

What To Do When You Get Bored With Your Research Topic

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Let's face it, researching and writing a dissertation or a book means you're going to spend a long time thinking about one, very narrow topic. Because of this, it's common for academics to start to tire of their topics at one point or another. It's usually around the time that you've finished your research and started to write. In other words, you've been with the topic a long time, but the end isn't in sight yet. How do you convince yourself to sit down every day and keep at it? Here are a few ways to re-ignite your passion... or at least help you get through.

Take Time Off

This is difficult for many of us because we feel under pressure to finish our projects. And besides, taking time off only elongates the process when what you most want is for it to be completed sooner. But taking a solid week away from your project can give you time to rest and attend to other matters in your life. Your brain needs rest to get stronger, just like an athlete's muscles need rest before they can heal and grow stronger. So, when you return to your work you will have more energy and focus to dedicate to it.

Visualize the Finish Line, the Next Project, or the Reward

Remind yourself about why you are doing this. This can be a great technique to combine with step one: on your week off, spend time imagining or even writing about what will happen after this project is over. Maybe you're going to reward yourself with a great vacation. Perhaps it will mean finishing your doctoral degree and being able to move onto the career of a full-time professor or another career. Maybe you've found another topic that you can't wait to dig into after this one. Spend time indulging yourself in these ideas—and always picture the start of these great things as the moment you hand in your final draft.

To Do or Not To Do

When you're really feeling oppressed by your project, realize that you have two options: you can put it down and walk away and move onto other projects or you can do it. If step two doesn't provide you with enough motivation, perhaps you're bored because you no longer see the point in finishing the project. But if finishing means something to you, you must put your head down and get to work.

Change Your Writing Routine

Were you previously working with week- or month-long goals? Try scheduling mini goals. Make the goals concrete and measurable. For instance, make it a goal to write for 30 minutes a day or to write a certain number of pages a day. Don't judge yourself on the quality—just keep working. If you feel frustrated because you think your progress is too slow, just remember that slow progress is far better than no progress. It will add up!

Just as how the dissertation process is not a test of your intelligence but rather a test of your mental and emotional health, this is one of the instances where mental health matters. Do you have the strength of mind to be able to will yourself to finish? This, in the end, is what distinguishes someone with a PhD and someone without.

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