



# **Learning Together: Online Research and Writing Communities for Academic Librarians**

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# What we'll cover

1. Background & context
2. Writing Retreats at Western
3. Shut Up and Write – Librarians Edition at U of T
4. Best Practices

# Some context: Librarians as researchers

We do research for many reasons, such as:

- It's required for promotion and/or tenure
- It helps us to be better professionals
- It is fun and rewarding!

Many factors can contribute to research success, including:

- Belonging to a research community
- Participating in a writing group
- Scheduling dedicated time for research

# Research context at Western

- ◎ Three areas of responsibility:
  - Professional Practice
  - Academic Activity (i.e., research) - 10-20% of workload
  - Service
- ◎ Research is a requirement for Continuing Appointment & Associate Rank: "the Member shall provide evidence of Academic Activity and the dissemination of the results as defined in the Article *Responsibilities of Members*"

# Research context at U of Toronto

- ◎ Three areas of responsibility:
  1. Professional practice for the Library (80-90% of workload)
  2. Research and scholarly contributions
  3. Service
- ◎ ... one or more of the following criteria should also be considered: academic achievement and activities, including additional formal degrees, programmes of continuing education, teaching, research, publication



# University of Western Ontario

Kristin Hoffmann and Leanne Olson (Western)

# LARSN Writing and Research Retreats

- ◎ Run by Western's Librarians and Archivists Research Support Network (LARSN)
- ◎ Started December 2020 on first Monday of the month, added the third Monday in July 2021
- ◎ Format is based on other online writing retreats
- ◎ Held on an MS Teams site, with text chat only
- ◎ Attendance varies between 3-12 librarians/archivists
- ◎ Goals: foster community, provide dedicated time for research



Search

... The University of Western Ontario

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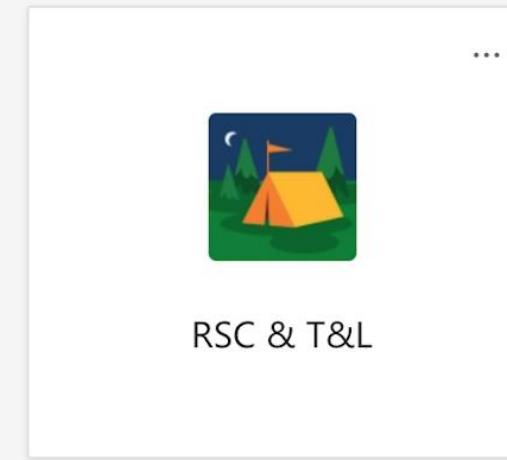
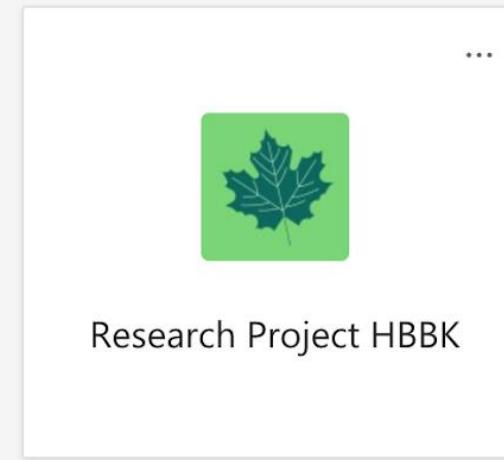
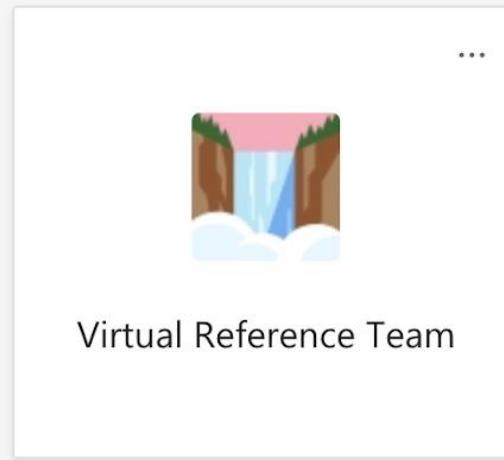
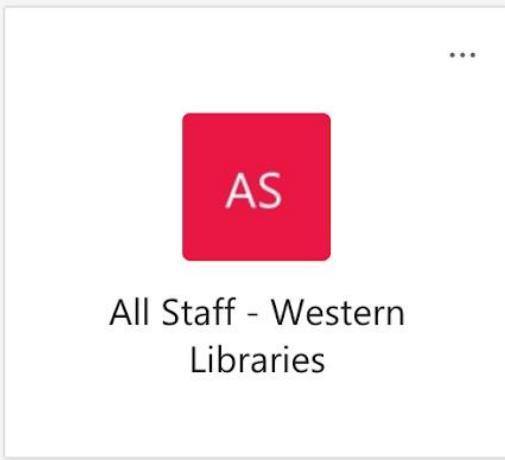
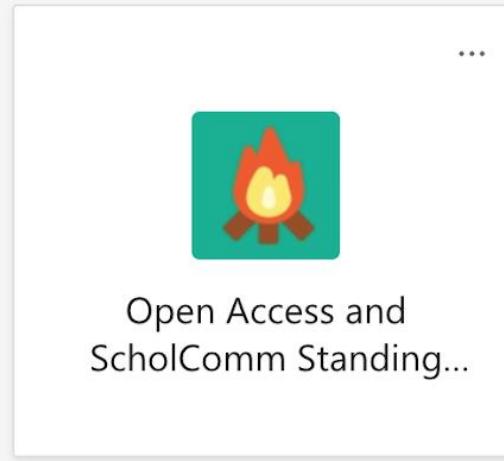
## Teams



