

HGRG Virtual Writing Retreat 2020.

Aim

The aim of the virtual writing retreat is to dedicate time to focus on your scholarly historical geography writing goals between 7th and 9th of January 2020. It is based around writing retreats that have been organised for HGRG by Jo Norcup / Geography Workshop Productions. The last two years the retreat took place in real space at the Gladstone Library, Hawarden, UK. Last year we piloted a virtual retreat due to the high demand of interest in taking part but people being unable to afford the resource necessary to attend a physical retreat. It proved successful as much to foster collegiality with historians and historical geographers from different parts of the world and as a boost to new year writing resolutions. The retreat guidelines have been updated to take these new circumstances in account. Should you wish to share your experiences or have any ideas during the time that would improve future years practise, please do share these. Thanks to Jo Norcup / Geography Workshop for organising this experiment in collegial academic writing.

The most important focus for organising a virtual writing retreat is that it gives a clear focus to **your** writing goals for the year / longer term and enables you to think through how you might structure these goals and get them achieved.

These goals are yours and yours alone. Do not be tempted to compare yourself with others (however much society / institutional structures nurture this). What matters is you attending to the writing you need to get you to the next stage of your writing / scholarship / academic goals. To do this in a kind, supportive and encouraging space is something that this exercise aims to nurture.

This document gifts some suggestions of things you might do in order to help you prepare for two days of virtual writing retreat. If you have never been on a writing retreat before, this is largely to give you time and headspace so you can focus on the writing goals you want to achieve or in progressing with / editing / finishing something you have already begun writing but haven't quite managed to complete.

The aim is largely that you have as much time as possible to dedicate to writing. Preparing beforehand is VITAL.

Preparing for the Writing Retreat:

- 1) **Set your writing goals:** What can YOU achieve reasonably in the time you will be able to free up over the three days of the virtual writing retreat? If you can commit to three full days, make sure you have all the resources (notes made from reading materials, etc.) to bring. DO NOT be tempted to bring reading matter to read during this time (unless you wish to turn this into a virtual reading retreat, which, of course, is entirely up to you, but with the focus on writing, I would suggest getting the reading BEFOREHAND this writing retreat begins). If you know there will be more you need to look up / fact check / reference, make a note of this during your writing time. There will be time in the evenings or after the retreat finishes to fine tune.

- 2) **Be realistic.** Have a look at each suggested block of writing time in the suggested timetable at the end of this document (or the blocks you are able to commit to over the three days) and allocate aims for each session. Sessions last for 50 minutes with 10 minute breaks and two run in succession before a longer break (see timetable). Consider what you want to achieve by the end of the day and allocate proportionately what you know you will need to complete in order to achieve this. This is methodical and mechanical, but it will help you see whether you are under or over aiming for your outputs for this time (again, you are the only measure that matters here, no one else). If you plan to start a new piece of writing, use each session to focus in on the structures you would wish for the writing and how this will progress over the day / retreat as a whole and where it will leave you for the rest of the year. If you draw up writing goals for the year, see how these two days might help kick start your goals, or else might fit with other writing ambitions (be clear that writing ambitions might be updating your CV/ undertaking a job application / putting together a funding bid. It's all writing!!).
- 3) **Monitor your own progress.** After each session you complete (see further down this document for suggested timetable), keep a note of words written. Yes, counting words is arbitrary and meaningless in that it can suggest superficial documenting, BUT it also make you realise what you are capable of writing given dedicated time. It makes one aware of focused working practices. All of your writing will need further work beyond the retreat itself, but keeping a tally of words completed during this retreat can give a sense of progress and affirm your capabilities. If you really don't like the idea of monitoring words, make sure you give yourself a few bullet point notes on how the session went: What worked? How you might tackle the next session?
- 4) **Practical preparing tips: Let everyone you know / who comes into your daily life (this is especially true of family / house mates / friends) that you will be writing during this time.**
If you can clear your schedule so you are able to dedicate time to writing for the entire two days, brilliant. If not, **try to set aside dedicated time during these days when you will not be accepting calls / checking emails / checking the internet or social media.** Tell any / everyone living in your domestic space / in your shared working space (where appropriate) that you will be undertaking a virtual writing retreat for two days. That you will not be available on the phone / email, etc. If it is easier, consider finding somewhere away from home to undertake your work: local public library? Café? Quiet area in a local museum / gallery? Avoiding the mothersload of invisible chores is a challenge if working from home, so take pains to be away from any sudden "emergencies" that might suggest you need to stop what you are doing. Your work matters. You matter. Keep this time sacred for your ambitions.

CLEAR TIME FOR YOU. If you simply cannot clear your schedule these days, but would still like to join in, please do so and recalibrate the timetable in a way that works for you to achieve maximum positive productivity given the virtual writing retreat running and what you can do. Can you do one

session a day in the evening? One before and one after your full time commitments? Great! You will have completed 6 hours if you only commit to 2x 50 minutes a day for each of the days

Another final suggestion is that you write away from the temptations of the internet. Try not to have any other distractions.

