However, even if a writer writes only for fun, I personally believe that creative writing is the sort of activity for which one makes an effort to carve out time.

Writing Context Preferences

It wasn’t surprising to see how many survey respondents chose to write in their homes, a place that is often comfortable and accessible. Even when given the choice of where to write for the first writing session, study participants all choose spaces in their homes. Of all these chosen spaces between both study participants and survey respondents, writing in one’s room was by far the most common. In those rooms, many wrote on their beds or at desks, but one respondent chose to write in the bathtub, and another chose to write standing. Because one’s home or room is such a manipulatable environment, there seems a sort of freedom of experimentation that comes along with it. Meaning that, if a writer wants to try something new, the home is the place to try it without having to worry about any sort of judgment or failure. Hence writers who write in their bathtubs or standing. These types of answers are interesting because they aren’t the status quo, and while it’s not necessary that a writer tries writing in such places, it should be encouraged. On the downside, writing in one’s room open’s oneself to numerous distractions. Vivian stressed that her room was a place for sleeping and watching Netflix, and that she could often become too comfortable to focus. There’s little accountability in that space. She also mentioned being worried about a pile of laundry in the corner, which raises the point that a

person's room is often the center of operations for other tasks such as sleeping or household chores.

The Student Success Center (SSC) on campus was the second location I had my participants try writing in, and I instructed them not to have headphones in, forcing them to listen to the sounds around them. While two participants found themselves the most productive there, it was not their favorite place to write, and they likely would not have chosen it to work on creative projects. Contrarily, two survey respondents mentioned SSC as places they have tried to write in. One respondent said they liked the ambient noise, while the other said the environment was too distracting, which aligns with what Vivian and Larry said in their interviews. Why, though, were two out of three participants the most productive in that space, despite their negative impressions of it? From their interviews, I've gathered that seeing people working in a focused environment combined with the ambient white noise of chatter were the largest contributors to focusing. Although, finding a seat, let alone finding one with an outlet to charge one's computer, and being able to find comfort, can be near impossible. Larry said that he felt some pressure from being uncomfortable, and that because he works well under some pressure, that might have also been a factor. All the factors he thought were ideal for his writing context—good lighting, comfort, and no interruptions—were probably not what he needed to be productive.

No survey respondents mentioned the Airport Lounge as a place to write creatively, though this is unsurprising because, at least for the time being, this place is a hidden gem on campus. With the lounge being like a giant living room, it's very similar in many ways to one's house—the general quiet and comfort, and if there at the right time, it may not be very populated. Larry liked the quietude, and that he got to listen to music was a bonus, as that's what he normally does. He said he liked it more than writing in his room, which means a lot as his room

is his—and many others’—ideal writing space. For Vivian, the space was comfortable, but seeing other people napping or conversing made her want to do those things—a similar issue she ran into in her own room. Had she not listened to music, she said the room might have been too quiet, though the music was still distracting nonetheless. Professor Carter said the only similarity she noticed between her home and the lounge was the way she sat on the couch.

Habits, Superstitions, and Rituals

I mentioned in the Survey Response Discussion section that half of respondents said they did not have any habits or superstitions, and that that made me wonder if they just weren’t aware of them. Terms like “habits,” “rituals,” and “superstitions” all have connotations of having to be out there, when in reality, habits and rituals could be as low-key as writing by hand instead of on the computer, or as “out there” as writing while riding an elephant. There is a difference, however, to what a writer *needs* in order to be able to write, what they *want*, and what they *can do without*. I prefer to drink tea while I write, but I can be just as productive when I’m too lazy to make it. Professor Carter learned a while ago that she’s good with just a table or desk and a window, and can adapt to everything else. All three study participants preferred to write in the mornings, and during the study, Vivian and Professor Carter wrote during the late morning, while Larry wrote in the early afternoon. He even mentioned being tired from classes during an interview. When it came to the length of a writing session, Vivian found that she needed either a very long session (3 to 4 hours) or a short one (30 minutes). The hour and a half she did for the study seemed like more time than it was to her, making her less productive by the end.

