What does it mean to write productively?

Writing productively means to write with **intention** and **direction**.
Writing productively involves **setting goals** for your writing that are **realistic** and **specific** to what your piece of writing calls for.
A productive writing process **follows a clear and organized plan** which helps you meet your writing goals.

Writing with Intention and Direction

Writing productively is so much more than just writing word after word for hours on end. If you think about writing in terms of just flinging words down on the page without a direction or purpose, not only do you end up with too much to sort through in your editing process, but you hit writer's block much faster because your goal is quantity rather than quality. As you sit down to write, what you write should have a purpose. What do you **intend** to say? Ask yourself these questions as you shape your sentences:

1. Are you trying to make an argument in this sentence or paragraph?
2. Does this sentence or paragraph answer or propose a question?
3. How does this sentence or paragraph fit into the larger whole of the paper?

Thinking about the purpose of your words as you write them steers you away from filler and helps you develop a piece of writing that flows logically and coherently. Every word is a piece of the larger puzzle.

Set Goals that are Realistic and Specific

Before you write a word, you need a game plan. In order to structure a plan for your writing, which we will talk about below, you need to know what you are trying to achieve. Ask yourself these questions to determine how to structure your game plan:

1. What type of writing is your project? A dissertation? A research paper? A statement of purpose? Knowing the purpose and function of your writing will help you determine your goals for that project.
2. When is your project due? A semester-length deadline is going to have different milestones than a month-long deadline or a program-length deadline like a dissertation. Discuss your project or assignment with your professor, advisor, etc. to determine **what you need to achieve and when.**

Once you've determined **what** you are writing and **when** you will submit your writing, you can set **goals** for your writing. The goals will revolve around achieving the intended purpose of your project as well as meeting necessary deadlines for it. Goals are not universal, so try to be as specific as possible. Take into consideration your own needs like a busy work schedule or a learning or cognitive disability around which you need to maneuver. Finally, setting goals that revolve around the **quality** of your work and **what you are hoping to achieve**, rather than goals that revolve around **quantity** (i.e.: "write two pages every day" or

"write 500 words every day") will help you dodge writer's block and keep your focus locked into what you are saying rather than how much you are saying.

Follow a Clear and Organized Plan

Now that you have your goals established for what you are trying to achieve and when, you can dig deep into the **how**. How will you go about writing? Structuring an **outline** of the piece of writing itself will act as your roadmap while you write, and creating a **schedule** of your goals and deadlines will help keep you moving.

Making an Outline
Like with your goals, there is no one universal outline. Every piece of writing is different, but *most* pieces of writing begin with the basic "Introduction, Body, Conclusion" format. Putting these three elements onto your draft will give you a skeleton off of which to build, and you can add further sections and subsections to that format depending on what your piece of writing will look like specifically.

For example, a dissertation's "Body" section would be separated into individual chapters rather than paragraphs, whereas a statement of purpose will have a shorter introduction and conclusion that are both integrated more fluidly into the body paragraphs.

A blank, white screen is the enemy of productivity. Drafting an outline helps you not only have an idea of where to start, but it gives you a framework for organizing your thoughts.

Finally, the outline serves to make sure that all of your information has its place in the overall structure, and it ensures that no sections of your writing are repetitive or off-topic.