



Beyond the Book[®]



F: We are live and ready to roll. Welcome back everybody for the afternoon session. And I am delighted to introduce Dr. Erin Oksol. She's a licensed clinical health psychologist at the student health center at the University of Nevada, Reno. And I'll have you know she drove nine hours with her family from Reno. She has a private practice and is also the president of the Nevada State Psychological Association. She led a thesis dissertation support group in which the focus was on helping students achieve their writing goals in the face of – something we're all familiar with – lack of motivation, anxiety and/or competing contingencies. So please welcome Dr. Oksol.

(tech talk)

OKSOL: Well hello everyone. Please don't feel sorry for me. I'm so happy to be here and honored to be here and the ride was beautiful and I'm at Green Valley Ranch with my children in the pool so it's fabulous. Last year I was there Michael Jackson was there. I think that's such a funny story. He had the cape on but the children didn't. Well we're going to be talking about how to overcome writer's block. And in the literature really writer's block is synonymous with writer's anxiety. And my specialty is anxiety, treating anxiety disorders, worry, perfectionism, things along that nature. And I've led many anxiety support groups at the University of Nevada, Reno with the college students and also thesis dissertation support groups with the college students working on those projects and so it was really fun to learn about your organization and maybe some day I'll be part of it because I would love to write a book and that's really anxiety-provoking for me.

But today I'm going to be talking about a new therapy that's been around since about the late '80's. I'm going to talk about cognitive behavioral therapies that have really been the gusto of psychology since the '50's, but the new age behavior therapy, which is ACT – acceptance and commitment therapy, ACT. And the chair of our psychology department is Steven Hayes and he's the 30th most-published psychologist ever. So he's really internationally and nationally known. But a lot of what I'm going to be talking about is from this book and you might love to get this book. It was just in *Time* magazine. The title of the article in *Time* magazine was "Happiness isn't Normal." So it'll teach you how to get through your suffering and your writer's block. I would just call it get out of your mind and into your life.

And so I hope that you enjoy learning a whole new twist, and my twist on all of this.

I'm going to be talking a little bit about the origins of writer's block. Mostly though – and how this is a psychological problem and how this really belongs to the domain of psychology – oh sure, that'd be great – and cognitive science. Thank you, Kim. She's going to pass out the handouts. And then of course the focus, strategies for overcoming writer's block. People in the literature talking about writer's block have called it the fragile balance between motivation and enthusiasm in the face of self-doubt and self-criticism. And so self-doubt and self-criticism, that really is a psychology thing. And you might want to think about for this presentation for yourselves as writers, what's the hardest part of writing for you? Is it drafting, revising, editing, proofreading? For most people it's getting started. And it's this idea of this conflict of feelings. Of being really motivated and wanting it to be great but wanting it to be perfect but also wanting it over with ASAP. And writer's block can be thought of as really this combination of anxiety and frustration. So that's really what it is. I found a lot of fun quotes so bear with me. But Stephen King, the scariest moment is always just before you start writing. After that things only get better. The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair. One of the most difficult things is the first paragraph. I have spent many months on a first paragraph and once I get it, the rest just comes out very easily. And the secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex, overwhelming tasks into small, manageable tasks and then starting on the first one.

So first let's talk a little bit about creativity. And we know that's what it takes to get a book written and to generate the ideas and to formulate them and put them together. And get to that end product. And creativity, again, belongs to psychology. Really the study of mental representations and the processes underlying our creative thought belongs to cognitive science and psychology. I'm going to be talking a lot about the ways to overcome barriers. And a lot of that is how to take care of yourself and basically be happy people. And what they've found is that's a way to prevent writer's block. But after writing that fabulous book, obviously many people feel very happy. And so creativity, and that insight that comes from creativity – I'll talk about how that's sparked by positive affect but it also creates positive affect and feelings of elation. I love that quote by Albert Einstein. He called his General Theory of Relativity the happiest thought of my life.

Research has shown that positive affect – just positive feelings – have three primary affects on our cognitive activities, our thought processes. One – it makes additional cognitive material available for processing. It gives us more thoughts. We think more when we're happier. The second – leads to defocused attention, so scattered attention, and a more complex cognitive context, increasing the breadth of those elements that are treated as relevant to the problem. So it allows you to take in all sorts of thoughts and ideas and make them cohesive into a product. And it

increases cognitive flexibility, that probability that diverse cognitive elements will in fact become associated into the grand scheme of a book.

