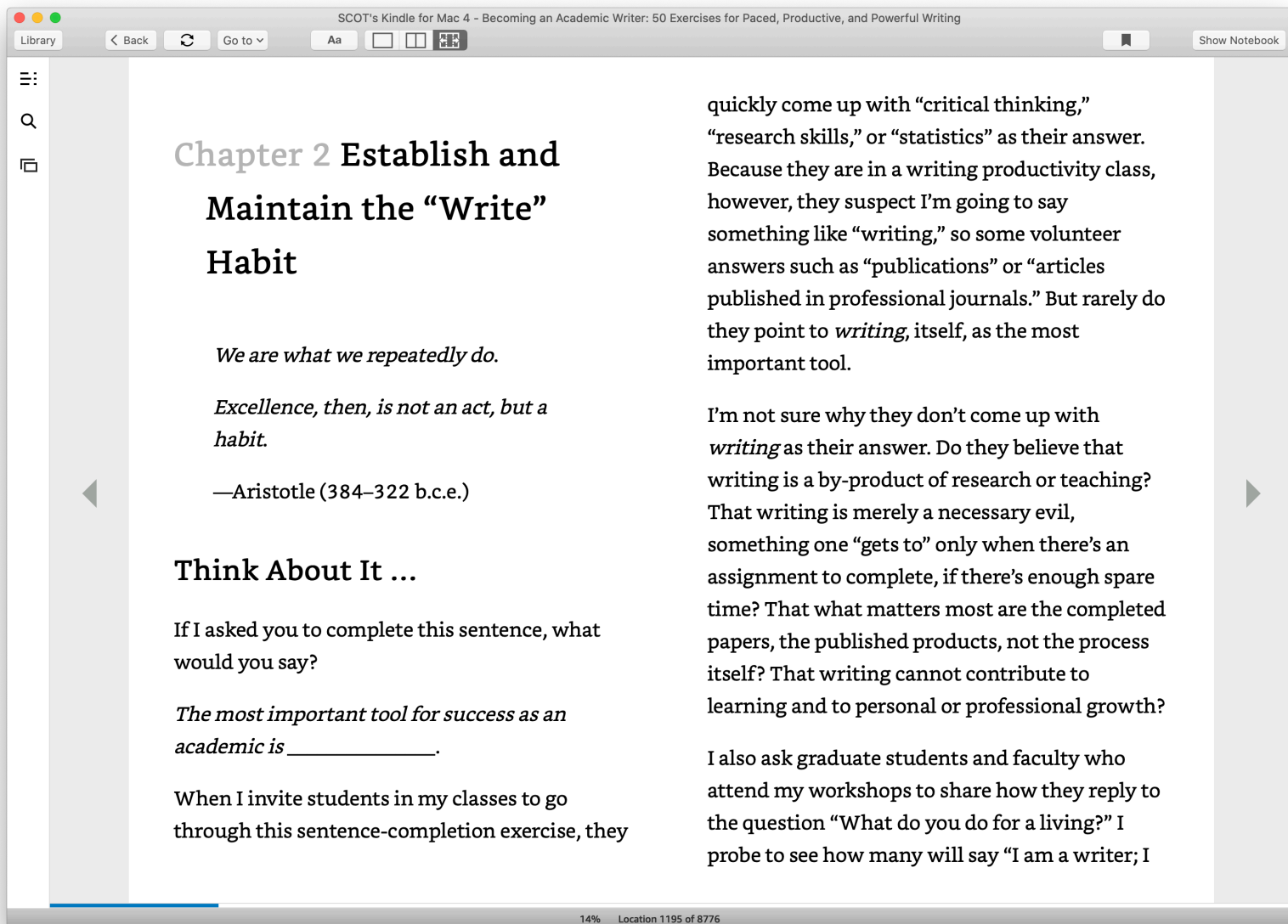




Chapter 2 Establish and Maintain the “Write” Habit

We are what we repeatedly do.

Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.

—Aristotle (384–322 b.c.e.)

Think About It ...

If I asked you to complete this sentence, what would you say?

