

Be prepared

Write well
academically



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Selene Delpont

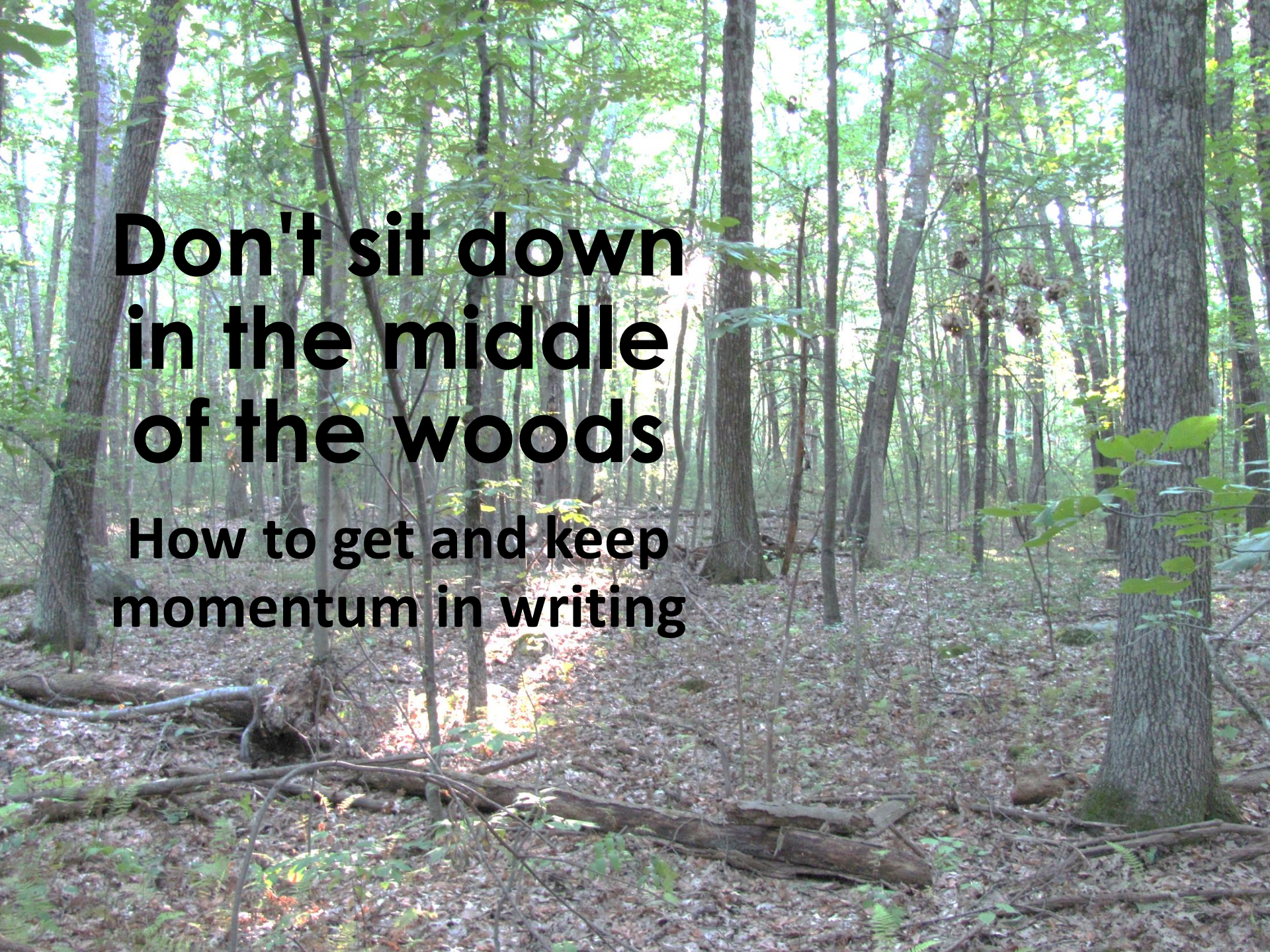
Writing Lab

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Don't sit down in the middle of the woods

**How to get and keep
momentum in writing**

Hjortshoj's analogy:

“Look, Carl. Writing is this little fire you tend, and your goal is to keep it going. Maybe you have to leave it briefly to get a few sticks, or a rabbit to cook, but just do that and hurry back before it goes out. You don't want to spend days collecting several cords of firewood or studying the principles of firebuilding. If you do, each time you come back you'll have nothing, but cold ashes.”

(Hjortshoj, 2001:84)



Carl's response:

“I think I’m the rabbit.”



Draw me a picture

- Draw an illustration of how you see yourself in relation to your research project now
- Compare your picture with that of someone sitting next to you
- How would your picture look ideally?



Why writers don't write



The implications of not understanding that writing is a process

- You think you're doing something wrong when it's not perfect the first time
- You won't understand what your process involves
- You won't be able to change or develop your process



So how do you write?

- For ten minutes write about how you write. You can discuss anything you like (what you physically do, what your habits are, how you prepare for writing, when you write, etc.)
- Don't worry about spelling, grammar or punctuation
- **Only rule:** write without stopping or planning for the entire ten minutes



Feedback

- How did it feel to write this way?
- What is your process?
- Should anything change?



An expert's view

“So many scientists think that once they figure it out, that's all they have to do, and writing it up is just a chore. I never saw it that way; part of the art of any kind of total scholarship is to say it well.”

Stephen Jay Gould, *The Writer's Almanac*, 10 September, 2007



Punctuated equilibrium

- Where evolutionary change occurs relatively rapidly, as compared to longer periods of relative evolutionary stability (with apologies to Stephen Jay Gould!)
- Do you have growth spurts when you write? Then you might write with punctuated equilibrium.



A key question

Evolution by jerks or evolution by creeps?



The Zen version



Phases of writing

- Prewriting
- Composing
- Revising
- Editing
- Release

(Hjortshøj, 2001)



Alone or in a team?

- Writing consultations
- Writing groups
- Fresh eyes
- Support
- Capacity development



Some tricks to get you going (I)

- Jump in!
- Begin where you feel most confident
- Set writing times
- Write a certain amount of words every day (instead of an amount of time)
- Set deadlines (and keep to them)



Some tricks to get you going (II)

- Decide to write for ten minutes
- Break your task into small pieces
- Develop a writing plan
- Promise yourself a reward for making progress
- Do away with perfectionism



A photograph of a dirt path in a forest. The path splits into two directions, one leading slightly uphill and the other slightly downhill, both surrounded by dense green trees and foliage. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

If you're feeling lost, remember:

Don't sit down in the middle of the woods. If you're lost in the plot or blocked, retrace your steps to where you went wrong. Then take the other road. And/or change the person. Change the tense. Change the opening page.

Margaret Atwood, *guardian.co.uk* ©
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Who can help?

- One-to-one consultations (also via Skype)
 - Anne-Mari Lackay (amlackay@sun.ac.za / +27 21 808 2989)
- Writing skills workshops
 - Selene Delport (selene@sun.ac.za / +27 21 808 2947)
- Shut-up-and-write (Postgraduate Office)
 - Alison Bucholz (alisonb@sun.ac.za)



Who can help? Cont.

- Reading Lab
 - Marisca Coetzee (mcoetzee@sun.ac.za)
- Language Services
 - Marguerite van der Waal
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