And so it's important to be happy for this writing process. This is just a little overview of ways to foster creativity and what the research has shown but as a human being and your writing, to establish some purpose and intention in your writing efforts, to stimulate and reward curiosity and exploration, and a lot of people have found that certain activities they do or traveling actually fosters creativity. Building your self-motivation, especially intrinsic. So learning how to validate yourself, how to reward yourself, how to reinforce yourself. Encourage confidence yourself and a willingness to take risks in yourself. Promote supportable beliefs about creativity, developing self-management, providing balance. We'll talk more about a lot of these.

This is an overview of what I'm going to be talking about today. But one of the things that I'm not going to spend a lot of time on is the first couple bullets, which is establishing a habit if you want to get something done. And to establish something that's consistent usually in psychology literature tends to make that behavior happen and show up more. So scheduling time to write and work regardless of the output, making yourself a habit. Showing up to write and thinking of it as a job. If your job is a writer, that's your job. If you're a plumber and someone calls you, you don't say well I'm not a plumber today. So you're a writer and you show up to write, you create a habit. William Faulkner said, "I only write when I'm inspired. Fortunately I'm inspired at 9:00 every morning."

So it's this idea of, of course he wasn't but he sits down and makes that habit happen. Sometimes for people creating rituals for writing success like chewing gum, listening to jazz. My brother-in-law studying in medical school always had to have a popsicle in his mouth when he studying and he just went through oodles of them. But that was what he did. And maybe your ritual is a certain place you work and a certain environment that sets the stimuli that says oh hey I'm writing, oh hey I'm going to be creative here. Nicholas Sparks, "I write 2,000 words a day when I write. It sometimes takes three hours, it sometimes takes five." I'm going to be talking a lot about challenging negative thoughts and about one's ability or skills to write. Taking breaks, meditating, relaxing. We're going to learn relaxation techniques today. Returning to writing after a day or two. Being creative, doing activities like I was talking about that might inspire creativity.

So let's talk about some barriers first. The easiest thing to do on earth is not write. That was from William Goldman. So this idea of procrastination. Writing is 90% procrastination – reading magazines, eating cereal out of the box, watching infomercials. It's a matter of doing whatever you can to avoid writing until it's about 4:00 in the morning and you reach the point where you have to write. I had really clean house when I was writing my dissertation. It just was really – but let's look at the function of procrastination. Why do we do these behaviors that we know are not in our best interest? And we know we have this goal? One – we

might be setting impossibly high standards for ourselves. And we'll talk about perfectionism. But we want it to be perfect, we don't want to be embarrassing with our colleagues here in the room. We want it to be better than the other one that's out there or something similar that's out there.

The task may seem unpleasant. Maybe we got – maybe we said yes to writing a book that I wish now I hadn't. This isn't that much fun. The task may seem too overwhelming. And it's actually a method of coping. Procrastination functions to temporarily relieve you of the anxiety and the tension of facing that challenging project. You go and do something else and so it functions that way to be a rewarding behavior. And it lessens our fear of failure. We get to avoid for a moment – or maybe many moments – that fear.

So insisting on a perfect draft is the surest way to writer's block. They talk about that a lot in this literature. William Stafford "There's no such thing as writer's block for writers whose standards are low enough. Lower your standards and keep writing." I think writer's block is simply the dread you are going to write something horrible. We can't be – this is my favorite – we can't be as good as we'd want to so the question then becomes how do we cope with our own badness? You don't start out writing good stuff. You start out writing crap and thinking it's good and then gradually you get better at it. That's why I say one of the most valuable traits is persistence. People have writer's block not because they can't write but because they despair of writing eloquently.

Turn the critical brain off. There is a time and a place for a criticism. It's called editing. If I waited for perfection I would never write a word. Don't get it right, just get it written. So we'll talk about perfectionism within this barrier of negative self-talk. So the gist of what I want to share with you today. And this is again from that 1950's all the way up cognitive behavioral therapy that's been extremely effective in treating depression and anxiety disorders and in many trials even much more effective than medication. But looking at our thought processes. Many writers in this field, including David Burns who's written *Feeling Good*, number-one bestseller. You've probably heard of it. That'd be a great other self book to get. I think it's \$6.00. Lumps our negative thinking into these larger categories. And I just want you to think today for yourself which one you fall into most. If you fall into all of them, which ones show up for you the most. The first can be conceptualized as the worrier. That's the what if and how will, those kind of statements that creep into your mind. What if I never finish this book? What if it's not good enough? How am I going to manage this with my family life? Et cetera.