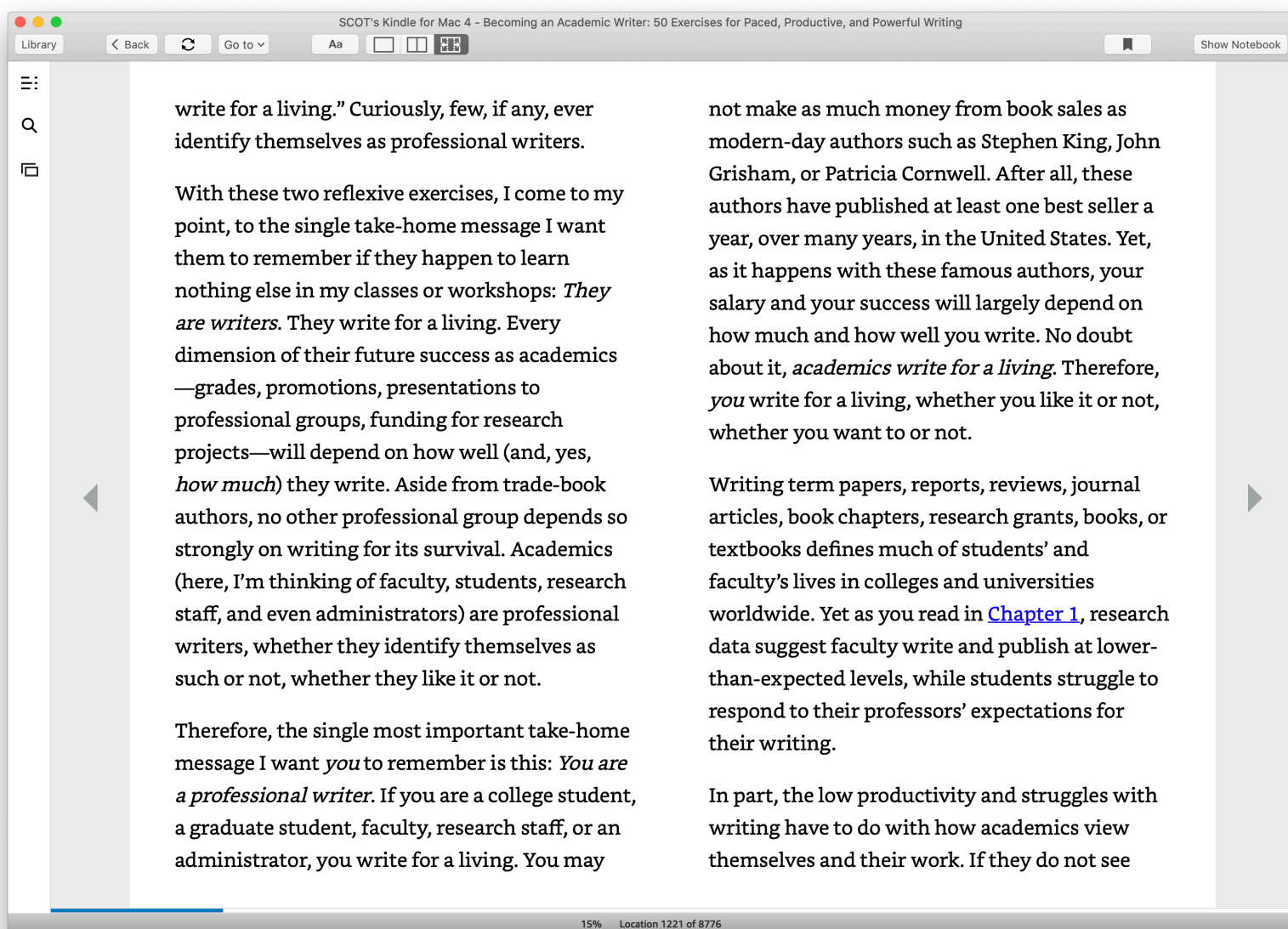
The most important tool for success as an academic is _____.

When I invite students in my classes to go through this sentence-completion exercise, they

quickly come up with “critical thinking,” “research skills,” or “statistics” as their answer. Because they are in a writing productivity class, however, they suspect I’m going to say something like “writing,” so some volunteer answers such as “publications” or “articles published in professional journals.” But rarely do they point to *writing*, itself, as the most important tool.

I’m not sure why they don’t come up with *writing* as their answer. Do they believe that writing is a by-product of research or teaching? That writing is merely a necessary evil, something one “gets to” only when there’s an assignment to complete, if there’s enough spare time? That what matters most are the completed papers, the published products, not the process itself? That writing cannot contribute to learning and to personal or professional growth?

I also ask graduate students and faculty who attend my workshops to share how they reply to the question “What do you do for a living?” I probe to see how many will say “I am a writer; I



write for a living." Curiously, few, if any, ever identify themselves as professional writers.