Usually, at least one of the five senses plays a part in everything we do, but with writing, the role the senses play can make or break a writing mood. All three participants who were interviewed noted lighting as important, whether it be natural light or an overhead light, leading

me to believe that lighting in general is important for setting the mood or even being able to see the page. One respondent stated always writing in the dark, and another lit a candle—though that seemed to be more about supernatural factors than lighting. Another important detail to some was sound, with six respondents of the survey mentioning what they prefer to hear or not hear while writing. Five of those listened to music, often instrumental, while one wanted only silence. After doing the study, though, Larry said music may not have been as big a deal as he originally thought, as he was still productive when not listening to it in SSC, where he instead listened to the blend of conversations. Here, it seems the two most important senses are sight and sound, although feel was also crucial. One respondent turned a ring around on their finger, and another liked to have water around to keep their hands busy when not typing. Professor Carter liked to have a large book in between her lap and her laptop when writing on her couch to keep the computer from heating up.

Defining “Productivity” and “Success”

These days, finding ways to become more productive is like searching for the fountain of youth—this miraculous, seemingly unattainable secret to giving us everything we’ve ever wanted and more. A simple search of the web will yield numerous results of blogs, articles, studies, and more that provide information on how to be more productive in anything you do. But for writers, even searching for these tips is a double-edged sword. Don’t look for these tips and one may never find ways to be more productive. Look for these tips and fall into the rabbit hole we call the internet—a writer’s ultimate distractive foe. Professor Carter had a fix for that, using a software called Freedom to block her connection to the internet for a set time. As useful as this program seems, she was the only person in the survey and interviews who mentioned using it or anything similar.

Over the course of the study, Vivian commented that her definition of productivity as a writer changed, going from quantity over quality to the other way around and then some. She didn't feel as productive if she wrote a bunch rather than if she had written something well. She would now define being productive as feeling like you've pushed yourself forward—fine tuning what you've already written, or adding three stanzas to a new poem, feeling like you've achieved something. It's about finding that happy medium where a writer writes a lot, but still feels good about it afterwards. Three survey respondents would agree with Vivian's new definition of productivity, and 8 would agree with Larry's unchanging definition of just being able to write at all, but furthermore still being proud of that writing, as another 9 respondents explained on a different question, when defining success.

One respondent agreed with Professor Carter, that productivity to them was the same as being successful. Furthermore, Professor Carter also said that success to her is about having a clarity and rhythm to her sentences, laying them out in an order that builds the story she's telling. This is interesting because it in many ways contradicts what she says is our society's definition of success. The United States is a capitalist society, which means overall, it's about the bottom line, making as much money in one's endeavors as possible. As an artist, Professor Carter said she's "not much of a capitalist in that sense [and is] not out to make money." She also expressed that "telling the truth and being patient, don't really have much to do with each other in our capitalist society." The way in which this notion of a capitalist society is most closely tied to the field of writing is in getting published, and even further than that, writing a bestseller that could make the author rich. No respondents stated financial gains as important to them on any question asked, but that may be one side effect of publishing a book, as 3 respondents included in their definitions of success, that sells well.

Measuring Writing and Averages

Thirteen respondents, 54%, measured their writing through page counts, nine respondents, 38%, used word counts, two respondents, 8%, used chapter counts or another form, and seven, 29%, did not measure writing quantity at all. I'll discuss this more later in the What I Learned section of my Findings chapter, but I was surprised by how many people did not measure their writing quantity at all. This was mostly because I do measure my quantity and, prior to this study, assumed most people did as well. I think it also matters what genre of writing writers are taking part in, as what may work to measure one form of writing, may not work for another. It may be inefficient to count a poem by the number of pages, whereas that may be the ideal form for a screenplay or novel.

I then asked participants to provide their average quantities per writing session. One writer noticed a decline in their word counts from when they were younger to the present, from 2000 to 600 words. Other averages included 1 to 2 chapters, 2 pages, 500-750 words, or 1000 words. Some of the highest quantities these writers have ever reached were about 5000 or 6000 words or 15 pages in one day. Writing is usually the furthest thing from a competition, but that doesn't mean it doesn't help some writers to be able to compare their processes or results to that of others. I asked this question purely out of curiosity, but I think some writers who do count quantities can benefit from learning about others.