The critic is that voice inside our head that says – it's always judging your efforts as not good enough. This chapter's so disappointing. The victim is the one that's telling yourself you can't. That's the victim's favorite statement, I can't. I'll never come up with a good idea again or this is too hard. And the perfectionist is the one that's always telling ourselves that we're not doing it good enough. We must or we should be doing it in a different way. This chapter should be better than it is. As a

general philosophy for those four types of negative self-talk, you can ask yourself the following with some types of negative self-talk. This is easier than others. You can ask yourself – let's take a common negative thought. Does anyone have one?

F: Too hard.

OKSOL: This is too hard.

F: I don't like finding all these references and I can't find that book I want.

OKSOL: I can't find the reference and this is too hard. Love it. Ask yourself what's the evidence for this? This is too hard. Am I actually getting it done? Is it actually too hard? Have I done this in the past? Has this always been true? What's my history of writing? Have I been able to find references that have been difficult for me? Do I have those problem-solving skills? What can I do? Has this always been true in the past? What are the odds of this really happening? What are the odds that I'll never be able to find the quote? It actually might be kind of high, right? What is the very worst that could happen? That's a good one for that. I might not be able to find the quote that I really want and I'm going to have to accept that the book can get published without that quote. What's the very worst that could happen? I just said that. Am I looking at the whole picture? Am I being fully objective? This is too hard.

So that's the critic and probably in line with the worrier. So worry is interesting because worry, you often can't challenge it as much with the facts as much as you can by saying I can handle this worry and do it anyways. And so worry creates anxiety by imagining the worst-case scenario. So this is too hard. What if I never get it written? So what. Sometimes that doesn't work so well. Because you have a deadline and a contract and so often that one doesn't work with worry but sometimes it does. I can handle this. I can be anxious and still do this. I can tolerate this even though it is scary. So it's the idea of this is seeming too hard, this is seeming so hard. What if it is too hard? Well I can still sit down at 9:00 in the morning and start writing. I can do it even in the face of worry. What's my track record, then, when I've been worried in the past? Did I get the book written? You are here. You are – probably the answer is yes.

The critic, the part of you that's constantly judging and evaluating your writing skills – here you get to pat yourself on the back a little. But you can really actually go by your experience a lot here. So you may never think you're a great writer but if you're published and you've won a TEXTY – I just learned that cool term. I love the TEXTY award – or the McGuffey – you're obviously good enough, right? And so it's the idea of you may go your whole life until you die and actually not feel as good as you are. But what if that kept you from writing? Are you willing to compromise that? What if someone else, what if everyone in this room was right and you were wrong and you actually were a really good writer but you didn't really think so but your books are selling and people are using them in college. So

going off your experience, not what your mind is telling you about what the truth is.

The victim makes you feel helpless by telling yourself you are not making any progress. The road is too long. It is too hard. I don't have to have it all written by tomorrow. I can continue to write and make progress one page at a time. I acknowledge the pages I've written. I'll continue to write. So again we have to start noticing this self-talk so we can do something about it. So the perfectionist again tells yourself your writing is not good enough. To tell yourself you can make mistakes. Life's too short to be taken too seriously. Setbacks are part of the writing process, are important learning experiences. I don't always have to be perfect. I don't always have to have the perfect quote. With perfection I love doing the simple language trick of changing the word "should" to "prefer." And so I should be able to find that perfect quotes turns into I'd prefer – I would prefer to be able to find the perfect quote. I would prefer that I could get this done by the end of the month, versus I should.

So it frees you up from the judgment that creates writer's block. Does that make sense? That self-evaluation and self-judgment that comes from should statements. I call it shoulding on yourself or shoulding on others. You can stop doing that. You can notice when you're doing that and change it to prefer and it almost always works. So I should have written more last week. It is a valid statement to say I would prefer I would have written more last week. That is a valid truthful statement. And sometimes prefer statements direct you to your values and so that just says well I better get going then. This obviously is important to me. I am feeling some guilt about this. How can I put one foot in front of the other and actually start behaving in ways that are in line with my values?

So challenging thoughts can be very effective, like I said, for some kind of thoughts. So for example, having the thought I am a horrible writer. You could get a lot of data probably if you've won a TEXTY or a McGuffey that says otherwise. You might not have that data though. You might say I haven't published yet so the data's confirming what I'm thinking. And so the cognitive behavioral therapy was all about – since the '50's is all about challenging thoughts. And what we've recently found in the '90's and since has been sometimes that technique actually makes the thoughts hang around longer – sorry – being more prevalent –

(tech talk)

OKSOL: So what we've found is the more you try to not have a thought, the more you have the thought. For example if I say don't think of an elephant, we're thinking of an elephant. If I were to say no really, come on, focus, I am up here, don't think of that elephant you're thinking of him still. If I were to say between now and 2:15 when we're done you might think of an elephant but if you do just notice you're thinking of the elephant and then put your attention back on me, you will think of the elephant less with that technique researchers found. So that idea of allowing

the thought versus trying to say stop having that thought works better. So applying this to suffering, to self-criticism, self-labeling, self-judgment works really, really well.