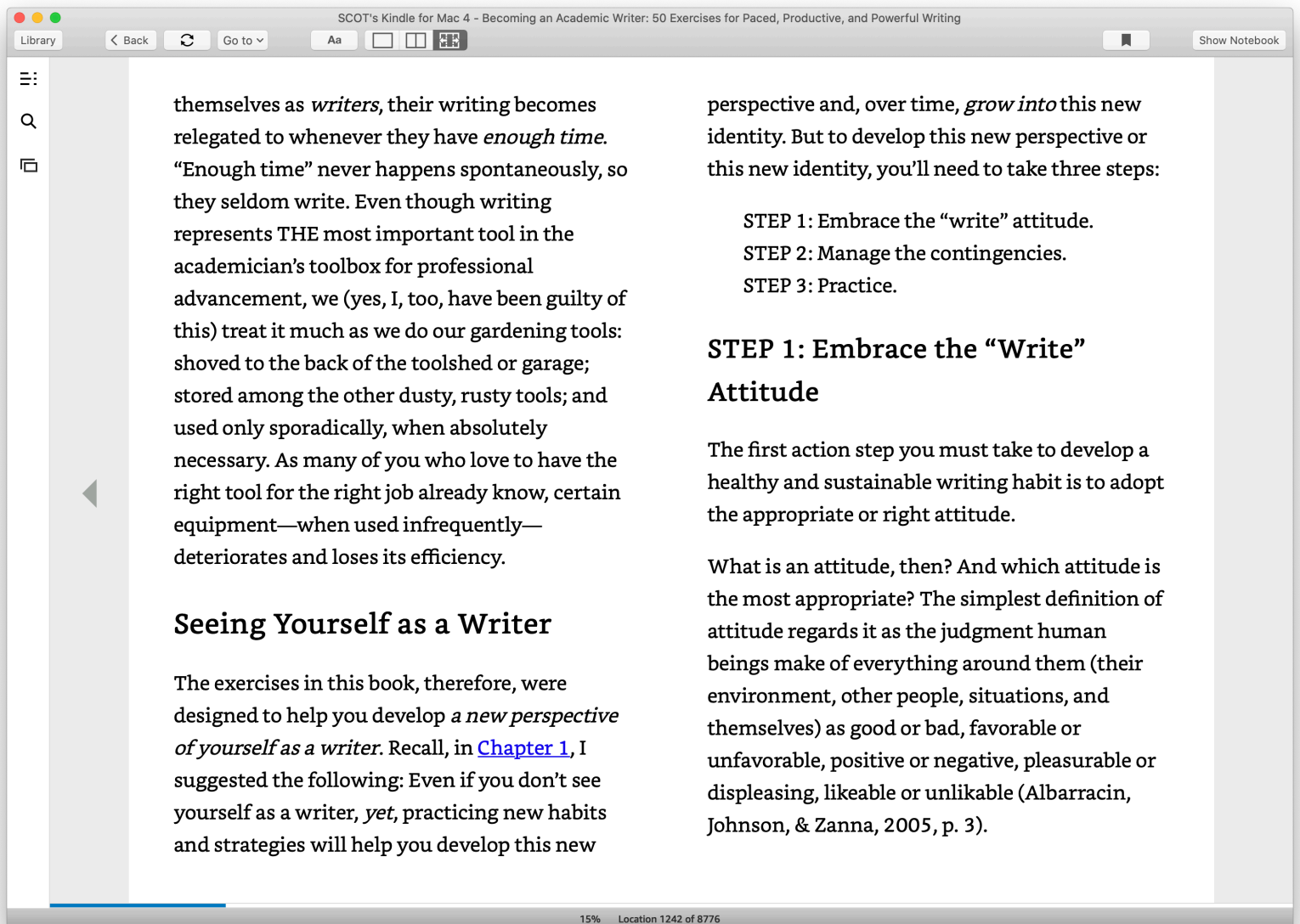
With these two reflexive exercises, I come to my point, to the single take-home message I want them to remember if they happen to learn nothing else in my classes or workshops: *They are writers*. They write for a living. Every dimension of their future success as academics—grades, promotions, presentations to professional groups, funding for research projects—will depend on how well (and, yes, *how much*) they write. Aside from trade-book authors, no other professional group depends so strongly on writing for its survival. Academics (here, I'm thinking of faculty, students, research staff, and even administrators) are professional writers, whether they identify themselves as such or not, whether they like it or not.

Therefore, the single most important take-home message I want *you* to remember is this: *You are a professional writer*. If you are a college student, a graduate student, faculty, research staff, or an administrator, you write for a living. You may

not make as much money from book sales as modern-day authors such as Stephen King, John Grisham, or Patricia Cornwell. After all, these authors have published at least one best seller a year, over many years, in the United States. Yet, as it happens with these famous authors, your salary and your success will largely depend on how much and how well you write. No doubt about it, *academics write for a living*. Therefore, *you* write for a living, whether you like it or not, whether you want to or not.

Writing term papers, reports, reviews, journal articles, book chapters, research grants, books, or textbooks defines much of students' and faculty's lives in colleges and universities worldwide. Yet as you read in [Chapter 1](#), research data suggest faculty write and publish at lower-than-expected levels, while students struggle to respond to their professors' expectations for their writing.

In part, the low productivity and struggles with writing have to do with how academics view themselves and their work. If they do not see



themselves as *writers*, their writing becomes relegated to whenever they have *enough time*. “Enough time” never happens spontaneously, so they seldom write. Even though writing represents THE most important tool in the academician’s toolbox for professional advancement, we (yes, I, too, have been guilty of this) treat it much as we do our gardening tools: shoved to the back of the toolshed or garage; stored among the other dusty, rusty tools; and used only sporadically, when absolutely necessary. As many of you who love to have the right tool for the right job already know, certain equipment—when used infrequently—deteriorates and loses its efficiency.

Seeing Yourself as a Writer

The exercises in this book, therefore, were designed to help you develop *a new perspective of yourself as a writer*. Recall, in [Chapter 1](#), I suggested the following: Even if you don’t see yourself as a writer, *yet*, practicing new habits and strategies will help you develop this new

perspective and, over time, *grow into* this new identity. But to develop this new perspective or this new identity, you’ll need to take three steps:

STEP 1: Embrace the “write” attitude.