Now that I've laid out all my research, survey responses, and interview data, I will use the following Findings chapter to conduct a further analysis, connecting what I've learned to what other writers may take away from my study to benefit their endeavors.

Findings

Audience

The audience of my research is other creative writers, whether they are students, teachers, published authors, hobbyists, or people who have never formally studied writing. My research could also be applicable to technical writers, academic writers, and anyone else who wants to find ways to be more productive writers. The results in the previous chapter explore what can happen when creative writers change up their habits, rituals, locations, and such, and how doing so can either help or hinder their productivity or success as writers. Some writers, particularly those who have been writing for a long time, know themselves as writers and are more critically aware of their processes and preferences. Some writers may not have tried writing in different locations with different rituals because they may never have thought to do so, may be more adaptable to spaces and therefore have less of a need to find the right space, or may not have the time or resources to try. Many writers have never really thought critically about their writing processes, but without doing so, they may not uncover ways to improve their writing contexts, discover tricks to fight writer's block, or overcome other challenges writers inevitably face. My goal for this study is to help creative writers become aware of their processes, why they have those processes, and to consider how they can improve them to become more productive and successful writers, in consideration of their personal definitions of those terms.

Putting My Findings in a Practical Context

Ultimately, this study aims to help and encourage writers to explore their writing lives in terms of contexts, processes, and preferences. This section aims to explain how my findings may be applicable in the real world, from what professors should consider when teaching students

about creative writing, to what creative writers need to consider about themselves as writers and about place.

What creative writing professors need to consider about their student writers:

Creative writing professors may need to understand one thing above all when it comes to their students: every writer is different. Furthermore, many student writers are relatively new to the act of writing, and may not yet have all the necessary tools to venture into the act more critically. Student and other novice writers have not had the same amount of time or practice as seasoned writers to gain self-awareness as well as insight about where, how, and why they write. Professors can help enlighten their students by discussing the writing process with them, inviting them to seek out what processes may work for them, introducing them to new and varying writing exercises both in and outside of the classroom, encouraging their students to read more and widely, encouraging them to pay attention to and experiment with where they write, and setting them on a path such that, when they leave the class at the end of the semester or year, they are better equipped as writers to do these things for themselves.

Professor Carter says how she teaches now is greatly influenced by her own experiences as both an undergraduate student in creative writing workshops and as a graduate student. About her experience, she noted that her professors paid little attention to developing craft, and focused more on what was working and what wasn't in the writing:

“I was working by intuition and badly needed craft instruction to help me put the rather inchoate stuff of life into microforms...that build toward the macro form, the essay or story. Not until my last year of graduate school did I get that, and I got it largely from my peers. We got together one night and shared craft tools we'd been amassing and trying out on undergraduates we taught in intro to nonfiction workshops... Once I learned craft,

I could discern better what choices I was making while putting together a piece...

Intuition can still turn up some magic when I write, and intuition as well as introspection are absolutely necessary in helping writers go deeper, but good writing absolutely cannot happen on intuition and introspection alone.”

Now as a creative writing professor, she’s reformed the teaching styles of her own teachers to create her own style, emphasizing that “learning craft, reading, writing, and revising—these are how one becomes a better writer.”

What creative writers need to consider about themselves as writers:

Writers need to know that context matters when it comes to creative crafting. If a writer is unable to focus in a specific environment, it may be due to a number of things: personal situations weighing on the writer’s mind—one survey respondent mentioned “discouragement over writer rejections; and time” getting in the way of their writing—not knowing what to do with their work in progress, or because of the environment itself. Perhaps it’s too quiet in the room, or there are too many distractions, or the writer is too hungry and should have eaten first. Vivian said she had “never really been aware of how and where I write, but I do feel more aware [post-study].” She realized about her process that she thinks about an idea during the day or writes a couple words, then will write it down later. It’s rare for her to sit down and write if she doesn’t know what she’s writing about, and she needn’t sit and write for the sake of it. She knows that about herself now, and can go on with her writing life with that in mind. Writers like Vivian may not work best with setting aside a time to sit and write. In such a case, it’s good to experiment with writing contexts to get a better idea of what works and what doesn’t.