And so all those critical negative self-statements we have, this is the technique for your writer's anxiety that I would propose even more than the challenging thoughts. So we talked about the idea of suppressing your thoughts. If I were to – first of all, the research, what I just said – the frequency of a thought increases when you try not to think of it. If I were to say tonight at 8:00 PM I will give you \$1 million but you have to remember three letters and if you do you'll get \$1 million. But you have to remember A, B and C. What's the probably you think you'll win \$1 million tonight? 100 right? Now if I were to say I've got \$1 million at 8:00 PM but you cannot think of three letters between now and 8:00 PM, A, B and C could you win? No. You've already thought of it. Right? And you'll think about it again as you recollect maybe today what we talked about.

And so it's impossible. Our mind thinks. It's what we do. It's like fish are swimming in water. We're swimming in our thoughts. Fish are swimming in water. They're not aware of the water. But they're in the water. It's that way with our thoughts. We're almost like we think we are our thoughts because they just are but we are like fish swimming in our thoughts. And so what were to happen if we could actually become aware of our thoughts? A lot could happen. So you can't take the fish out of the water. It would not live. But what if you made the fish aware of the water? That's the metaphor for this new cognitive therapy. So it's all about having a thought versus buying a thought. Let's take another negative self-judgmental thought about writing. A self-critical statement.

M: I have nothing new to say.

OKSOL: I have nothing new to say. So rather than trying to control what you think or felt, what if you could just learn to see you are merely having thoughts and experiencing emotions? There I go again. I've had this thought many times. I have nothing new to say. Yup that's what shows up for me. I'm getting anxious again because I'm thinking of putting a book out there. There I go worrying again. So it's this idea of just noticing the thought versus buying it as true. If it really is true, that's bad news. It's really good news that our thoughts are not all true. Really good news. Because you will always be able to criticize something in your writing. It's the human condition, the human brain. That's its job is to evaluate. If you looked at anything in this room, you are evaluating. If you look at this carpet, you all have a thought about what you think about this carpet. It's kind of crazy. If you think about the lighting, the temperature, the color of the tablecloth you all – you will evaluate it. Your brain just does that.

And so it does that when you think of your writing and your writing skills and your ability to be a writer. So again this noticing your thoughts versus buying them is in the service of – actually research shows it will decrease the believability of that

negative thought. So it decreases how much you believe that thought I have nothing new to write is actually true and it decreases the distress that that thought causes you, which is fascinating, I think. So if we are not fused with our thoughts, if we are not our thoughts. If we are noticing we are fish in water, not water. We are in the water. If we notice our thoughts are just thoughts then we are defused from them. And these are just a couple techniques to start applying to yourself when you have those negative thoughts. Again looking at your thoughts, like noticing them, not from your thoughts.

One meditation exercise I do in my anxiety groups is this idea of imagining yourself sitting by a stream and leaves are floating by and put a thought on each leaf and watch it float by until you have another. And the next one goes on the next leaf. And you'll realize it's just one thought after another. And the thought might be wow, I can't get this thought out of my mind and God, stop thinking that thought and God, why are you so hard on yourself, and oh my God it's hopeless and there I didn't really have a thought and there I had the thought again and now the sky is pretty blue today. It's just one thought after another. Gives you this skill of being mindful, which is observing without judgment. Mindfulness is simply observing without judgment your thoughts.

So telling yourself there goes my mind again. There it goes. It does that a lot. It tells me this is too hard and I don't have anything new to say. Just noticing. I'm noticing I'm judging my writing right now. You can put that I'm noticing in front of anything. I'm noticing I'm feeling this task is too hard. Versus this task is too hard. Do you see how it decreases the believability of it a little bit? Which is so cool. Buying the thought. I'm buying the thought that. Put that in front of everything. I guess I'm buying the thought that this is too hard. I guess I'm buying the thought that I'm not good enough.

Recognizing thoughts are not causes. Again the good news of all of this. It's possible to think this way and still do X. Is it possible to think – and it is – that I have nothing new to say and do it anyways? Of course it is. Is it possible to think this is too hard and to sit down at 9:00 AM anyways? Yes. I already went over notice everything is evaluated. It's just what the mind has evolved to do. And ask yourself how has this thought worked for me in the past? Has this thought – does this thought work for me? Is it effective for me? Telling myself this is too hard, what does that do for myself? Well that makes me feel more anxious and self-defeated and it makes me procrastinate.