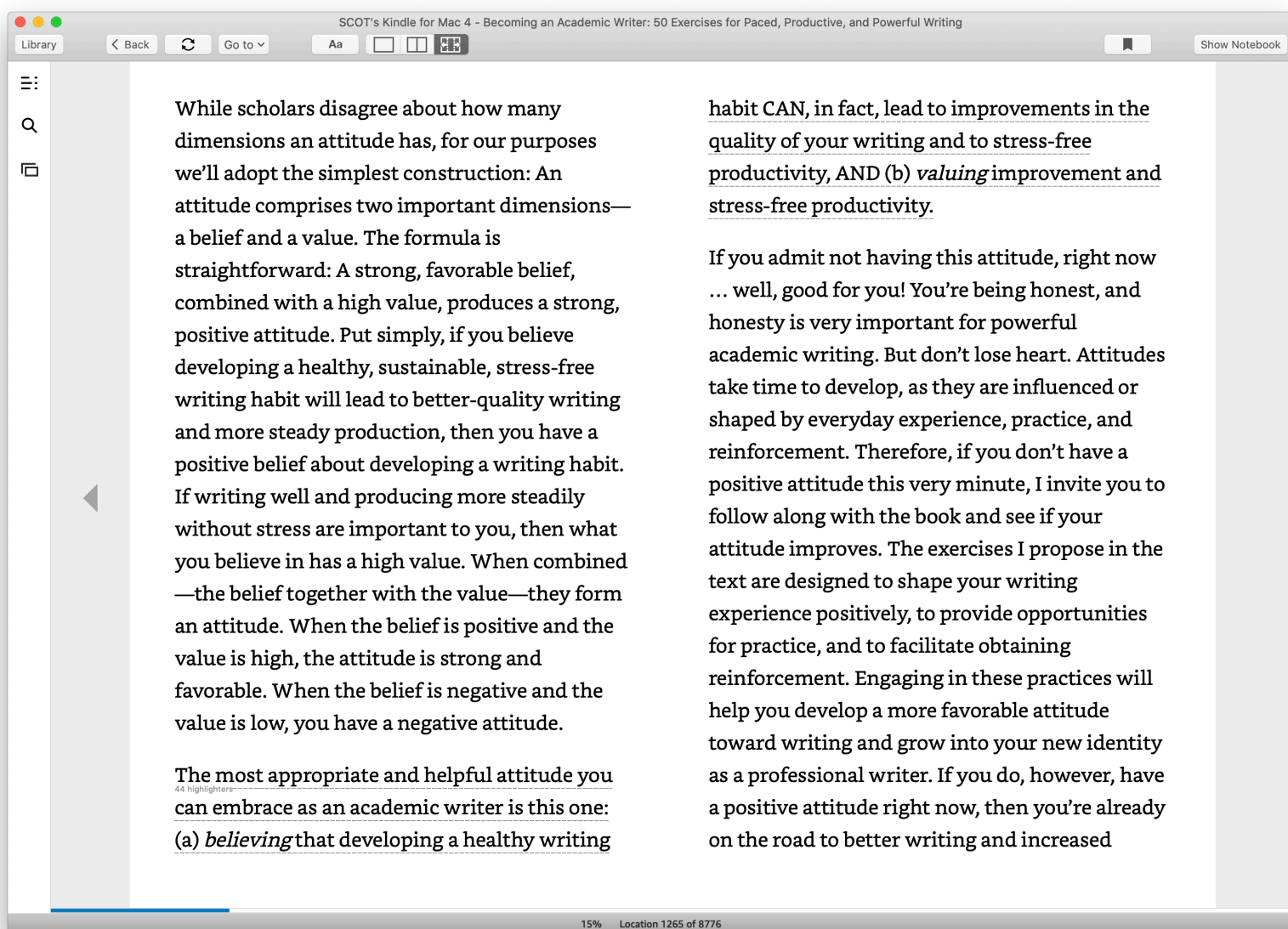
STEP 2: Manage the contingencies.

STEP 3: Practice.

STEP 1: Embrace the “Write” Attitude

The first action step you must take to develop a healthy and sustainable writing habit is to adopt the appropriate or right attitude.

What is an attitude, then? And which attitude is the most appropriate? The simplest definition of attitude regards it as the judgment human beings make of everything around them (their environment, other people, situations, and themselves) as good or bad, favorable or unfavorable, positive or negative, pleasurable or displeasing, likeable or unlikable (Albarracin, Johnson, & Zanna, 2005, p. 3).