- 5) **Plan 'Brainfood'**: Yes, writing is all about the nutritious snacks, treats and wholesome meals and drinks that help feed the wordsmithery. Don't knock it. If you do not have a domestic home help (I do not, I AM the domestic homehelp), then plan the kind of foods you want and food prep for the time you will be undertaking on this virtual retreat. The afternoon of Sunday 5th January, I will be food-prepping the life out of my week ahead. Flapjacks, rockyroads, vegan lasagne, stirfry veggies, pre-prepped jacket potatoes, veggie chili. I will be stocking up on the ingredients late night / bargain food shop style on Saturday 4th so that come next Tuesday, the only food prep I will need to do will be a slow reheat during the pre-dinnertime / pre-teatime writing session. Financing the food needn't break your budget (I am on v low income at the moment, so know the need to stick to budgets). I am a big fan of Jack Monroe cooking on a bootstrap. If you want some inspiration, have a look here <https://cookingonabootstrap.com>. Jack does a good range of cheap vegan cooks, so no need to buy expensive processed pre-packed stuff (unless you want to). I also 'invested' in a massive tub of popcorn over the festive period and popcorn kernels to make my own at home. Popcorn is a great writing snack. I still have some Clementine's and assorted nuts and seeds to nibble on. Of course, buying lovely cakes and biscuits if you don't have time to bake yourself is always an option if you can afford it. Just remember, in feeding yourself the good stuff, you are feeding your writing muse!
- 6) Although this is a virtual writing retreat, I will only be logging in online / on social media at the end of each day. Wherever you are in the world / time zone you are in, **It would be ace if you could virtually check-in on twitter once a day**. You don't have to say anything or discuss progress, but an indicator of how many people are taking part (take a photo of where you are writing? Or share daily word count **#hgrg_vwr2020** would be good so we can gauge how useful such a virtual experience is. Should you have any questions or experiences you wish to share with fellow virtual writing retreaters, feel free to leave **supportive and encouraging**, affirming comments only. Please remember this virtual retreat is meant as an inclusive and encouraging space and one that brings support.
- 7) At the end of the #hgrg_vwr2020, if you wish to, there will be a reflections / feedback form uploaded on the HGRG website. This is FOR YOU. To help you reflect on what you have achieved over the two days and how you can consider maintaining your writing commitments alongside other demands on your time over the following year. Should you wish to comment and share feedback to HGRG about the experience, or any other ideas you might have to support fellow historians / historical geographers in their quotidian scholastic practice, please do get in touch joanne.norcup@nottingham.ac.uk.

Thanks and Happy Virtual Writing retreating!!!



#HGRG_VWR2020: Timetable

Here is a suggested timetable for your virtual writing retreat. Print it off and have it to plan your writing goals per session you will be dedicating to writing during this time. This is YOURS to use how you wish. There is no right or wrong way to do this. If you know you will only be able to dedicate one day, then focus on how best to make the most of that allocated time.

Use a timepiece with an alarm you can set every 50 minutes (a kitchen timer is ideal for this rather than a smart phone which might be kept on and interrupt writing proceedings).

Each suggested writing session has a maximum of 50 minute writing time before having a break from the computer screen. The allocated 10 minutes are for rest breaks / getting a cuppa / getting some air and have a walk. Please make sure you use the breaks to step away from the screen.

The times are only a suggestion based around a full time day. Stagger and manage times to suit your own needs. 8 sessions of 50 minutes gives just over 6 hours a day to your writing. If you can commit to three whole days and focused 18 hours to your writing ambitions, see what you are able to achieve in this time! Good Luck and all power to your writing

Tuesday 7th January		Aim for session	
Word count			
Session 1	0900 – 0950		
Session 2	10:00 – 10:50		
Session 3	11:10 – 12:00		
Session 4	12:10 - 1300		
1300 – 1400 Lunch / exercise			
Session 5	1400 – 1450		
Session 6	1500 – 1550		
Session 7	1610 – 1700		
Session 8	1710 - 1800		
Evening: relax, reflect & update / share on progress (optional) #hgrg_vwr2020			
Running total word count, Day 1 =			
Wednesday 8th January			
Session 1	0900 – 0950		
Session 2	1000 – 1050		
Session 3	1110 – 1200		
Session 4	1210 - 1300		
1300 – 1400 Lunch / exercise			
Session 5	1400 – 1450		
Session 6	1500 – 1550		
Session 7	1610 – 1700		
Session 8	1710 - 1800		
Evening: relax, reflect & update / share on progress (optional) #hgrg_vwr2020			

Running total word count, Day 2 =			
Thursday 9th January			
Session 1	0900 – 0950		
Session 2	1000 – 1050		
Session 3	1110 – 1200		
Session 4	1210 - 1300		
1300 – 1400 Lunch / exercise			
Session 5	1400 – 1450		
Session 6	1500 – 1550		
Session 7	1610 – 1700		
Session 8	1710 - 1800		
Evening: relax, reflect & update / share on progress (optional) #hrg_vwr2020			
Running total word count for all three days =			

