How to survive (& thrive) in academia: a practical guide

Mirya R. Holman
Associate Professor
Political Science
Tulane University
New Orleans, USA
www.miryaholman.com
Author of #MHAWS:
miryaholman.substack.com
Today’s goals:

Convince you that:

You can succeed without being miserable

We can use our social science training to understands ourselves

There are practical tools for accountability and planning to help!
Academia is (often) miserable

Three reasons why:

- Our Accountability Structure is Skewed
- The Work → Reward Link Is Tenuous (at best)
- There is No Done
What can we do?

Step 1: Create better accountability structures
Question 1 – place yourself on this scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I like the idea of telling someone my writing goals (&amp; if I met them!)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>My goals aren’t anyone’s business but my own</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Question 2 – place yourself on this scale

| Conferences are important because I have to give other people a paper & will be embarrassed if I don’t have (a good) one | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Conferences are important deadlines because I’ll know when the paper needs to be done |
Question 3 – place yourself on this scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I struggle with completing solo work; I prefer to work with other people</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I struggle with completing work with other people; I prefer to work on my own</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 4 – place yourself on this scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People might say that I do too much for other people and have a hard time saying no</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>People might say that I do what I want and have a hard time giving time to others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 5 – which dog are you?
Average your score

you can ignore #5 if you want

why would you want to though?
Average your score
you can ignore #5 if you want
why would you want to though?

Score of 1-2:
You are highly motivated by external accountability. Coauthored work is probably easier for you than solo work. Collaborative and social environments are your jam.

Score of 3:
You might benefit from both external and internal accountability… or neither.

Score of 4-5:
You are motivated by internal accountability. Solo work is probably easier for you and you prefer working on your own.
Accountability structures

External accountability
- Swap work with other people
- Create a writing group
- Publicly state goals
- Use conference deadlines
- Promise your work to others

Internal accountability
- Regularly check ins
- Visual reminders
- Clear goals
- Use internal deadlines
- Promise yourself work
Just not like this, okay?
Accountability structures

External accountability
- Swap work with other people
- Create a writing group
- Publicly state goals
- Use conference deadlines
- Promise your work to others

Internal accountability
- Regularly check ins
- Visual reminders
- Clear goals
- Use internal deadlines
- Promise yourself work
What can we do?

Step 1: Create better accountability structures

Step 2: Treat yourself
Reward guidelines

Commiserate with what you are celebrating

Push you towards your goal

Be meaningful
Reward guidelines

Commiserate with what you are celebrating

Push you towards your goal

Be meaningful
What can we do?

Step 1: Create better accountability structures

Step 2: Treat yourself

Step 3: Get good at setting goals
Phase 1: Collect underpants
Phase 2: ?
Phase 3: Profit
Copycat is okay, copy and adapt is better

Vary goal setting by temporality

Revisit your goals

Adjust your processes
Five year+
- Get promoted

One year
- Finish book
- Publish a top-three hit

Semester
- Finish 2nd draft of chapters
- Work on socialization R&R
- Submit MeToo

Month
- Finish chapter 2
- Full response to R1
- Final edits

Week
- Minority incorporation in chapter 2
- Read R1 again, draft response
- Prep appendix
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 years / promotion</th>
<th>1 year</th>
<th>Summer / Semester</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counts of publications, placement</td>
<td>Counts of submissions, rejections</td>
<td>Movement of projects through stages</td>
<td>Focus on project progress</td>
<td>Blocked time and check lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals = personal development</td>
<td>Major goals and deadlines</td>
<td>Smaller goals and deadlines</td>
<td>Time or word count goals</td>
<td>Concrete tasks as goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be moving goalposts</td>
<td>Be very willing to adapt</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Less flexible</td>
<td>Inflexible (don’t change goals midweek)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Weekly Affirmation:**

```
A goal without a plan is just a wish
The future is gunning for you. Kick ass.
```

**Goals for the week:**

- Sunday
- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday

**RESEARCH**

- #DoItForTheBook
- #DoItForTheBook
- #DoItForTheBook
- #DoItForTheBook
- #DoItForTheBook

- Teaching
- Service
- Event

- Veggies
- Distance
- Water

**Rewards:**
Good goal setting behavior

Copycat is okay, copy and adapt is better

Vary goal setting by temporality

Revisit your goals

Adjust your processes
Good Goal Setting Lets You Feel Done
So What?

Why does it matter that you structure your life with accountability, rewards, and goals?

My hope is that you can use this to:
- Help with work-life balance
- Gain mental clarity about what matters (not this, not really)
- Be less miserable
- Be more productive
Resources

Robert Boyce *Professors as Writers*
Stephen King *On Writing*
Anne Lamott *Bird By Bird*
Gretchen Rubin *Better Than Before & The 4 Tendencies* (take the quiz if you haven’t already!)
Cal Newport *Deep Work*
Raul Pacheco-Vega’s blog on academic work
The National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity
Recap of Today’s Goals

You can succeed without being miserable

We can use our social science training to understand ourselves

There are practical tools for accountability and planning to help!