Your teams



...





Leanne Olson Yesterday 9:24 a.m.

1

## October 4th retreat

Good morning! Here is our agenda for today. Please give a thumbs up to this message or leave a comment so we know who is here today (just for numbers).

Agenda for today:

9:30 - 9:45 - Welcome and introduction

9:45 - 11:00 - Writing Block #1

11:00 - 11:15 - Break

11:15 - 12:15 - Writing Block #2

12:15 - 12:30 - Wrap up & celebration

[See less](#)

82 replies from you, Leanne, Christy, and 2 others



Kristin Hoffmann Yesterday 12:26 p.m.

nice to work "with" you all this morning, have a good afternoon!

 Reply

## A few attendee comments:

- ◎ “This was so productive for me, thank you all for being my virtual study buddies.”
- ◎ “The writing retreats are one of my favourite things these days. They are such a supportive, positive space and I love the opportunity to focus on my research wherever I am yet know that I am not alone.”
- ◎ “Thanks for being here everyone. I am so glad I had time to finally read this one article that I had been putting off reading.”
- ◎ “These really help me focus, even if it’s just for a little bit”



# University of Toronto

Jesse Carliner and Aneta Kwak

# Research Interest Group (RIG)

- ◎ The purpose of the Research Interest Group (RIG) is to support librarians' research and foster a culture of research at U of T Libraries (UTL).
- ◎ One goal is to "Provide a forum for discussion, collaboration, and support in ongoing and new librarians' research initiatives at UTL"