And what if I went by my experience? I've written a couple books already. I'm well on my way. I've gotten some pretty good feedback that this article is going to get published. Go by your experience, not what your mind says in terms of negative, painful, suffering statements. That's where you really apply it. OK. I'm taking a risk and we're going to do a little experiential exercise but you don't have to get out of your chairs or anything. I just want you to listen. It's just two paragraphs and in the context of realizing then that writer's block is writer's

anxiety – it's just anxiety – this experiential exercise really captures what I'm saying, that the idea is to just notice your thoughts and behave anyways. So you can look at me, you can close your eyes, whatever you'd like to do. It's called Anxiety News radio. And it's meant to be kind of funny. But just notice what you think about and what you notice for yourself.

This is Anxiety News radio, broadcasting inside your head 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Wherever you are the signal will reach you. When you wake in the early hours, we'll be there to make you aware of all the unhappy aspects of your life. Even before you get out of bed. Let us take over and control your life. Anxiety News radio is compelling listening. And guess why? It's the news station you've grown up with. And now it comes to you automatically, 24/7. Pay attention. Anxiety News radio knows what's best for you and we want you to buy our products. We advertise only what is most distressing and disturbing to you personally. So don't forget that and remember, if you should forget us and act without seeking permission, then we'll broadcast all the louder. Remember what you think and feel inside your skin can be really awful. So you should stay tuned to this station to know what to think and how to control it.

Or you could turn the dial and listen to Just So radio. Wake up. Anxiety News radio is just a station. You can tune in or you can tune out. One thing is guaranteed, though. Whatever the time of day, you'll hear the same old stuff on Anxiety News radio. If that's been really helpful to you, then go ahead, tune in and stay tuned. That would make sense. If not then tune in more often to Just So radio. We bring you the news of actual experience in the moment, all live, all the time. Actuality is our business. We give it to you straight, as it is, not as your mind says it is. In contact with the world, outside and inside the skin, you can experience what it is to be human and it's entirely free. We can guarantee that experiencing what's inside the skin exactly as it is will never damage you but it just might bring you joy. Just So radio brings you information about how things are, not how you fear they might be. Just So radio invites you to step forward and touch the world just as it is and to touch your life just as it is. We get louder the more you listen to us. So stay tuned. Give us a fair trial. If you're not convinced by your own experience – and please don't take our word for it – then Anxiety News radio is still there on the dial.

So that make sense in the context of what I was talking about? You have this opportunity to recognize there's a choice involved, not of what you think but your relationship to your thoughts. That's where your choice comes. So it's not about trying to control all the thoughts because remember with the elephant that doesn't work. But recognizing they're just thoughts. Thoughts are just thoughts. That's what my mind is meant to do. There I go judging again. There I go putting it in categories of good/bad, right/wrong, better/worse. That's just what minds do. So any questions about the negative thoughts and how to have different relationship to your thoughts before we go onto stress management and taking care of ourselves?

The reason why stress impacts your writing process is what we learned at the beginning. It decreases the amount of thoughts that come your way. It decreases your cognitive flexibility. It makes you have less positive affect. It makes you more upset, frustrated, less happy. These are completely and totally tied to your ability to write, I believe. And they seem simple. Some of them may seem simple. But our body and our mind are connected and so we need to work with that knowledge. There are two physical activities you can do to try and decrease the muscle tension and the anxiety in your body because when you do so, your mind becomes less stressed and your mind then becomes happier and your mind becomes more creative. So these are important. And when you notice you're feeling writer's block, you might want to check in and say physically what can I do here? Am I tense?

One of the best techniques – and research has shown this – is progressive muscle relaxation. And what this is basically is just think of going from the top of your body to the bottom of your body, tensing the major muscle groups for like five seconds and then releasing them and relaxing them. There's nothing magical about the tensing but it generally just helps people get a momentum into the relaxation versus just saying relax your arms or relax your stomach. So if you were to actually tighten your stomach for five seconds and then release it, you would get a larger shift into a relaxation kind of feeling. And you don't want to do this if you have any pain in your body or chronic pain but you literally start top and go bottom. So your forehead, your jaw – a lot of people hold tension in their jaw. You'll find where you hold your tension once you become aware of this. Your shoulders, your arms, your gut, your legs.