What creative writers need to consider about place:

People never know whether they truly like or dislike a food until they try it—the same

principle applies to the contexts in which one might write. In the study, I noticed many of the responses were worded in the vein of “I’ve tried...but...”, in which respondents stated a context they’d tried to write in, but found some fault with it. For example, one respondent said, “I have tried to write in quiet spaces, but it’s almost more distracting. There needs to be a little background noise.” Writers never know whether they do or don’t prefer to listen to instrumental music, sit outside, eat pretzels, smell a scented candle, write bright and early in the morning, have a stack of books on their desk, sit on the floor, write with other writers, use a timer, write on the bus...if they don’t give it a try. The important thing about experiences is that they need to be lived. Whether a novice writer or a seasoned one, there’s bound to be a road less traveled. As Professor Carter said, “One is always an apprentice to writing—because every story, every poem is new, and you need to learn from it what it needs.”

Larry noted that changing places increased his productivity, got the juices flowing more, and gave him a new perspective from being in a different place. Even just being aware of one’s actions while sitting down—or standing—to write is a step in the right direction. A writer can hardly change what they’re doing if they don’t know they’re doing it. Larry went on to say “I started thinking of my room as a place, and thinking about how it was impacting me.” Professor Carter realized she would prefer not to write in any environment where she’s not comfortable, although, she could still adapt to the environment and write. She thinks writers can adapt to all kinds of environments in order to write, and that that’s a good skill to have as a writer.

Professor Carter also made an important point about diversity, one I had not considered as a factor in looking at place. When discussing why coffee shops are good environments to write in, she mentioned the ambient noise that’s different from home, the lighting, and that it’s more of a democratic space. For her, a democratic space is one that is diverse in the type of

people students, professionals, and families represented. When she wrote in the airport lounge and SSC on campus for the study, she was very aware that only students inhabited those spaces, and it was an interesting lesson for her about what spaces look like if you're the only one of something in that space, which is important. Her experience with this stems deeper, because when she joined the Peace Corps and visited Benin, where she was the minority. It's always important to interact with people unlike ourselves, and that doesn't have to stop when it comes to writing. Journeying into new spaces, new worlds, new situations is fodder for the soul and for the writerly muse.

My Tips for Writers

In studying writing contexts for productive writing, I hoped to uncover some strategies to becoming a more productive writer overall, and to help other writers do the same. In tracking the productivity of the writers participating in my study, I assessed whether being aware of one's writing environment, and even altering it in some ways, may increase output. Most writers are interested in discovering ways to be more productive and to improve their overall success as a writer, whether creative, academic, professional, or technical. What follows is a list of points I think are the biggest takeaways for writers from my study:

1. Define your priorities.

To understand their priorities and goals, writers should ask themselves a few questions: Why do you write? What does success mean to you as a writer? What about productivity? Does it even matter to you, or is something else more important? Whether you write because you have a story to tell, because it's fun, or for another reason, it can't hurt to know why beforehand. Ruthanne Reid, from the popular writing blog *The Write Practice*, explains why it's important to

know why you write: “On those days, when your writing seems like something no one would ever want to read, it is essential to have an answer to the question of why you write.” Knowing your priorities can help you to set and reach goals (if those work for you) or to just be more aware of who you are and what you need to write efficiently in your chosen context.

2. Read. Read. Read.

Although I did not directly study the effects of reading on writing, reading still emerged to many as an important precursor or practice that benefits the writing process. Professor Carter keeps books on her writing desk that are relevant to what she’s writing, and can serve as inspiration or instruction when she’s figuring out how to express an emotion in her writing. While a writer needn’t read with the sole intention of learning how to write, simply sitting down with a good book can teach—even subconsciously—a lot about the craft. As King said, “If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that” (*On Writing*, 147). Many writers’ desire to write grows from a love of reading, and reading can teach writers everything from the technical—how to write sentences, scenes, characters, worlds—to the magical—how to fall in love with sentences, scenes, characters, worlds.

3. Explore and try new things.

Writers may feel they know where they work best, and trying to work in new spaces can either confirm or deny what they already knew. Prior to doing the study, Vivian said she could work everywhere and thought her participation would positively affect her. Afterward, Vivian realized the importance of her writing in a place meant for writing or working, and not for other activities such as sleeping or socializing. For Professor Carter, a seasoned writer who was more aware of her own process going into the study, she always believed she worked best with a table and window, and that belief was reinforced after doing the study.

