

INTERVAL TRAINING FOR LEGAL WRITING SCHOLARS

Laura P. Graham*

What am I thinking? I'm not a runner. As soon as we start out, everyone will know I'm an impostor. These anxious thoughts filled my mind as I rode the elevator down to the Milwaukee Hilton lobby for a 6:00 a.m. run to Lake Michigan with some LWI colleagues.

I didn't chicken out, and I actually was able to run all the way to the lakefront! I'm sure it had a lot to do with the interval training I've been doing with the help of the super-chill Coach Benjamin on Aaptiv.com. But I think it had more to do with my LWI colleagues, who motivated me to keep running as we headed to the lakefront and kept me company as I walked back to the Hilton.

As I thought about my surprising success on that early morning run, I was struck by the parallels to my scholarship efforts. At the 2018 LWI Biennial Conference, I listened to so many brilliant and innovative colleagues discuss their work, and I often found myself thinking, *I'm not a scholar. As soon as I publish my next piece, everyone will know I'm an impostor.*

But at the end of the conference, I came away feeling reassured that I can successfully complete the piece I'm working on. I was reminded that I have something interesting and unique to contribute to the discipline, even if my work can't be called brilliant and innovative. Once again, I give credit to my LWI colleagues—the Coach Benjamins in my professional life. In fact, as they offered their advice and encouraging words about my scholarship, they sounded a lot like Coach Benjamin.

*To begin with, give yourself a nice and easy walking pace.*¹ I need to allow myself to work on my article at my own pace; I don't need to

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¹ Benjamin Green, *Walk, Rock, and Run*, AAPTIV, <https://aaptiv.app.link/txkQxdOPDO> (last visited July 24, 2018). All italicized statements in the text are transcribed from this Aaptiv workout.

worry about keeping up with colleagues who seem to be able to publish more and faster.

Your first interval is six minutes long with a beautiful five-minute break. Do not press pause. Do not end the workout. You can always modify as needed. Writing an article is like interval training; there will be periods of high-intensity work, and I should allow myself some breaks along the way. If my energy starts to flag, I can slow down; my article won't progress as quickly, but I'll be better able to sustain my effort level over time.

No negative thoughts in your brain. Put them elsewhere. Many times in the course of the conference, I heard this theme: Don't give in to the temptation to compare my article to my colleagues' articles. My article may not be as rich in theory as theirs; the subject of my article might not be as cutting-edge. But I have something to add to the conversation, and my voice is worth hearing.

I know this is hard. I did not say this would be an easy workout. I know this is painful. It's a good pain. Scholarship is hard, sometimes even painful. But it makes me a better teacher, a better writer, a better colleague, a better leader. It's a good pain.

If your breath is heavy right now, ease off slightly. Why? Because I really want you to succeed with your second interval. I need to pace myself as I work on my article. There will be times when I can't devote much effort to it, and there will be periods of great progress. If I force myself to press ahead when I'm mentally worn out, the quality of my article will suffer.

Can you start pushing yourself slightly faster right now? I learn so much from my LWI colleagues about how to make time for working on my article. They talk of carving out dedicated writing hours (or entire writing days); of getting up in the wee hours of the morning to get some writing in before the workday begins; of spending precious hours in the summer drafting, revising, and perfecting their articles. When I need to push myself, I can draw inspiration from their labors.

Slow it down. Easy walk. Right here, right now. Why do I want you to care about this active recovery and all of them? To make you more efficient. To make you stronger. Your recovery is an interval. When I take a break from working on my article, I'm not being lazy. I need "active recovery" time—time to reflect on the work I've done so far, time to solicit a colleague's feedback, time to ponder where to go from here. These intervals make it possible for me to finish strong.

I'm still right here with you. If you have any negative thoughts going on in your brain right now, give them to me. My LWI colleagues are always right there with me as I forge ahead with my article. If I ask them to read my draft, they say yes, and they give me honest, constructive feedback. Sometimes, their comments help me

fine-tune the draft; other times, their comments cause me to take the article in a whole new direction. Always, they reassure me that my work has value.

It's harder, it's harder, but guess what? I see the finish line. It's in front of you! Here comes your finish in 5-4-3-2-1! That moment will come when my article is finished! When I'm doing that final revision, when I'm checking my citations, when I'm second-guessing what I've written, I need to keep sight of the finish line. Soon enough that offer of publication will come, and I know that my LWI colleagues will celebrate with me then.

If you heard the details of your run today, and you thought, I don't know if I can do that, but I'm going to try, and you succeeded, you unleashed new capabilities for yourself. WOW! Completing a challenging article gives me renewed confidence to undertake the next one—maybe a slightly more ambitious one on a related topic, or maybe one that touches on an area of inquiry that is entirely new to me. I can look back and see my growth as a scholar, and perhaps I can even offer some advice and encouragement to a junior colleague who is just entering the realm of legal writing scholarship. WOW! is right.