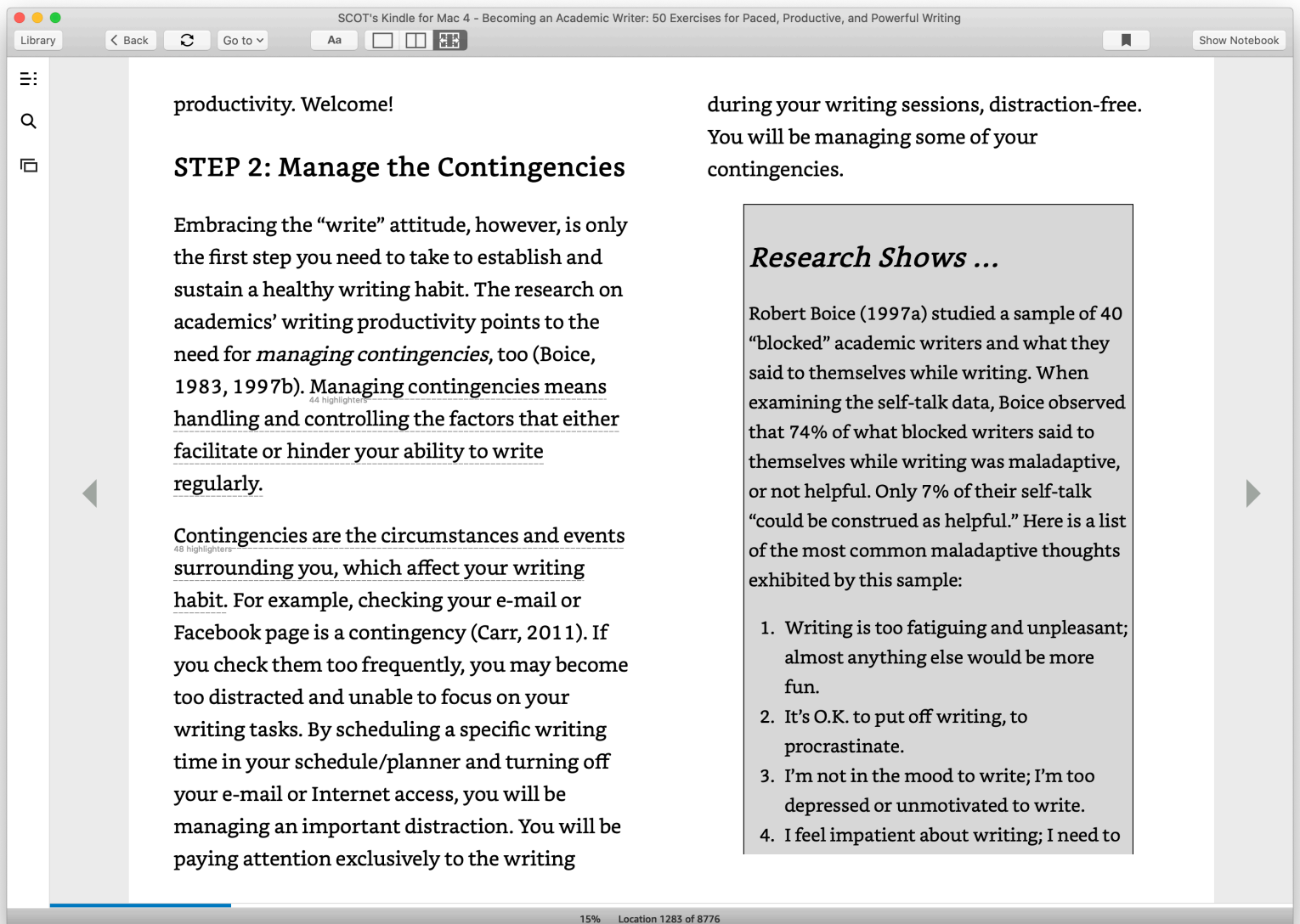


While scholars disagree about how many dimensions an attitude has, for our purposes we'll adopt the simplest construction: An attitude comprises two important dimensions—a belief and a value. The formula is straightforward: A strong, favorable belief, combined with a high value, produces a strong, positive attitude. Put simply, if you believe developing a healthy, sustainable, stress-free writing habit will lead to better-quality writing and more steady production, then you have a positive belief about developing a writing habit. If writing well and producing more steadily without stress are important to you, then what you believe in has a high value. When combined—the belief together with the value—they form an attitude. When the belief is positive and the value is high, the attitude is strong and favorable. When the belief is negative and the value is low, you have a negative attitude.

The most appropriate and helpful attitude you can embrace as an academic writer is this one: (a) *believing* that developing a healthy writing

habit CAN, in fact, lead to improvements in the quality of your writing and to stress-free productivity, AND (b) *valuing* improvement and stress-free productivity.

If you admit not having this attitude, right now ... well, good for you! You're being honest, and honesty is very important for powerful academic writing. But don't lose heart. Attitudes take time to develop, as they are influenced or shaped by everyday experience, practice, and reinforcement. Therefore, if you don't have a positive attitude this very minute, I invite you to follow along with the book and see if your attitude improves. The exercises I propose in the text are designed to shape your writing experience positively, to provide opportunities for practice, and to facilitate obtaining reinforcement. Engaging in these practices will help you develop a more favorable attitude toward writing and grow into your new identity as a professional writer. If you do, however, have a positive attitude right now, then you're already on the road to better writing and increased



productivity. Welcome!

STEP 2: Manage the Contingencies

Embracing the “write” attitude, however, is only the first step you need to take to establish and sustain a healthy writing habit. The research on academics’ writing productivity points to the need for *managing contingencies*, too (Boice, 1983, 1997b). Managing contingencies means handling and controlling the factors that either facilitate or hinder your ability to write regularly.