For writers who may not know where they work best, now is the time to experiment. Try bringing something to write with when going out for the day or travelling longer term, and write during moments of private time. Commute time can be valuable to, whether speaking into a recording while driving to write down later such as Vivian does, or scribbling between bumps on the bus. Make an effort to explore the local area and find the nooks and crannies of the city—cafés, park benches, libraries, bookstores, restaurants, and so on. And if writing at home, see what it's like to light a candle, turn off the lights, listen to music with and without lyrics, write standing up, or sitting on the floor, write at the kitchen table, or in the bathtub (probably with the water off), sit out on the balcony, or on the grass below, write early in the morning and “race the sun” like Larry does, or write well past sunset...

4. Use different contexts for different types of work.

As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, writing in different locations or using different devices for different types of work can help the mind compartmentalize and associate tasks separately (Ciotti, “The Best Way”). This step might be best tried after a writer has done their exploration and has a better idea of what spaces work for them. Writers should avoid writing in the same place in which they send work emails or draft academic assignments. One survey respondent wrote that they've tried writing in both the library and in coffee shops: “I find they're better for focused academic writing and comfortable spaces are better for creative writing.” In my case, if I tried to work on this thesis at my bookstore café, I wouldn't be able to focus and would only be able to think about the creative writing I could be doing, and the same goes for if I tried to write my creative work in progress in my school study lounge. This is a case of divide and conquer put in a different context. Tasks can be conquered in a more efficient manner if the contexts in which they are done are divided.

5. Create a daily or weekly routine.

It took me a while to learn that I work best with routine—my productivity increased immensely when I established my weekly routine of going to my bookstore café every Friday afternoon just to write, intermingled with other activities I enjoy such as going to the gym beforehand and watching my favorite show afterward. Professor Carter recounted her routine of getting up to write from 5 a.m. to 1 p.m., with an hour-long running break in the middle. When discussing habits and automaticity, researchers Judith Ouellette and Wendy Wood noted that habitual responses, as long as they are done in stable environments, that is, in consistent locations with consistent behavioral goals over time and setting, require less thought and effort; as opposed to unstable environments, which present new goals or otherwise disrupt the execution of practiced responses (1998). In other words, in order for a writer to establish a writing routine, and to train themselves to associate a certain place and time with creative writing, they must set consistent schedules, behaviors, and practices. How exact these factors must be would depend on the writer, as I find I work best as long as I go to that bookstore café around 2 or 3 or even 4 p.m., but I needn't go there at exactly 2 p.m. every time.

6. Set achievable goals that are out of reach but not out of sight.

A goal can be as simple as dedicating time to write once a week, and as complex as becoming the next J.K. Rowling. Whatever the dream, writers need to be realistic about their humanistic capabilities, and should consider that reaching long-term goals often requires the completion of short-term goals. Before finally publishing that book, think about the steps it takes to get there—the individual chapters that need writing, the world that needs building, the characters that need the breath of life. Many survey respondents said that completing their creative work was their ideal mark of success, but to get there requires smaller steps such as what

one respondent said: “sitting down every day and writing just a little bit.” Another said, “Steady progress on a novel. 20-30 pages a month in rough draft form.” Goals that are out of reach introduce a challenge that requires some work to overcome without depleting one’s energies. Out-of-sight goals, however, can make the writer feel hopeless about the possibility of even achieving them, and that’s not a good feeling. Writers should discover that happy medium between hard work and achievability, and they’ll be on their way.

7. Get together with other writers.

Writing is a largely solitary activity, but there are ways around that. Connecting with writers provides a peer group that’s as passionate about the weaving of words as you are. They can be a support group, lenders of advice, or even potential beta readers when another set of eyes is needed. Another benefit is being able to help other writers when they need it. Writer Melissa Donovan, creator of the blog *Write Forward*, says that being part of a critique group allows writers to “discover all kinds of interesting new writing tools and techniques, often simply through the course of discussion as well as through observing everyone’s work.” By critiquing others’ work, a writer can learn to see things they can also improve in their work. However, one needn’t organize an official get together with other writers, as simply going where other writers frequently gather—coffee shops, libraries, writing conferences and retreats—can be just as beneficial.

