

The background features a complex, abstract pattern of wavy, overlapping lines. The top half is a vibrant blue, while the bottom half is a rich green. The lines are thin and densely packed, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is reminiscent of a stylized, organic texture or a digital wave pattern.

WRITER'S BLOCK & GETTING THROUGH IT

Cassily Charles
for Digital Health CRC
September 2020

- Introductions
- Writing processes and 'normal progress'
- Blockages: types & experiences
- Strategies for getting through

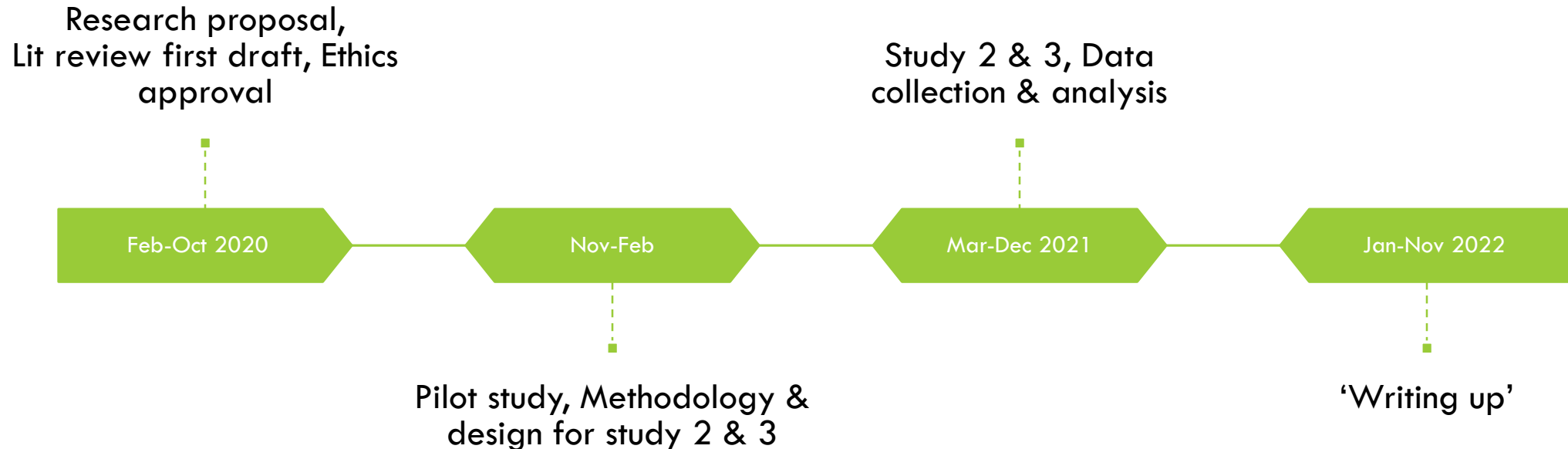
OUTLINE

INTRODUCTIONS

- Cassily Charles
- Please introduce yourself:
e.g. where you are, what you are working on, favourite song...