And so you can do this wherever you are for some of the muscle groups. You can do this – if you have sleep problems you can do this in bed to try and get yourself to sleep. I've put people to sleep many times doing this in group. It just really works and it seems so simple but it really does. It's the primary treatment for sleep problems to actually learn how to do it when you're awake in a chair and then bring it to your bed. And people get to sleep before they even complete it.

Another is deep belly breathing. The good news here is our bodies can't be relaxed and tense at the same time. It's physically impossible. So if we can instill and program with intention a relaxation response we will become relaxed. Deep belly breathing is slow diaphragmatic breathing, like four seconds in, four seconds out where your belly is actually going up and down. Versus breathing like this that we all learn how to do as adults. If you look at little babies sleeping in their cribs, their little bellies are going up and down. This is how we come into the world breathing. It's how we breathe when we are all falling asleep. It's the same kind of breathing we're doing. So bring that with – your breath is always with you. So do it any time you need to.

We know the more you worry, the harder it gets to think clearly and to think at all. And so this tagline, move from worry to action, is a great tagline. What can I do?

What if I never find the quote? Well what – I could go to action. I could go and problem-solve and try to find the quote. What if I don't get it done on time? I could start today. I could look at my schedule and how many days I have from here until when it's due and figure out what I need to get done. So worry is triggering, again, your value system. What's important, what's on your lap, what's on your agenda. Time management plus mindfulness is my combo for stress. So for example if you have a month and you have that deadline and you've got work and a book to write and parties to go to and kids to drop off and whatever, you literally have to manage your time.

In that time management it's very important to put in time for yourself and relaxation activities. But then the key is mindfulness. Being wherever you are. If you've got a ten-hour day and you've got four different things you're at it's important to just be where you are. Because if you're in this room for the next eight hours, which you've been, you can't be somewhere else. Why not be here? If you're out relaxing at the pool, be relaxing at the pool. If you're sitting down to write, sit down to write. If you're eating dinner with your wife, be mindful of eating dinner with your wife. So you're always where you are. But you have to have the time management with the mindfulness to be that great combination, I think.

There's this psychological Yerkes-Dodson law which if stress is on the bottom and performance is over here basically the curve is an upside-down U. Which basically means we need a little bit of anxiety and a little bit of stress to write well. To perform well. If we have not enough, we're going to procrastinate, we're not really going to get motivated. If the deadline is two days away it's too much stress and we can't perform there. But you need a little bit. And so maybe recognize your patterns in your writing. That if I know something's due in six months, I don't get it done. So I'm going to stop worrying about it until three months because I know then I will get it done. I was thinking about this speech the last month, telling myself though I'm not going to start writing this a month – that's not how I operate. I know I won't do that. So I could feel bad for a month or I can realize I'm going to do it four days before the conference. Because that's when there's just enough stress for me that I'm feeling it to be productive and to get it done.

So if we're throwing everything that we can at stress management, everything that we know about that. I've talked about time management. Connecting with others – again these sound cliché and cheesy but research shows social support system is one of the primary factors for decreasing depression and anxiety. Connecting with people. Going out on an activity even if you don't want to. Again behaving your way there. People often wait around for that motivation to come to do the behavior so you're waiting and waiting. Well I'll start writing once I feel like I want to. Sometimes you need to just start writing and then you'll feel good you've written and your mood will lift. It will, like, follow. And then you'll get momentum and you'll feel better and because you're feeling better you'll write more. Because you

just wrote more you're feeling better. Because you just – you're feeling better you're writing more. And you get into a positive cycle versus a negative cycle.

Talk it out, share your feelings. Again so therapist-like but expressing oneself gets that stress out. Venting it in has consistently shown it just makes the stress greater and the anxiety greater. The getting physical – again clichéd but important. Our body needs those neurotransmitters and chemicals that go through your body when you're physical. And academic life is a sedentary life for most people. And so recognizing I need to do that to foster creativity. I need to do that to foster my serotonin levels. I need to do that because these are all linked.

Humor – knowing your limits. Again knowing I can't take on two projects at once plus my full-time job. That gets me nowhere. I'd prefer to be able to, but should I be able to? The should statements again just make me feel awful about myself and keep me stagnant. So knowing your limits and sticking to them. Avoiding self-medication so alcohol and drugs we know temporarily relieve that stress. But it contributes to the problem. Reward yourself. People – this idea, and there's a fancy name for it but I can't remember it but rewarding yourself by doing the least-preferred activity with a more-preferred activity. So if you want the baby to eat peas, he eats peas and then you give him the peaches. That idea. So maybe writing this chapter is not the most exciting thing on your to-do list but maybe you need to reward yourself if you get some written. Because no one else is going to do it. So reward yourself. And again be in the here and now, practice mindfulness – I talked about that.