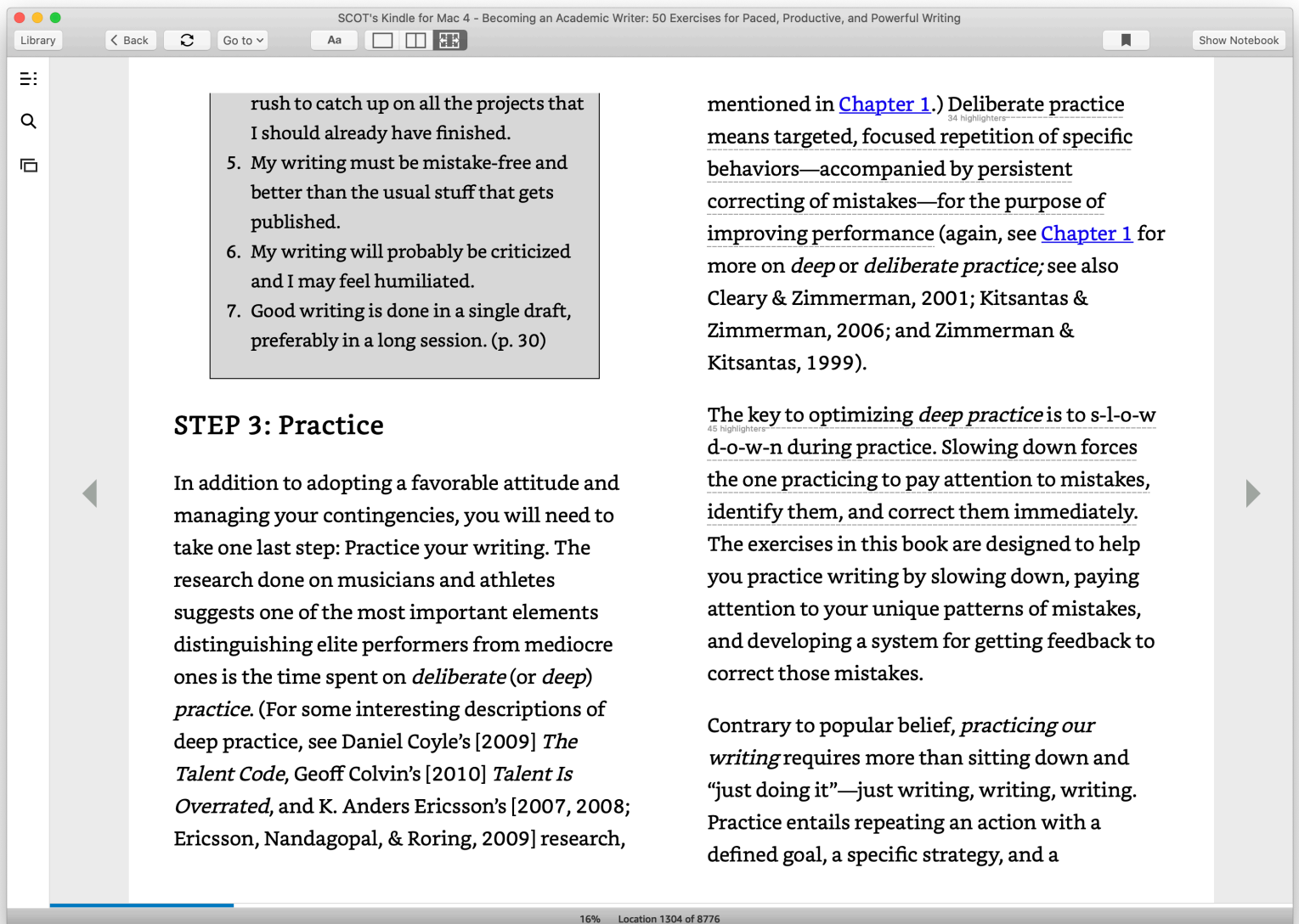
Contingencies are the circumstances and events surrounding you, which affect your writing habit. For example, checking your e-mail or Facebook page is a contingency (Carr, 2011). If you check them too frequently, you may become too distracted and unable to focus on your writing tasks. By scheduling a specific writing time in your schedule/planner and turning off your e-mail or Internet access, you will be managing an important distraction. You will be paying attention exclusively to the writing

during your writing sessions, distraction-free. You will be managing some of your contingencies.

Research Shows ...

Robert Boice (1997a) studied a sample of 40 “blocked” academic writers and what they said to themselves while writing. When examining the self-talk data, Boice observed that 74% of what blocked writers said to themselves while writing was maladaptive, or not helpful. Only 7% of their self-talk “could be construed as helpful.” Here is a list of the most common maladaptive thoughts exhibited by this sample:

1. Writing is too fatiguing and unpleasant; almost anything else would be more fun.
2. It’s O.K. to put off writing, to procrastinate.
3. I’m not in the mood to write; I’m too depressed or unmotivated to write.
4. I feel impatient about writing; I need to



rush to catch up on all the projects that I should already have finished.

5. My writing must be mistake-free and better than the usual stuff that gets published.
6. My writing will probably be criticized and I may feel humiliated.
7. Good writing is done in a single draft, preferably in a long session. (p. 30)

