

Surviving Report Writing

Working in schools can be stressful!

These articles are intended to help the great people who work in schools reduce stress and increase satisfaction.

Key points

Report writing time is a predictable time of stress!

Exercise is often the first thing that we stop doing when stressed by report deadlines - DON'T!

If you aren't well organised and prepared, learn from it. Write notes to prevent this happening again.

Talk straight

Re-read difficult reports the following day

Nothing in the world is good or bad but thinking makes it so

Shakespeare

Report writing time is stressful – fact! It is an additional task to do as well as your usual day-to-day responsibilities. It also comes at the end of the term when we are at our most vulnerable and our reserves are low. However the stress is to be expected – don't be surprised, it happens at this time every year! It is important to monitor your self-talk and keep the stress in proportion.

It is particularly important to **maintain the activities that reduce stress** when we are at our most vulnerable. Often the first thing that we stop doing when we add the extra demands at report writing time, is our exercise routine. Taking a break to get some fresh air, raise the pulse and take our mind to other places is vital and makes us more effective. The 30 minutes it takes to get some exercise is NOT wasted time. Don't stop walking the dog, going to the gym, walking etc. These times are vital!

Deal with the current challenge. Break the task down into achievable chunks. How much needs to be achieved each day? Tackle the difficult parts first and work your way through it. Focus on the task and remove distractions for a block of 50 minutes before taking a 10 minute break. Set a realistic goal to achieve in that one hour session.

Parents should be given accurate information on their child, however care needs to be taken in how we phrase comments. Reports on some students are particularly difficult to write. Getting the balance right in your wording is important. A useful term to keep in mind is Covey's '**Talk straight**'. If we 'soften' our wording too much, for fear that we might upset parents or the student, we risk not getting our message across – particularly when there is a problem. Beware of too much 'sugar coating'.

However, if we are too blunt in our message we can damage the relationship and be seen as harsh. This will just add to our stress later as parents or students will question our intent. Hitting the 'sweet spot' in the middle is important. It is a good idea to **re-read the reports that we are particularly concerned about**, after a good night's sleep.

The aim of communication is to **clearly convey a message from one person to the other**. Will your words achieve that?

If you are going to miss a deadline, talk to your Principal, confront reality, apologise and accept responsibility. Avoid blaming others and making excuses. Make a commitment that is realistic and assure them that you won't make the same mistake again.

Obviously the preventative strategies of being organised and prepared are best and help to reduce stress. If you aren't happy with your current level of preparation, learn from it. Take 30 minutes NOW to plan and record what you need to do in the future to **prevent this happening next time**. Write it down in your diary for the first day of next term. Take action now to be better prepared next time.

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