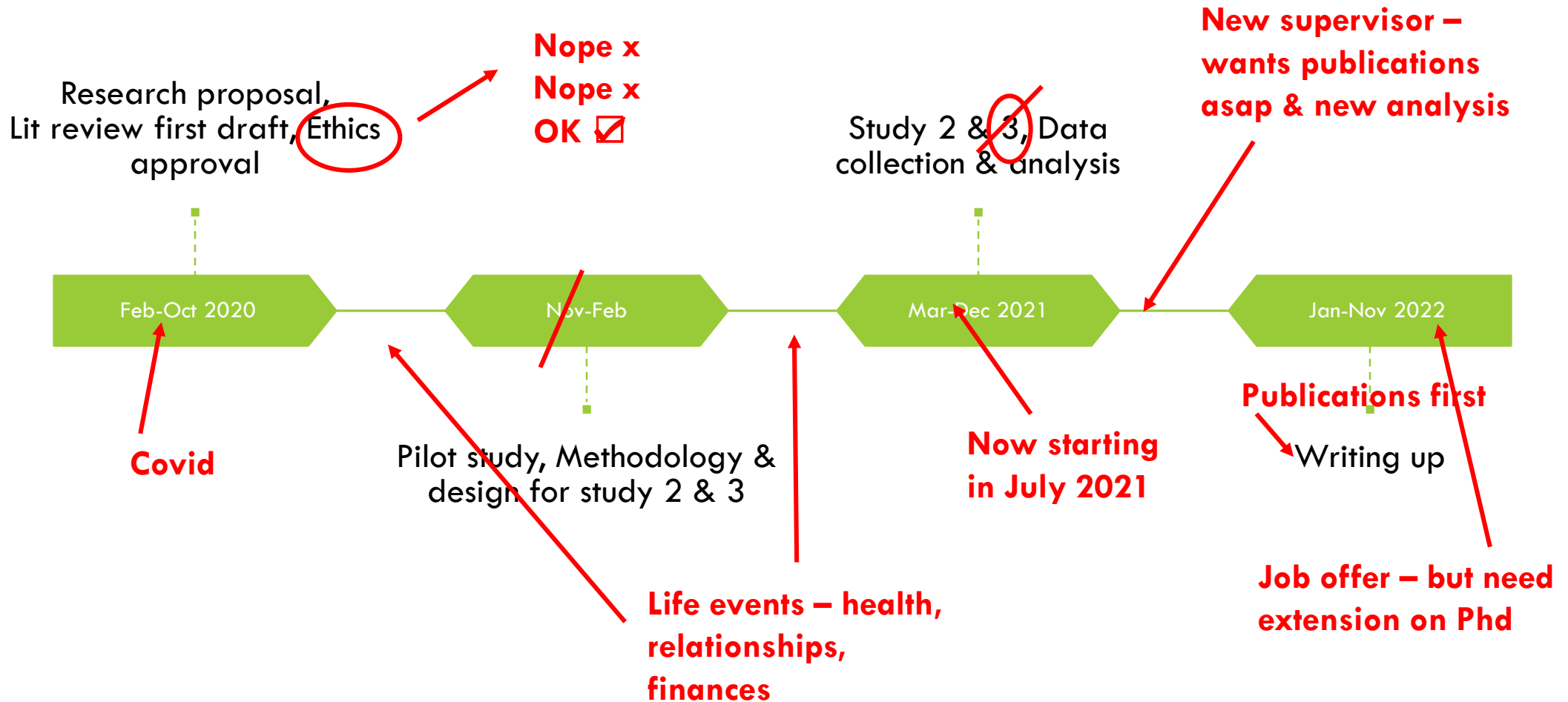
WRITING PROCESSES AND 'NORMAL' PROGRESS

We might imagine the PhD process something a little bit like this...



WRITING PROCESSES AND 'NORMAL' PROGRESS

But in reality the candidature could look more like this...



WRITING PROCESSES AND 'NORMAL' PROGRESS

We might imagine the writing process like this...

Read/analyse, think and
plan the chapter/paper



Get feedback from co-
authors / supervisor

Write a first draft

Revise and write a final
draft

WRITING PROCESSES AND 'NORMAL' PROGRESS

Writing processes vary naturally and often, according to...

- Your writing approach (e.g. planners versus drafters)
- The type of text you are writing (e.g. chapter versus paper)
- Whether you are a single author or a co-author
- Relationships and similarities/differences between you and co-authors/supervisors
- Responses you get from peer reviewers
- The events of your life
- Changes in your resources, vulnerabilities, development trajectory

There really isn't any one single observable 'normal' process for writing!

WRITING PROCESSES AND 'NORMAL' PROGRESS

We might imagine the writing process like this...