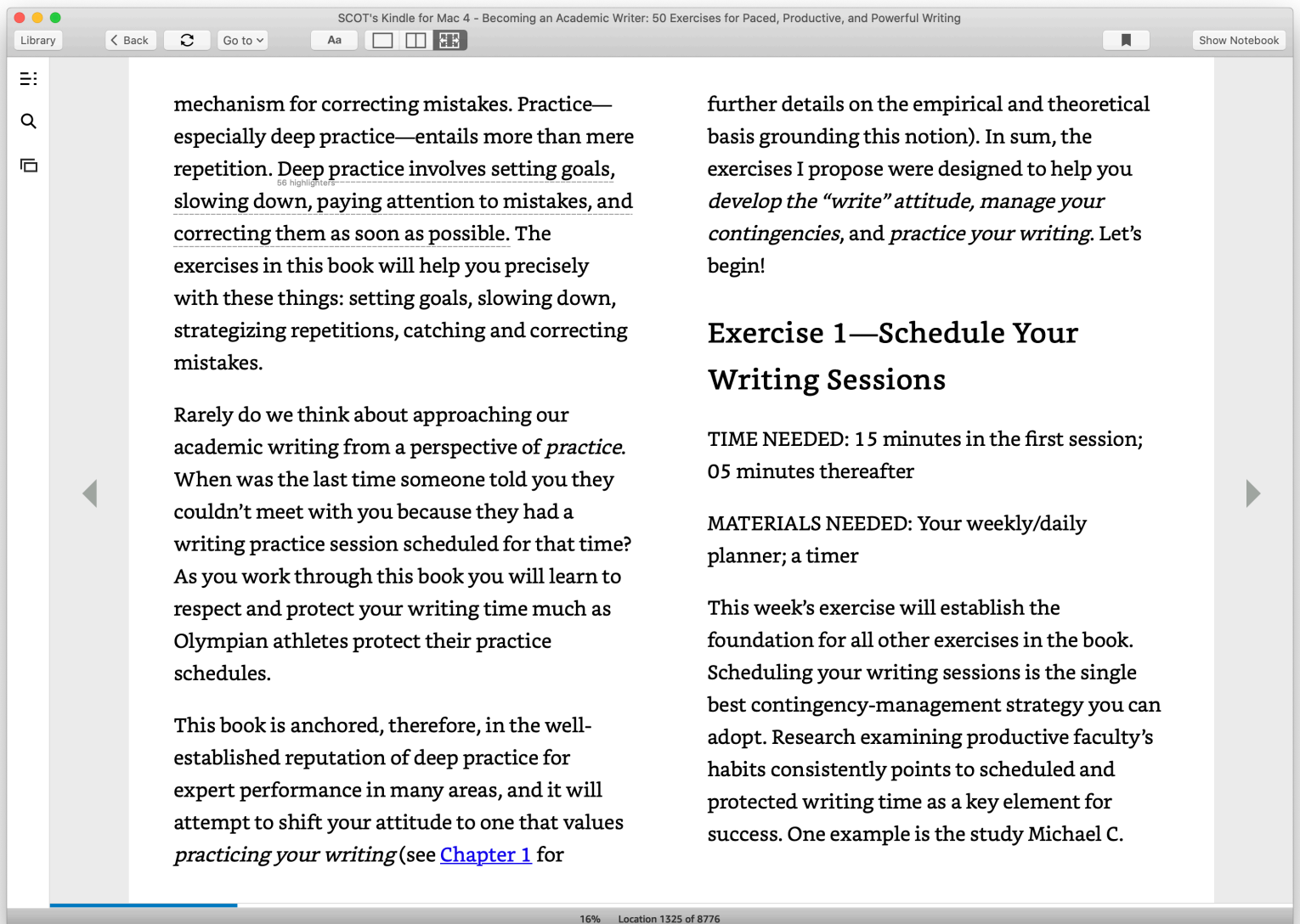
STEP 3: Practice

In addition to adopting a favorable attitude and managing your contingencies, you will need to take one last step: Practice your writing. The research done on musicians and athletes suggests one of the most important elements distinguishing elite performers from mediocre ones is the time spent on *deliberate* (or *deep*) *practice*. (For some interesting descriptions of deep practice, see Daniel Coyle's [2009] *The Talent Code*, Geoff Colvin's [2010] *Talent Is Overrated*, and K. Anders Ericsson's [2007, 2008; Ericsson, Nandagopal, & Roring, 2009] research,

mentioned in [Chapter 1](#).) Deliberate practice means targeted, focused repetition of specific behaviors—accompanied by persistent correcting of mistakes—for the purpose of improving performance (again, see [Chapter 1](#) for more on *deep* or *deliberate practice*; see also Cleary & Zimmerman, 2001; Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2006; and Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999).

The key to optimizing *deep practice* is to s-l-o-w d-o-w-n during practice. Slowing down forces the one practicing to pay attention to mistakes, identify them, and correct them immediately. The exercises in this book are designed to help you practice writing by slowing down, paying attention to your unique patterns of mistakes, and developing a system for getting feedback to correct those mistakes.

Contrary to popular belief, *practicing our writing* requires more than sitting down and “just doing it”—just writing, writing, writing. Practice entails repeating an action with a defined goal, a specific strategy, and a



mechanism for correcting mistakes. Practice—especially deep practice—entails more than mere repetition. Deep practice involves setting goals, slowing down, paying attention to mistakes, and correcting them as soon as possible. The exercises in this book will help you precisely with these things: setting goals, slowing down, strategizing repetitions, catching and correcting mistakes.

Rarely do we think about approaching our academic writing from a perspective of *practice*. When was the last time someone told you they couldn't meet with you because they had a writing practice session scheduled for that time? As you work through this book you will learn to respect and protect your writing time much as Olympian athletes protect their practice schedules.