Motivational interviewing skills was developed in terms of addiction and alcohol and substance abuse to try and get people to figure out where on their readiness-to-change scale are they. Where are they? Are you just contemplating writing this book or are you really wanting to write this book? Where are you on this motivational list? If you get asked to write a book, this would be a great thing to do. And what you do is you make four boxes. A lot of people often just think what are the pros and cons of doing this? But you do the pros and cons of writing the book and the pros and cons of not writing the book. You'll come up with some very interesting things. What are the cons of writing this book? Well I'd have less time. What are the pros of not writing this book? I wouldn't have to face fear of rejection, I wouldn't have to be worried, I could go on vacation.

You get a lot of positives by not doing something even though you might think you should be doing it. So making your list. And some in the list will overlap but there's a lot that are illuminated by making it four lists instead of two. Then you can look at your negatives. So if you know you really need to write the book, you look at the negatives and you problem-solve and you move from worry to action. You problem-solve how can I get through that and you use these techniques and you use what you need to do to solve the negatives.

The motivational interviewing skills is all about clarifying your values. And that's a really big part of this acceptance and commitment therapy also. It's living in line with and behaving in line with your values even with your negative thoughts. So I've said this today, could I do this even though I'm having this thought or feeling this way? So remember why you started writing in the first place, the writing that feels most like play will end up delighting you the most. Writing's too hard to do it for any other reason. Are you writing what you love or what you think you should be writing? But sometimes when you're faced with a task that you really have to do, you need to figure out what value needs to trump your others so that you can get it done.

And so my value of the royalties trumps liking this right now. Or the value of what this will get me for tenure trumps I'd really like to be able to go on these social activities with my family this week. But you have to figure out what value is trumping it because that can be the self-motivating part. Because then you know you're living in line with your values for that particular spot in your life. That's all I have. Thank you so much.

Any questions or comments, discussion?

M: Really quickly and it's simple I hope but you had some really wonderful quotes in there. Do you just Google them and find them?

OKSOL: I Googled, yes. Writer's block. Overcoming writer's block, my title. And they're on your slides too.

F: (inaudible).

OKSOL: There are more of the handouts – let's see. Yeah there must be.

M: Something that builds off of your breathing (inaudible), trying to learn how to breathe for four or five years or so. And there's two activities that work for me that might work for some of you and one is Tai Chi. And the other is going to the pistol range and shooting the hell out of targets.

OKSOL: Tai Chi and shooting the crap out of something. That's going to the –

M: Pistol range.

M: (inaudible) pistol.

OKSOL: Pistol range.

M: And you can't be accurate and not breathe correctly. And Tai Chi is the same way so they both reinforce each other in different ways.

OKSOL: Tai Chi. Wonderful.

M: So one gets a little bit of anxiety out the other (inaudible).

OKSOL: And that's a great example of you are able to be mindful in certain areas of your life. So he's able to be mindful when shooting because you have to be. And so recognize you're all able to be mindful. You just need to sometimes apply it to other areas where you're having struggles being mindful. Thank you.

F: I really like the fact that you brought up the time management with the mindfulness because that's something that was new. Because I'm fine with the mindfulness but the time management, somehow I need work in that area. (inaudible) you say something about connecting those (inaudible)?

OKSOL: Yeah that's my combination. Yeah I'll re-say it. She said thank you for saying the time management plus the mindfulness. She hadn't heard it that way before. She's really good at the mindfulness and not the time management. Usually people are pretty good at the time management but really bad at the mindfulness. And so you do need that combination, I think. Because you can plan your schedule but you could be stressed your whole day and not get anything done. So it's not about just making your schedule, this is what I'm doing when. It's you may never enjoy your life that way.

F: (inaudible) and that's with the time management. I feel like I have too many things to do but when I do something, it has my 100% (overlapping conversations; inaudible).

OKSOL: Yes. It's a great way to prevent yourself from being spread too thin. And that's what stress is. So someone can have the same number – someone can be working 80 hours a week and someone can be working 30 and they're both stressed. It's not how many things you have on your plate, necessarily, that makes a person stressed. It's that balance for oneself, the enjoyment of it, the ability to function well – and function effectively while doing it.

M: Random musings (inaudible). I found myself thinking what would happen if we did have (inaudible) the poet said and we got a chance to actually work through some of the things everyone was talking about like your worst fears about what would happen (inaudible). We had a table back here of people who don't yet have tenure. So we have a clear fear there. If I don't get this thing published and four other things like it in the next two years I'm not going to get tenure, I'm going to lose my job, I'm going to be homeless. I'm going to drink a lot, I'm going to lose all my teeth and whatever.