8. Realize it’s not all about the output.

Despite my study’s focus on productivity, I’ve learned that productivity isn’t everything. One survey respondent spoke for several others when they said, “Being successful is being able to write something that you’re proud of.” While it may certainly feel good to crank out a few thousand words in one day, if the writer doesn’t like those words a week later, then it may not

have done much good. Productivity is often thought of in terms of quantity, but some survey respondents leaned more toward quality, as one wrote: “Writing productively means creating quality pieces, not necessarily how many pages or how many words.” It’s important to connect with one’s writing, and to understand the deeper meaning in what it’s trying to say.

9. Take the time to find the meaning in your work.

Writers may write for a variety of reasons, as discussed in my first point of setting priorities. However, at the end of the day, a writer should be proud of their work, as many of the survey responders concurred with in their definitions of success. “It’s important for an author to have sat with their stories long enough to know what they’re about,” according to Professor Carter. “There are a lot of books out there that are very surface-y and don’t really have a deeper level. Have the patience to allow a story to gestate long enough for it to come out as a true story. Stephen King and Emily Dickinson have said: Tell all the truths, whatever you do. Don’t put on a show for anybody. Invite a reader in and give them enough information. Yes, dazzle readers long enough to make them stay, but don’t dazzle them so much you only care about the surface level.”

What I’ve Learned

My intention in this study was to help other writers become more aware of themselves and of other practices out there, but I did not realize the same would happen for me. Before doing this study, I was a huge proponent of producing large word counts, and I unintentionally assumed, in forming my research questions, that other writers did the same. And according to my study results, some did, although 29% of writers surveyed said they did not measure their writing quantity at all, and another 63% measured via another form like pages, chapters, or other.

Success and productivity needn't always be measured quantitatively, as many writers see those things qualitatively—feeling proud of their work long after it's written, or sitting down to write even when they're not in the mood, even when the story seems to be fighting back.

I've also paid more attention to and thought about my own writing process. Every time I listened to the interview recordings, looked over my notes, found sources, or otherwise interacted with this thesis, my desire to write grew and grew. Thinking and writing about writing makes me giddy, and I've often wished to be a part of my own study—that is to be told where and when to write, and then asked questions about it. Instead, though, I've reflected on my own writing practices. I realized that, while I've always tracked my word count, over the past year, I've drifted more into scene counting, feeling that sense of accomplishment more strongly if I finish writing a scene than if I hit a certain amount of words. For me, I could write the same scene in 500 words or 5000 words, depending on how wrapped up I get in descriptions, or how determined I am to just get the scene down before I forget it or lose my momentum. In the latter case, the scene often ends up shorter, and over time, that practice teaches me how to know when a scene is done. Going forward, I think I might still continue on the path of tracking my words, but relying more on finishing scenes.

I'm the writer who writes for fun, because it's fulfilling, because I need that outlet, because I have stories to tell, because I am better at no other thing, because I want to be published one day, because I want only to write for a living, because I need to write. Productivity may not be everything, but it's the thing that helps me keep my goals in perspective. It's the thing that makes my successes smaller and more achievable. It's the means to an end. And for me, a life spent writing is that end. The act of writing is physical, but it's tied so closely to our

emotions. Sticking with writing even through “all its ups and downs”, as one survey respondent commented, can be trying, but it’s worth it to persevere.

Significance and Further Research

In the future, this research can be stretched to measure not just how writing contexts can affect the success and productivity of a *creative* writer, but of other types of writers. Any writer can benefit from research done with the purpose of increasing productivity, and a study can be designed to reach that purpose. The case study could also be expanded to include more than just three writers and more than just three days across three consecutive weeks. Using larger numbers for a case study can lead to more generalized data that can appeal to a wider audience.