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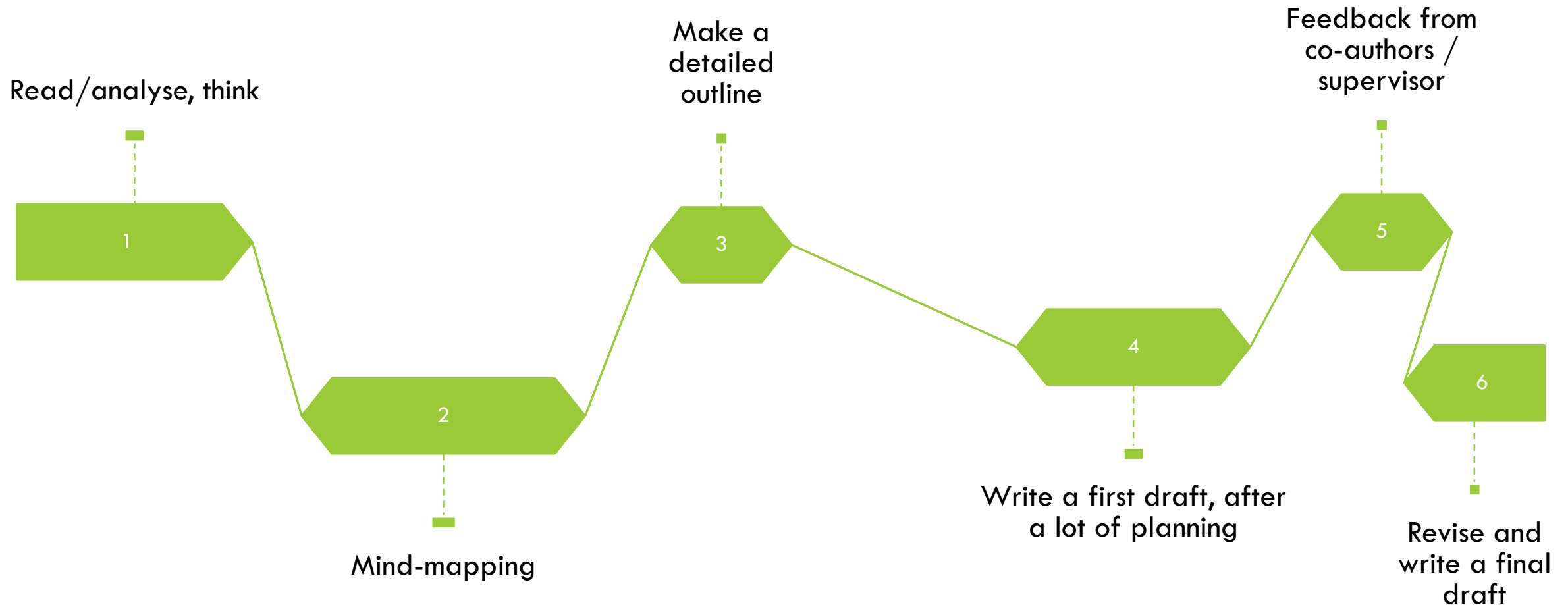
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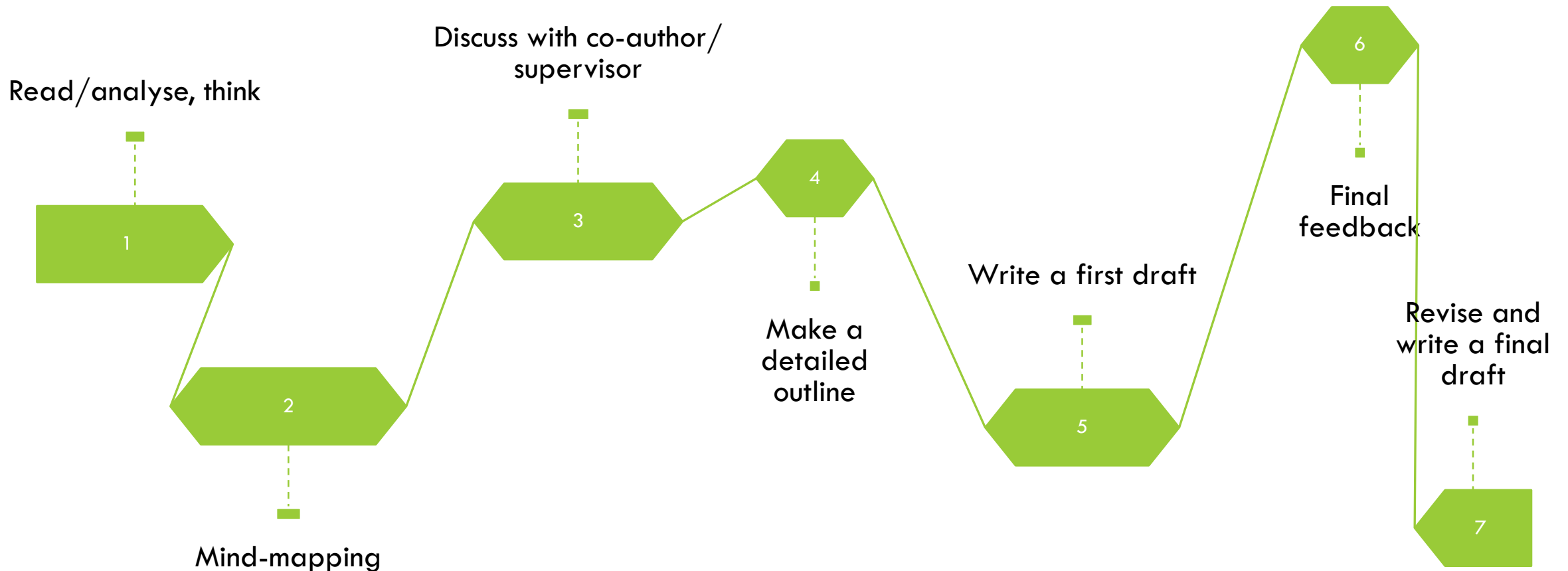
WRITING PROCESSES AND 'NORMAL' PROGRESS

