

Tips for setting and maintaining healthy boundaries

These are some concrete actions that may be helpful in setting and maintaining healthy boundaries. We suggest picking one or two items from this list and seeing how that works for you.

Work

- Cultivate a writing practice: non-negotiable blocks of time every day
- Pretend you're working a 9-5 and treat yourself as an employee (e.g. assign yourself tasks)
 - Alternatively, have a reasonable pomodoro cap and stop working after that
 - Rituals can help! Ex: dress like you're getting ready to work
- Set your own goals, not external expectations
 - Reward yourself by reaching *your* goal -- e.g. submitting an article, not getting accepted
 - Rewards: You know what you like! Ideally, this should be something you wouldn't usually do/get. E.g. a fun day hike, museum trip, or nice meal out; a massage or spa visit; a new outfit or some other present.

Reflecting on & Practicing Boundaries

- Sign up for the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity mailing list, if available through your university (<https://www.facultydiversity.org/>)
- Once a month (or more), step back & ask: is this working for me? If not, why not? What are my goals? Values?
- Have a 'No list' (Rena Seltzer) - 5-10 things a week - Write them down.
 - **Examples:** not replying to an email right away, skipping some social or academic events, not meeting at odd hours of day
- Have a corresponding 'Yes List': what did saying 'no' (or setting boundaries) allow you to say yes to?
- Have a 'No committee' (ideally of 2-3 people): a group of friends and mentors who you consult on whether to take up new commitments. If they say 'no', you just follow their judgment.
 - This also buys you time!
- Practice having 'go to' boundary-setting phrases
 - "This makes me uncomfortable."
 - "This isn't something I can take on right now."
 - "I would love to help, but I have a bit too much on my plate right now."
 - "I don't have the energy to have this discussion at the moment."
 - "I'll have to sleep on it; I have a policy of not making decisions right away."
 - "I'm prioritizing x, y, & z this semester."

- Decide what you will say in advance of setting a boundary. Consider talking through difficult conversations with someone else beforehand, and have them when you're feeling prepared.
- Practice 'baby no's', e.g. letting friends know that you would prefer them to be on time, or taking time for yourself when you need it despite an invitation for a social event.
- Practice setting small commitments/clear rules and sticking to them; e.g. I will write for an hour a day and I will stop working before 8pm.
- Practice noticing your feelings in a non-judgmental way. E.g. take five minutes at the end of the day to re-cap situations during the day where you felt uncomfortable or happy.

Habits & Practices for Mental Health Generally

- Exercise
- Sleep
- Take up a hobby!
- Follow mental health social media content (and unfollow content that triggers your insecurity)
- Consider taking up meditation or yoga. They give you tools to notice your feelings in a non-judgmental way and to notice the space between requests for action and responding.
- Consider going to therapy (especially if you have good health insurance coverage)

Technology

- Consider 'Sane Box' for email management and/or deleting app from phone if possible
- Set your email program to send emails at one particular time of the day
- Try having email hours and make them clear, e.g. "I only check email at 9am and 4pm," or "I observe email-free evenings and weekends."
- Try adding an email signature (see Lisa Miracchi's example [here](#))
- Use drafts folder - set a certain amount of time for email, reply to urgent ones, if have time respond to others
- Try apps like "Focus," "Self-Control," and "Forest" to protect your time while working

Other Tips

These especially apply if you have too much on your plate and feel guilt about not 'doing it all'

- Decide in advance a threshold for how many events (etc) you'll go to, and be happy if you meet that threshold
- Trade in some responsibilities for others -- e.g. if you mentor a lot of people informally, give yourself permission to step back from other things
- Set certain times in grad school where you focus on certain things - eg focus on writing for just one month