In my literature review section, I stated that the *why* of a context may in some cases be more important than the *where*. Some writers may pick one spot to write all their words in, others may flit from space to space as they please, but what trumps the place, perhaps, is why, and some further research on this topic could prove useful.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

(Estimate about 15 - 25 minutes to complete)

1. What is your experience with creative writing?
2. If you've studied creative writing formally, how many courses have you taken? What courses have you taken?
3. What is your favorite place to write and why? How did you choose this place?
4. What other places have you tried to write in? How did they work for you?
5. Do you have any specific habits or superstitions for when you do write? If yes, what and how often do you observe them?
6. Which option best describes your level of discipline:
 - a. I am not very disciplined and I usually only write when I feel like it or when I'm inspired.
 - b. I am somewhat disciplined with my writing schedule and set aside time to write when I can.
 - c. I am very disciplined and I have a strict writing schedule.
 - d. It has nothing to do with discipline; I have no problem writing most, if not all of the time.
7. How would you define success as it relates to your writing?
8. How would you define productivity as it relates to your writing?
9. How do you measure your writing quantity—word counts, page counts, chapters written, something else?
10. With your chosen form of measurement, what is your average when writing? What is the most you have ever written in one session?
11. Do you typically do all your writing in one sitting or spread throughout the day? What's the longest you've ever sat down to write?
12. How often do you write?
13. For what purpose(s) do you typically write?
 - a. Personal/hobby
 - b. Creative writing courses
 - c. Other
14. What motivates you to write?
 - a. Self-motivation
 - b. Discipline
 - c. Career/academic/life goals
 - d. Inspiration
 - e. External motivation (e.g.: writing groups, friends, NaNoWriMo)
15. What gets in the way of you writing?
 - a. Academic/career or familial/friendship obligations
 - b. Personal obligations
 - c. Laziness/lack of motivation
 - d. Writer's block/lack of inspiration
 - e. Other

Pre-Study Interview Questions

- What is your experience with creative writing? If you've studied it formally, how many courses have you taken?
- What is your favorite place to write and why? How did you choose this place?
- Do you have any other preferred writing contexts? How did you choose this context(s)?
- What other contexts have you tried? How did they work for you?
- Do you have any specific habits or conditions for when you do write? If yes, what and how often do you use them? If no, why not?
- How would you define success in your writing?
- How would you define being productive in your writing?
- What is your average word count? What is the most you have ever written in one session? How else do you measure your work—pages, sections, chapters?
- How do you measure productivity—such as with word counts, chapters written, story development, etc.?
- Do you usually do all your writing in one sitting or spread throughout the day? What's the longest you've ever sat down to write?
- What type of project do you think you'll work on during the writing sessions? Will you work on the same one throughout all three sessions, or do you expect to change projects? Why?
- How disciplined are you as a writer? Why?
- How do you think your success or productivity will be affected by changing your writing contexts?
- Anything else?
- Where would you like to write for the first writing session?

Post Writing Session Questions

- What were your initial impressions of this space?
- What were your likes and dislikes about this space? Why?
- Did you ever have trouble working in this context? Why?
- Do you think other factors outside of the context affected your productivity?
- Do you think the context had an effect on your productivity? If yes, what? If no, why not? Were you more, less, or just as productive?
- (If applicable:) How does this context compare to your preferred writing space?
- Did you have any goals going into this session of what you wanted to accomplish?
- What did you work on in this session? Did you change projects at any point?
- What are your impressions of the context now that you've written in it?
- How much did you write (in terms of chosen unit of measurement; e.g. word count, page count, chapters written, etc.)?
- Do you feel that this was a productive writing session? Why?
- Do you feel that this writing session was a success as far as any goals you may have set?

Post-Study Interview Questions

- Did you ever have trouble working in your context? Why?
- Did you prefer or dislike any of the new contexts over others? How did these contexts compare to your chosen context?
- Do you think the contexts had an effect on your productivity? If yes, what? If no, why not? Were you more, less, or just as productive?
- Did you change projects at any point during the sessions?
- Did you spend most of your time writing out the story, or were you working more on brainstorming or planning?
- Are your definitions of productivity and success still the same after doing this study?
- Do you think there were other factors outside of the context that affected your productivity?
- How did your impressions of the contexts change between first seeing the context to after writing in the context?
- Did you learn anything from doing this study?
- Do you think your awareness of writing for a study affected how you wrote? Would you have written just as much if you weren't in this study?