But if you are a strong 'planner' type of writer, it may look more like this...



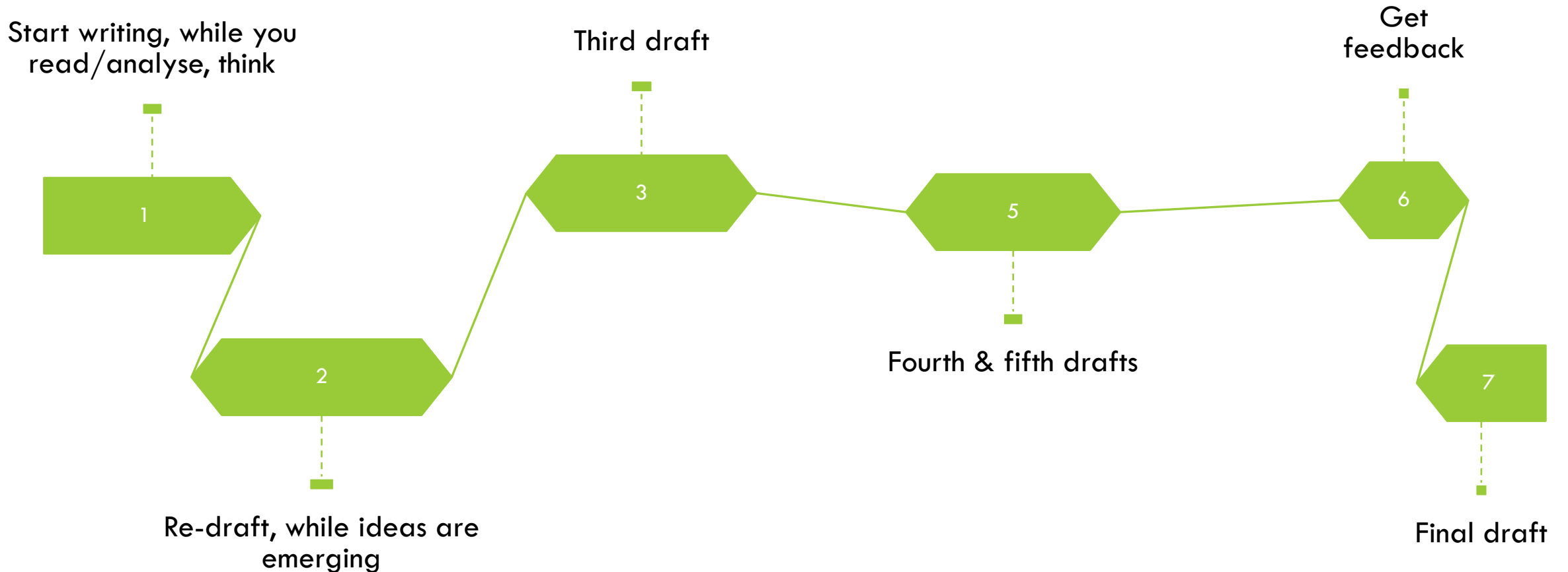
WRITING PROCESSES AND 'NORMAL' PROGRESS

And if you are working with another strong 'planner' type...



