

WRITING ROOM HOW-TO

How to offer a low-cost program to your community to support their academic work

Behavioral research by Penn researchers suggests the presence of peers, an environment free from distraction, and accountability strategies increase self-control and success in achieving one's objectives.^{1,2} Writing Rooms offer individuals the space, schedule, and structure to work towards their academic goals in a productive atmosphere.



SPACE

Participants prefer a space with the following:

- Ample lighting & windows
- Plenty of outlets
- Enough space to avoid people sitting too close to one another

- Coffee, tea, and snacks provided so they don't have to leave if hungry

Our model uses conference rooms with capacities of 6-18, with an average number of 10 people per room; however, a Writing Room can be flexible in size to fit your needs.

SCHEDULE

Our model uses a 6 hour block of time each day the Writing Room is in session: 3 core hours & 3 optional hours (eg 8am-2pm, 9-12pm core hours)

Core and optional hours allow for guaranteed time with peer presence as well as room availability for those who prefer working for longer.

NOTE: Schedule is the primary barrier for most potential participants; consider adding flexibility in the following ways:

- Require commitment of a minimum number of days with other days optional
- Request participants commit for a month at a time or other reasonable lengths
- Offer one-time alternative writing marathons, such as during weekends or evenings



WRITING ROOM HOW-TO

How to offer a low-cost program to your community to support their academic work



STRUCTURE

EXPECTATIONS:

- No phones or social media,
- No talking (except at a low volume when necessary)
- No eating in the room (drinking is fine)

These expectations are reinforced with external accountability through an explanatory email, introductory packet, and signs in the middle of the table.

COMMITMENT DEVICES:²

- **Commitment contract** (internal accountability): participant commits to attend the designated dates and times
- **Partner accountability contract** (external accountability): at least two participants commit to meet at least before and after the Writing Room cycle to discuss goals and report progress
- **Money deposit contract** (external accountability): participant agrees to deposit a self-selected amount of money to staff to be returned upon completion of their goal(s)
- **Goal planning worksheet** (internal accountability): participant writes out goals, timeline, and plan to accomplish their objectives

**For more information, questions, or materials, please email Michelle Johnson
(michellj@sas.upenn.edu)**

mindCORE
Center for Outreach, Research, and Education

1. Duckworth, A. L., Milkman, K. L., & Laibson, D. (2018). Beyond Willpower: Strategies for Reducing Failures of Self-Control. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 19(3), 102-129. doi:10.1177/1529100618821893
2. Rogers, T., Milkman, K. L., & Volpp, K. G. (2014). Commitment Devices. *Jama*, 311(20), 2065. doi:10.1001/jama.2014.3485