# Origin of the Shut up & Write- Librarian Edition

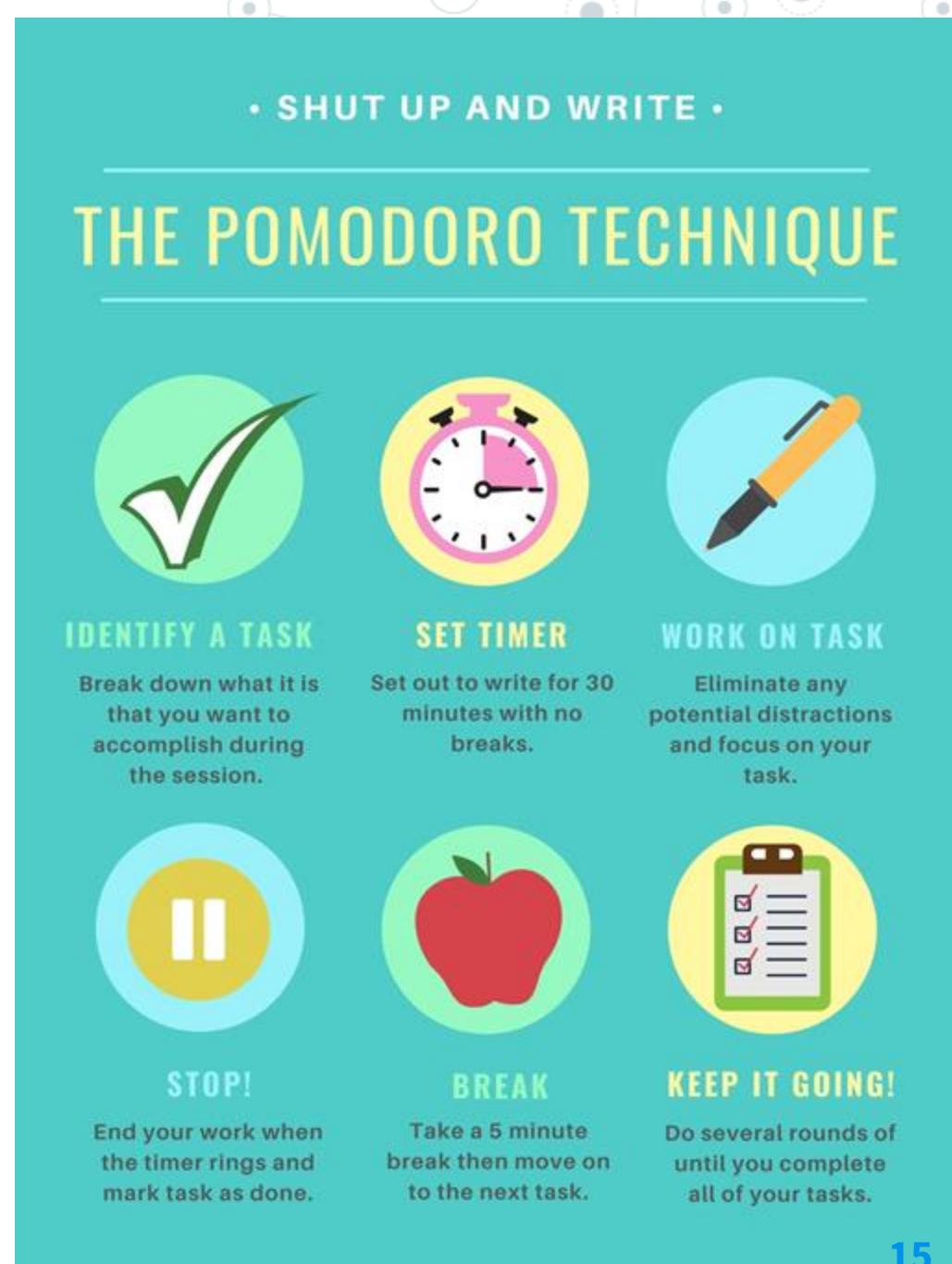
- ◎ RIG workplan item 2022-2023
  - Foster community support and connections, encouragement and accountability
- ◎ Pilot Shut Up & Write - Librarian Edition, to create a virtual space for librarians to work together on research projects.
  - This community follows the Shut up & Write model, whose "goal is to ensure that every writer, regardless of genre or skill level, has access to the community, accountability, and resources they need to be successful in their personal writing goals."
  - Piloted in the Summer 2022 (June – August) and Fall 2022 and Winter 2023 (September – April)
  - Limited to librarians

# Shut Up & Write! - Librarians Edition

- ◎ Zoom sessions, every other week from 9:30 – 12:30 (Thursdays in the summer, Fridays during academic year)
  - Break-out rooms for collaborative work
- ◎ Accountability
  - Stating what we are working on for the day
  - Progress sharing during longer break and at the end of the session
- ◎ Pomodoro Technique (30 min work, 5 min break) using a shared timer from <https://cuckoo.team/>
  - Slide deck shared on screen with a link to the Cuckoo clock
  - Structured longer break for 15 minutes with chair yoga

# What is The Pomodoro Technique?

1. **Identify a Task**
2. **Set Timer** - 30 min.
3. **Work on Task** - *distraction free*
4. **Stop!** End your work when the timer rings!
5. **Break** - 5 or 15 min.
6. **Repeat!**



# Key themes

## ○ Structure

- “Dedicated time to work on my research project on a regular schedule”
- “Dedicated “live” space to write - blocking out everything else”
- “I always looked forward to the yoga time”

