

#WaterlooWrites groups are volunteer-facilitated writing communities for graduate students. Writers who have finished coursework or are tackling a big writing project often face challenges like social or physical isolation, a lack of structure, and feeling alone in the struggle to write. If any of that sounds familiar, then writing groups can help. This social space with an established structure for big writing projects can help you feel connected to your peers while practicing effective and sustainable writing habits.



#WaterlooWrites

Host Guidebook

Read through the material in this guidebook to help you decide if you want to host a #WaterlooWrites group and to learn the steps you need to take to set one up for you and your peers.

Host your writing group online through the #WaterlooWrites Team or host them in person in a location of your choosing.



Since 2020, our #WaterlooWrites groups have held over 1,000 sessions!

Create a social writing space for you and your peers!

Through #WaterlooWrites, The Writing and Communication Centre (WCC) offers a “writing café in a box” to bring social writing practices to students where you already work, and empower you to build communities of practice of your own in those spaces. The WCC provides the infrastructure, guidance, and educational resources for volunteer groups to host your own weekly writing cafés.

Get in touch with the WCC today to get started!

writing and communication centre

What is a #WaterlooWrites Group?



The Host

Each #WaterlooWrites Group has a volunteer leader or host, as well as, ideally, an alternate. These hosts find or book a writing space (or organize the virtual meetings), greet writing group participants, act as “time-keeper,” take attendance each week, facilitate goal-setting and end-of session discussion, and introduce a weekly writing “tip” (provided by the WCC).



The Participants

Participants in these writing groups commit to attending all (or almost all) sessions, barring illness. As an incentive to attend, they receive a stamp card (as a form-fillable PDF or a physical card) that they can fill in and redeem for a #WaterlooWrites coffee mug. To redeem a mug, they must attend 12 sessions at any #WaterlooWrites group, including the WCC Writing Cafés.



The Sessions

#WaterlooWrites groups must set a schedule for meetings, so that participants can rely on the writing group. The frequency (weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly) is up to you and your group. Aim to start meeting in Month 1 (September, January, May) for sessions between 2 and 3 hours long. This includes time for goal-setting, 30-minute writing “poms” with short breaks, and reflection at the end. A standard writing session could look like this:

Total Time:

2h35m

You can set whatever schedule your participants want, but we recommend the Pomodoro Method: 25- to 30-minute working ‘poms’ with alternating 5-minute breaks (and a 10- to 15-minute break after 4 ‘poms’).

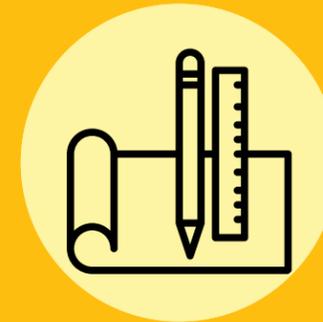
Use the Goal-setting and Tracking sheets the WCC Facilitator sent you!

Writing Time:

2h

Task	Time	Actor
Welcome participants and take attendance	5 minutes	Host
Introduce weekly writing tip	5 minutes	Host
Goal Setting	5 minutes	Individual
First Writing Pom	30 minutes	Individual
Break for coffee and socializing	5 minutes	All
Second Writing Pom	30 minutes	Individual
Break for coffee and socializing	5 minutes	All
Third Writing Pom	30 minutes	Individual
Break for coffee and socializing	5 minutes	All
Fourth Writing Pom	30 minutes	Individual
Wrap Up: reflect on progress and goals	5 minutes	Individual
Wrap Up: congratulate yourselves!	5 minutes	All

How do you host a #WaterlooWrites Group?



Plan

Once you’ve identified that you want to host a #WaterlooWrites group, your next step is to figure out when and where you want your group to meet. We recommend planning weekly sessions at the same time and place, as consistency is essential for developing and sustaining good habits. Whether you meet online or in person, we also recommend setting expectations for attendance and social writing etiquette.

How regularly do you want to meet?

Whether you meet weekly, monthly, or somewhere in the middle, it’s essential to stick to a schedule. Figure out what frequency works for your participants to ensure people come to every session.

Where do you want to meet?

Virtual groups on Teams can be more accessible, but many people appreciate the social pressure to stay focused when working in person.

If you’re meeting in person, find a room you can write in regularly: see if your department has a bookable space, or check out the Library or SLC. You can also apply for a small snack fund (using the form in the host package) to encourage people to come!

If you’re meeting virtually, use the ‘join now’ function in your channel on Teams or create a regular meeting room.

Who do you want to participate?

Some groups include any graduate students from their department or faculty, whereas others are for specific research groups or identity groups: it’s up to you who you want to include, though we recommend making sure you pick a group that’s big enough to attract a regular set of at least 5 consistent participants.

What is the mood of your group?