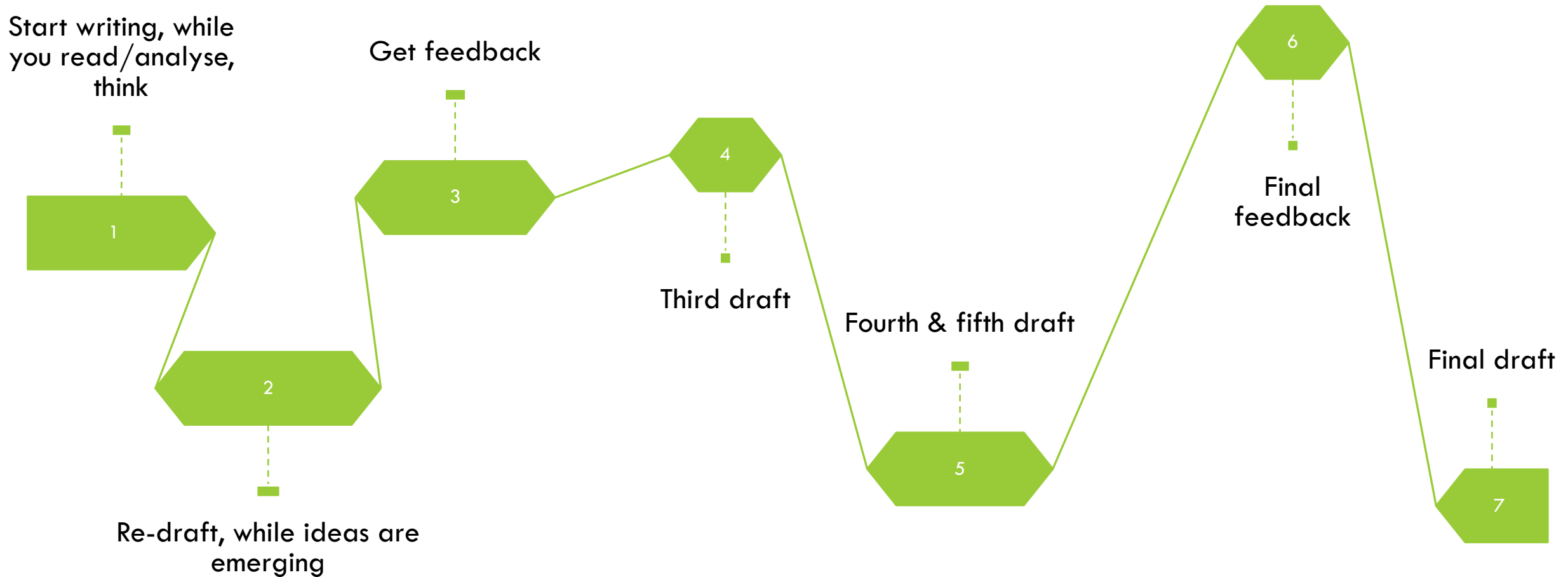
WRITING PROCESSES AND 'NORMAL' PROGRESS

Or if you are a strong 'drafter' type...



WRITING PROCESSES AND 'NORMAL' PROGRESS

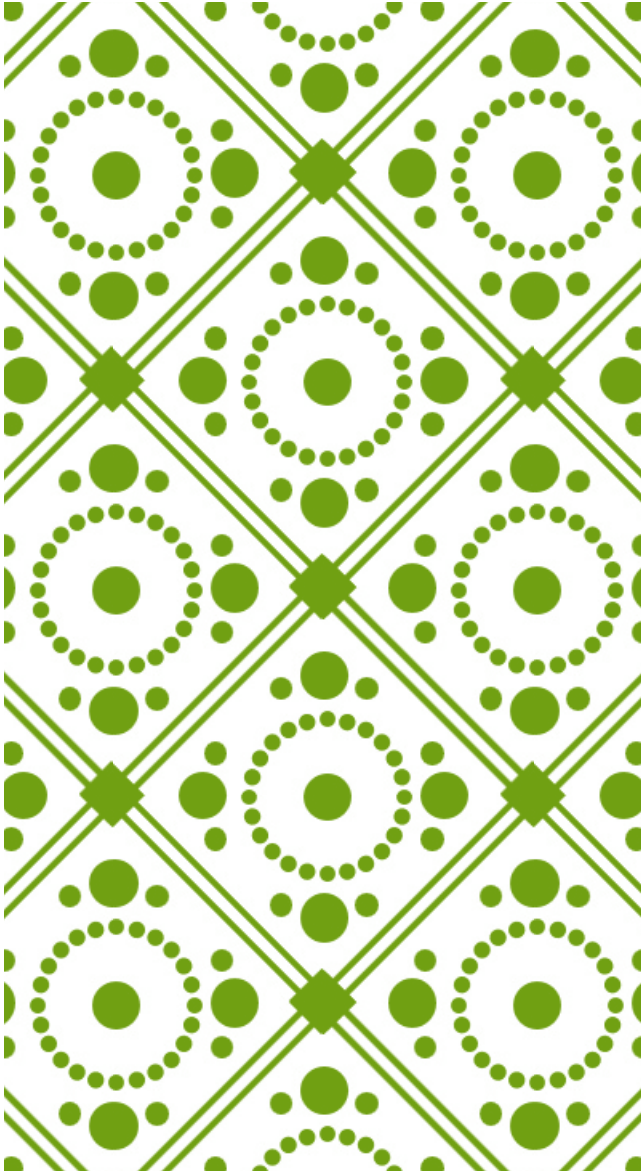
And if you are a strong 'drafter' type working with another strong drafter...