M: You put drinking a lot on the bad list?

M: Silly me, silly me. For people who are not in that position, it's a fascinating thing to imagine. So suppose you are a textbook author who doesn't need the income from textbook authoring, which probably describes many, many people in the room here. So what's the worst that could happen? The next edition of my book doesn't sell. I'll never get another contract as long as I live. I'm going to have to give up on that part of my self-concept. I suppose that that would be the (inaudible). It's not going to be a tangible. It's going to be a self-concept kind of thing. And that's really scary. And they're getting in touch at a deeper course. Why is that scary is an interesting notion (inaudible) our core needs of we want affection, we want inclusion. There's fascinating stuff going on here under the surface, too.

I said random musings plural. The A, B, C stuff and the elephants – there are people here who write and deal with criminal justice who know this stuff much better than I do but there's a lot of research showing that when a trial judge tells the jury to disregard what they just heard, they have not an impossible time to do that if the judge is casual about it. But the more pointed the judge is about how important it is that you disregard what you've just heard, they'll never disregard it. And just that the smartypants thing was the thing you were trying to think of on the tip of the tongue – the Thorndike principle?

OKSOL: I think so. The Thorndike principle.

M: There's always a wise guy in the room.

OKSOL: Premack principle. It is. It is. Yes. Good job. It's the Premack.

M: (inaudible) we have these little trite expressions that are relatively meaningless until (inaudible) fake it until you make it is not a bad little thing that I (overlapping conversations; inaudible).

OKSOL: That's the whole thing of this talk.

M: Now I would also like to ask you a question because it isn't often that I get a chance to ask this question of someone with an informed opinion. I have come to learn the value of learn while you sleep. I'm using three different occasions to pass qualification license exams. So I've also used that so with content learn while you sleep. If I'm inspiring myself to write as topic or work on a project or whatever and I can't quantify this but things come to you a lot easier if you program your subconscious for four or five nights in a row before you tackle a task. Things seem to come off the trees a lot easier. Could I have your comment on that?

OKSOL: I don't know anything about that. I don't. I'm sorry.

M: So fake it until you do.

OKSOL: I don't –

F: I agree. Look I agree with that. I think (overlapping conversations; inaudible).

M: It won't work for everybody but (inaudible).

F: Yeah it works (overlapping conversations; inaudible).

OKSOL: That's a great – I know what happens in our waking life radically impacts our sleeping life so that makes a lot of sense. I just don't know the research behind it.

M: But the cost benefit. The cost is like zero (inaudible) like wow.

F: Right. And it's yours in the morning.

F: Right before you go to sleep and right before you wake up (inaudible).

M: I'm going to sleep on that stuff.

OKSOL: Sleep on it.

M: Just as a question to him now, is that voice recordings you're listening to?

M: Yes (inaudible).

OKSOL: I was going to ask him that, too. During your sleep.

M: (inaudible) records them so I get that (inaudible). And I can also play them when I'm driving around in the car and then (inaudible).

M: (inaudible).

F: Just on that idea, my friends have been listening to (inaudible) tapes that way now have the mp3 player so it cycles all night long.

M: I'm curious – a lot of what we do in academic psych on how (inaudible) I'm less efficient in terms of (inaudible) grad student (inaudible) assistant professor, I seemed to be able to do six things at once. Now I don't know if it's after 10 years your brain just partially shuts off (inaudible) the stress – you were discussing the stress as somewhat reduced. I find I'm more efficient just working on one project at a time. Is there research that talks about this notion of multitasking?

OKSOL: Well we have all these experts in the room which I have no idea. But the cognitive flexibility goes down.

F: (inaudible). It's as you get older (inaudible) and that's actually the most effective way to work. And I certainly – you have to (inaudible) you have to focus on

what's most important and maybe it's the textbook so that's it. That's (inaudible) my main focus if that happens. Hopefully (inaudible) but actually (inaudible). But the good news is (inaudible) it's that it crystallized (inaudible). It improves (inaudible) better and better the more you work on it. (inaudible).

M: Because I (inaudible) I was thinking (inaudible) utility I guess (inaudible) diminished returns (inaudible).

OKSOL: Thank you.

F: (inaudible) just learning to be where you are.

OKSOL: Well thank you. Enjoy your stay in Las Vegas.

M: Thank you (inaudible).

OKSOL: Thank you.

END OF FILE