All groups should have dedicated, focused writing time, but you can decide how you want to use the breaks: do you want to create a social, chatty atmosphere while people refill their coffee, or do you want to encourage people to step away from their keyboards and leave the room? We recommend encouraging some socializing, at least at the beginning and end of the session, but whatever you choose, you should communicate it to your participants!



Connect with the WCC

Once you’ve decided what you want your writing group to look like, it’s time to re-connect with Elise Vist at the WCC. Let them know what kind of group you’re looking to set up, and follow their instructions for joining the training session or one-to-one conversation to discuss any questions and make sure you have access to all the material.

Get in touch with Elise at mevist@uwaterloo.ca

How do you host a #WaterlooWrites Group?



Promote

As a graduate student in a specific department and faculty, you are best able to contact your peers. The WCC will also promote the program on our website, but you have an important role to play in getting the word out and inviting friends, peers, and colleagues to participate.

Reach out virtually and physically

Share information about your writing group through email, on social media, and in the physical spaces (like a student lounge in your department) where potential participants are likely to be. Consider sharing information about your writing group with your graduate chair and other faculty so they can encourage their students to attend.

Design something for your peers

The host package includes a link to a few poster templates on Canva, which you can adapt as much as you'd like, though you're free to make your own poster! You will know better than we do what will entice and invite your peers to participate.

Give your group a catchy description

Based on what you decided in the planning stage, write 1-2 sentences to express the mood and purpose of your writing group. For example, "This quiet, focused writing space is perfect for people who need to escape the bustle of their labs," or "A social, lively writing space to motivate you to keep writing."



Connect with the WCC

The WCC will happily share, retweet, and repost your social media posts inviting participants in your writing group, so let us know what you're posting! If you have questions about how to design the poster or write a snappy blurb, you can also reach out to the WCC or other #WaterlooWrites hosts for help.

Get in touch with Elise at mevist@uwaterloo.ca

How do you host a #WaterlooWrites Group?



Host

Once you've got people in the room (virtual or physical) for your writing group, your job is to shepherd participants through settling in, setting goals, staying focused on 'poms', and reflecting on their writing challenges and successes, as well as keeping track of who shows up so that they can earn their mugs. We recommend having at least two people who can host, so that you can trade off the duties each session.

Track attendance

Greet people when they come in and make note of their attendance. Not only does this ensure they can redeem their 12 sessions for a #WaterlooWrites mug, but it also encourages people to keep coming. It's easier to attend an event if you know people will note your absence!

Start with goal-setting

Setting time aside at the start for goal-setting helps your participants settle into their focused writing time, and also encourages them to develop one of the most important writing habits. Consistent writers set goals, track their progress, and reflect on and revise those goals. Use the Goal-Setting and Tracker Form in the host package.

Keep time for writing poms

Use a Pomodoro timer, like marinaratimer.com, to keep you and your writers on task. Writing in short 'poms' and taking breaks in between is essential to developing sustainable writing habits.

Share 5-minute writing tips

The #WaterlooWrites WCC Facilitator will give you access to a bank of over 30 5-minute writing tips, which you can then share with your participants to help them become more informed writers.



Connect with the WCC

If something isn't working the way you expected it to, or if you're having trouble running a session of your writing group, please let us know! We can help you figure out what changes you can make to the room or system you use, to ensure everyone – including the host! – has a great #WaterlooWrites experience.

Get in touch with Elise at mevist@uwaterloo.ca

FAQs #WaterlooWrites Group!



Connect with the WCC

The WCC is here to help you with any questions, concerns, obstacles, challenges, or curiosities as you plan, promote, and host your #WaterlooWrites Group. Please reach out to us so that we can help you make a writing group that motivates and connects graduate student writers.

Get in touch with Elise at mevisti@uwaterloo.ca

How is this different from the Writing Cafes?

The WCC's own writing groups, the Writing Cafes, continue to run virtually (Tuesday and Friday mornings) and in-person (Wednesday afternoons) and operate on a drop-in basis. Your #WaterlooWrites group will have a time and location that works best for you and your participants and will require more consistent attendance, to create accountability.

Can I schedule my group at the same time as someone else's?

Yes, even the WCC's Writing Cafes! Your group should happen when and where makes the most sense for your participants, even if that's at the same time as another group

What kinds of snacks can I get?

You can apply for snack funding through the #WaterlooWrites Snack Fund form, which we will use to reimburse you for coffee and tea and small writing-fuel snacks (like donuts, granola bars, cookies, etc.). Each in-person writing group can apply for funding from the WCC using the form in the host package.

What if I don't want to use the Pomodoro Method?

We won't force you to use a system that doesn't work for you and your participants, so pick a structure that works best for your writing needs. However, we recommend the Pomodoro Method (which you can adapt to your writing needs) because its structure encourages sustainable, consistent writing habits and lends itself to setting goals and tracking progress.

Happy writing!