1. Judgment/discomfort in your current processes
2. Uncertainty / need for more skills for the next step
3. External factors holding things up – e.g. slow feedback
4. Fear, and avoiding fear – e.g. procrastinating, frozen
5. Low motivation, low hope, low energy
6. Dunno: Just need to get some words on the *£^0% page!

WHAT KIND OF BLOCKAGE IS IT?

- 
- Collect the data on the ways you write
 - Comparisons? Only if 1) realistic and 2) useful
 - Build in comfort / pleasure / recognition / community
 - Stretch or change your processes only when needed
 - Advocate realistic expectations of progress & process
 - Getting it 'right' versus getting it done

1. KNOW & LOVE YOUR PROCESSES





2. SHINE LIGHT ON UNCERTAINTY

- Do you know your helpers?











2. SHINE LIGHT ON UNCERTAINTY

- Do you know your **helpers**?
 - Peer community (Join or create a writing group!)
 - Writing / academic literacy advisors / coaches / training
 - Researcher developer advisors / coaches / training
 - Professional / research mentors, or additional co-supervisor
- Research *into* your discipline / the thesis / grant-writing / methodologies etc.
 - Scholarly writing / guides
 - Collect data through exemplars (e.g. documents, coffee interviews)

3. EXTERNAL HOLD-UPS







**ROAD
CLOSED
AHEAD**



3. EXTERNAL HOLD-UPS



Overflow channels for your progress



Another way through / around

- Alternative sources
- Understand & manage your up-holder
- Which hold-ups are worth moving up the cline?
negotiate >> advocate >> escalate
- Can you think differently about the project?

4. FEAR / ANXIETY & AVOIDING SCARY THINGS

Procrastination, freezing, restlessness, distraction, worry...

- Reasons they might come up when we write
- Sit with fear – track edges
- How much can you feel fear and do it anyway?



4. FEAR / ANXIETY & AVOIDING SCARY THINGS

Procrastination, freezing, restlessness, distraction, worry...

- Reasons they might come up when we write
- Sit with fear – track edges
- How much can you feel fear and do it anyway?
- Notice the patterns, notice the shifts
- Your indicators of health / support needed
 - Friends/family/informal support
 - GP/counsellor/medication/complementary
 - Adjust arrangements and expectations, to balance stress in & stress out

Can't see the point, down on your work, pessimistic?

- First check your goals, values & priorities: Are they clear, and is your current task aligned with them?
- Track the links in energy, mood & thinking – find the patterns and notice the shifts
- Make your successes visible, recognise daily
- Work from your strengths, nourish them – positive talk
- What are your indicators of health / support needed?