## ○ Accountability

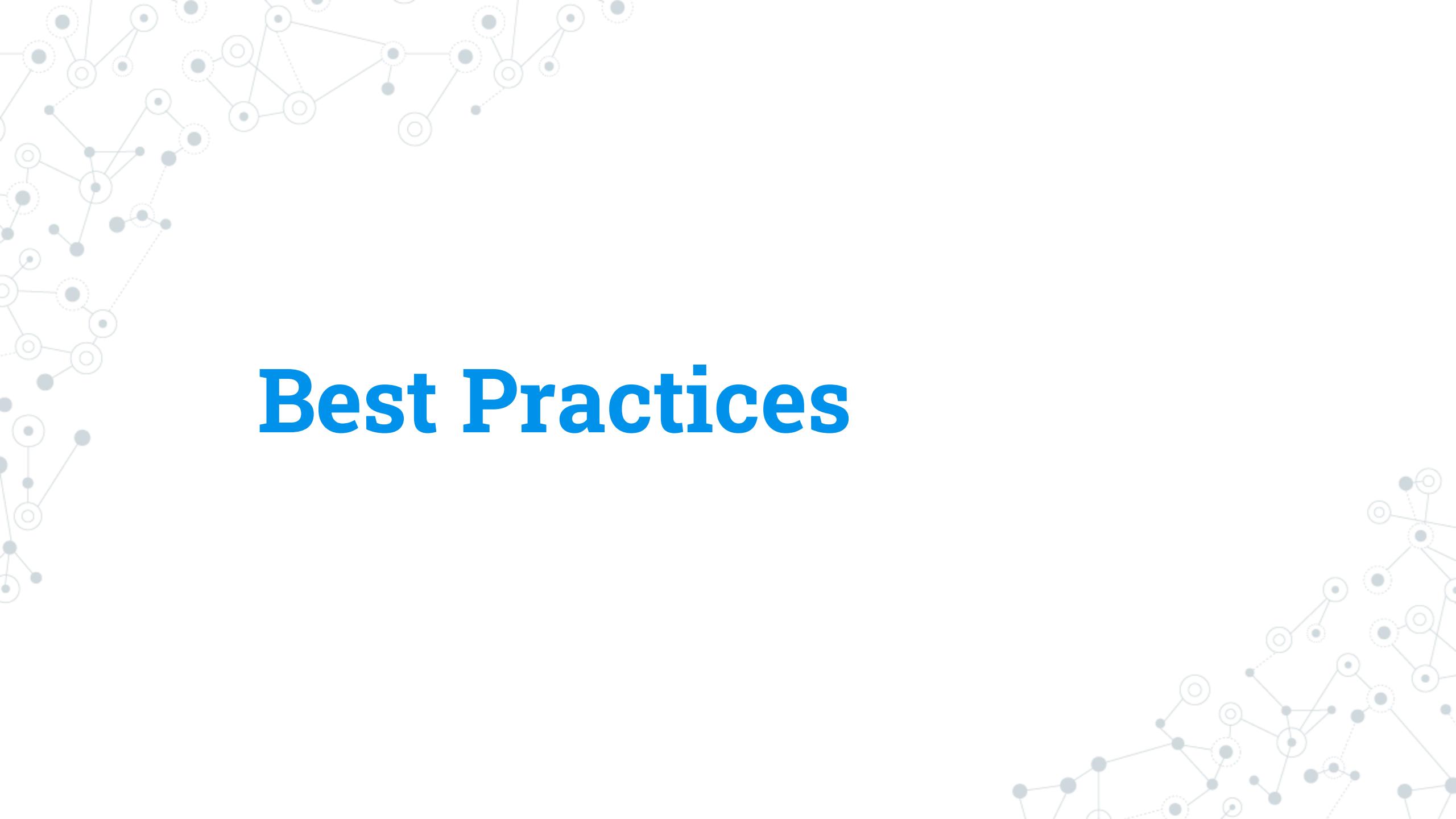
- “The accountability provided by checking in and telling people what I was working on helped me focus/not get distracted by work”
- “being with others made me more focused on doing research in this time rather than letting myself get distracted with other things”

## ○ Community

- “The positive reinforcement of not only working in a group but sometimes discussing research or writing challenges in the break times”
- “Working together as a group -- having someone to start/stop the timer kept me focused”

# Future Considerations

- ◎ Create a “Quiet Working Room” for individuals who do not want interruption
  - “I struggle with concentration - I'm easily distracted. It takes me a while to get in "the zone" and stopping after 25 minutes would be hard for me. I am interested in this type of "working meeting" to help keep me working steadily on my research”



# Best Practices

# Best Practice Themes

- Scheduling
- Admin and management support
- Community
- Don't try to make everyone happy

# Best practices

- ◎ Find a good time and keep it consistent
  - Pay attention to regularly scheduled staff meetings
  - Meet consistently (once a month, same day/time)
  - Have a consistent schedule within the retreat
  - Create a calendar invite to block off the time
- ◎ Consistent access
  - Same link for remote events or same room each time
- ◎ Get support from library admin and managers
  - UofT admin sends out the invitation and reminders to staff
  - Western had conversations about honoring the time, but it's loosely followed
- ◎ Tailor to your community
  - Create a safe collegial atmosphere based on your workplace culture
- ◎ Publicize frequently

# Suggestions for starting your own

- ◎ Tailor it to your community
  - Text chat, video or in person?
  - Structured, unstructured or semi-structured?
  - Supportive, with or without accountability
- ◎ Experiment
  - Start small—try a pilot, could be once a month and then move to more
  - Ask for feedback and suggestions, e.g. send out a survey
  - Don't be afraid to change things
- ◎ Share the workload
  - Ask for volunteers to help facilitate
  - Make it a committee initiative
- ◎ Don't try to make everyone happy, it's not possible!



# Questions?



# Thank you!

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