5. LOW MOTIVATION, LOW HOPE, LOW ENERGY

- Break old habits, start a new one – time, location, duration, techniques, tools
- Work with witnesses – e.g. ‘shut up & write’ or a retreat or bootcamp
- Get a deadline with consequences – e.g. make a commitment, plan a meeting

6. GET WORDS ONTO THE PAGE

Quantity writing

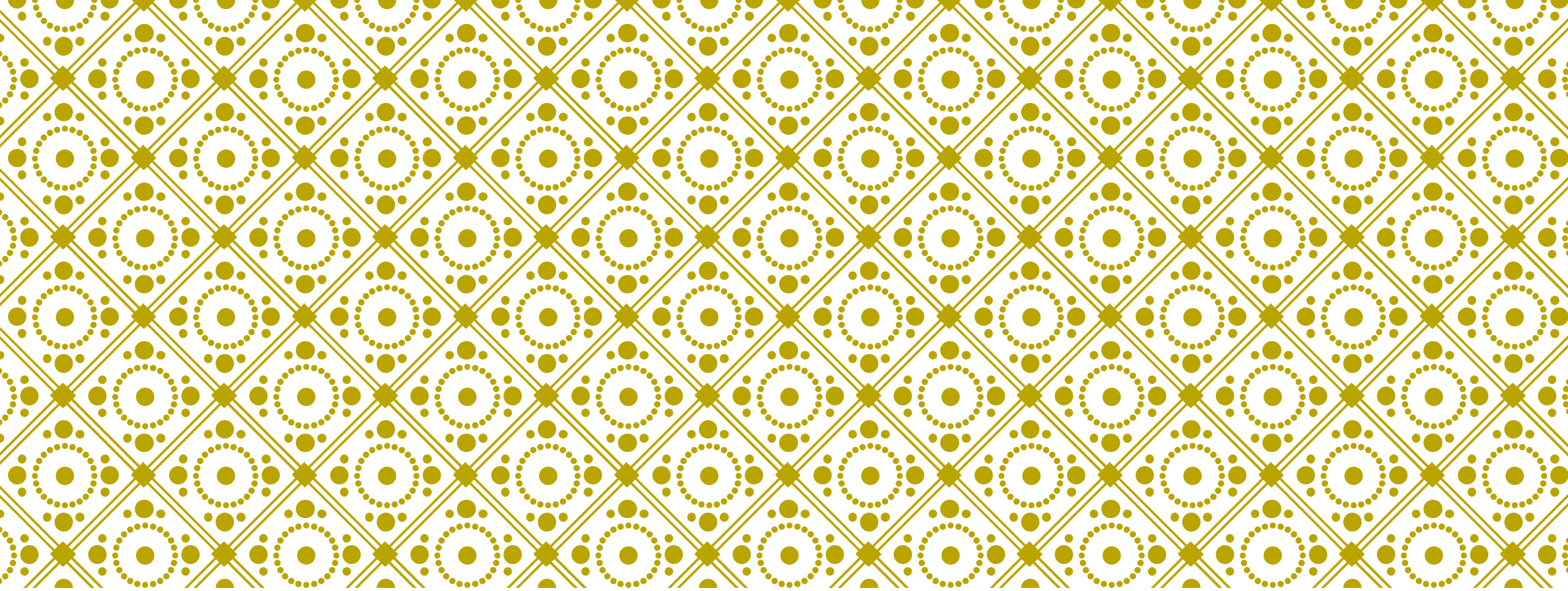
- First, choose a few sections of your chapter / paper that you want to work on.
- Second, write down several headings / sub-headings / main topics within that chapter/paper.
- Under each heading, write some dot points for things which will be included.
- Prepare at least twice as many headings & dot points as you can possibly work on in the time.
- Then, set the clock with a timer. Minimum 10 minutes, maximum 50 minutes.
- Start the timer. Write as fast as you can under each dot point. Don't stop for references, grammar, spelling, don't edit. When you run out of things to write under that heading, move straight onto another heading. Aim for maximum quantity (not quality) before the timer goes.

6. GET WORDS ONTO THE PAGE

Does the well seem dry? Find the water which is hiding

- ◆ Free-writing: A separate process from your writing tasks.
- ◆ Choose a time of day, either once or twice per day – e.g. when you first wake up / before bed.
- ◆ Set a goal, either pages or time. Start easy: e.g. 1 page or 5 minutes. Increase as needed.
- ◆ Write *anything*, without pausing, editing, judging, correcting. Meet your goal or exceed it.
- ◆ Do this each weekday, or each day. **Stick to it**. If you can't, make the goal smaller until you can.
- ◆ Recruit a witness, coach, companion – Be accountable and report daily (process, not content)

6. GET WORDS ONTO THE PAGE



**ANY OTHER EXPERIENCES OR STRATEGIES
YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?**

Thank you
& happy writing!