This book is anchored, therefore, in the well-established reputation of deep practice for expert performance in many areas, and it will attempt to shift your attitude to one that values *practicing your writing* (see [Chapter 1](#) for

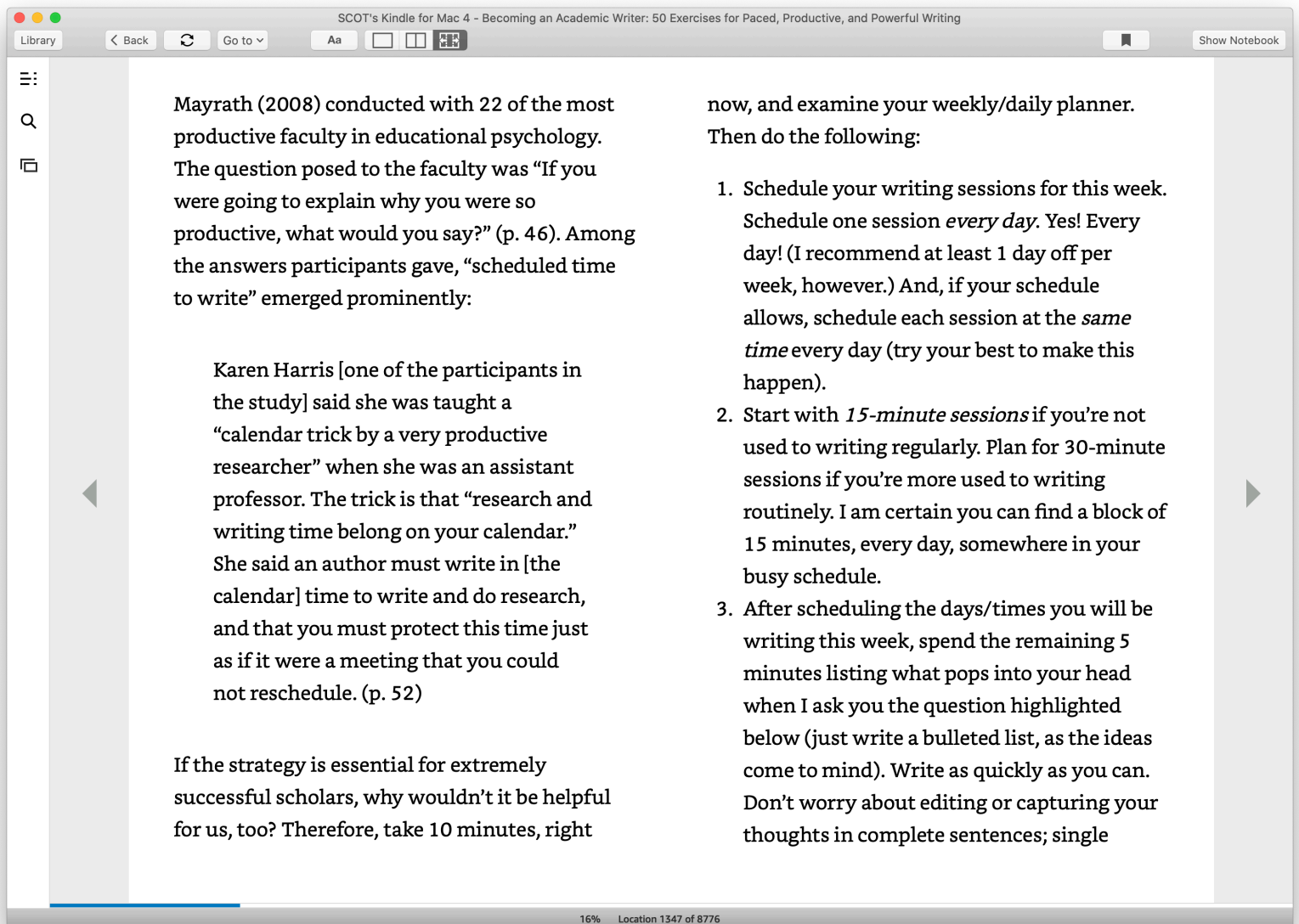
further details on the empirical and theoretical basis grounding this notion). In sum, the exercises I propose were designed to help you *develop the "write" attitude, manage your contingencies, and practice your writing*. Let's begin!

Exercise 1—Schedule Your Writing Sessions

TIME NEEDED: 15 minutes in the first session; 05 minutes thereafter

MATERIALS NEEDED: Your weekly/daily planner; a timer

This week's exercise will establish the foundation for all other exercises in the book. Scheduling your writing sessions is the single best contingency-management strategy you can adopt. Research examining productive faculty's habits consistently points to scheduled and protected writing time as a key element for success. One example is the study Michael C.



Mayrath (2008) conducted with 22 of the most productive faculty in educational psychology. The question posed to the faculty was "If you were going to explain why you were so productive, what would you say?" (p. 46). Among the answers participants gave, "scheduled time to write" emerged prominently:

Karen Harris [one of the participants in the study] said she was taught a "calendar trick by a very productive researcher" when she was an assistant professor. The trick is that "research and writing time belong on your calendar." She said an author must write in [the calendar] time to write and do research, and that you must protect this time just as if it were a meeting that you could not reschedule. (p. 52)

If the strategy is essential for extremely successful scholars, why wouldn't it be helpful for us, too? Therefore, take 10 minutes, right

now, and examine your weekly/daily planner. Then do the following:

1. Schedule your writing sessions for this week. Schedule one session *every day*. Yes! Every day! (I recommend at least 1 day off per week, however.) And, if your schedule allows, schedule each session at the *same time* every day (try your best to make this happen).
2. Start with *15-minute sessions* if you're not used to writing regularly. Plan for 30-minute sessions if you're more used to writing routinely. I am certain you can find a block of 15 minutes, every day, somewhere in your busy schedule.
3. After scheduling the days/times you will be writing this week, spend the remaining 5 minutes listing what pops into your head when I ask you the question highlighted below (just write a bulleted list, as the ideas come to mind). Write as quickly as you can. Don't worry about editing or capturing your thoughts in complete sentences; single

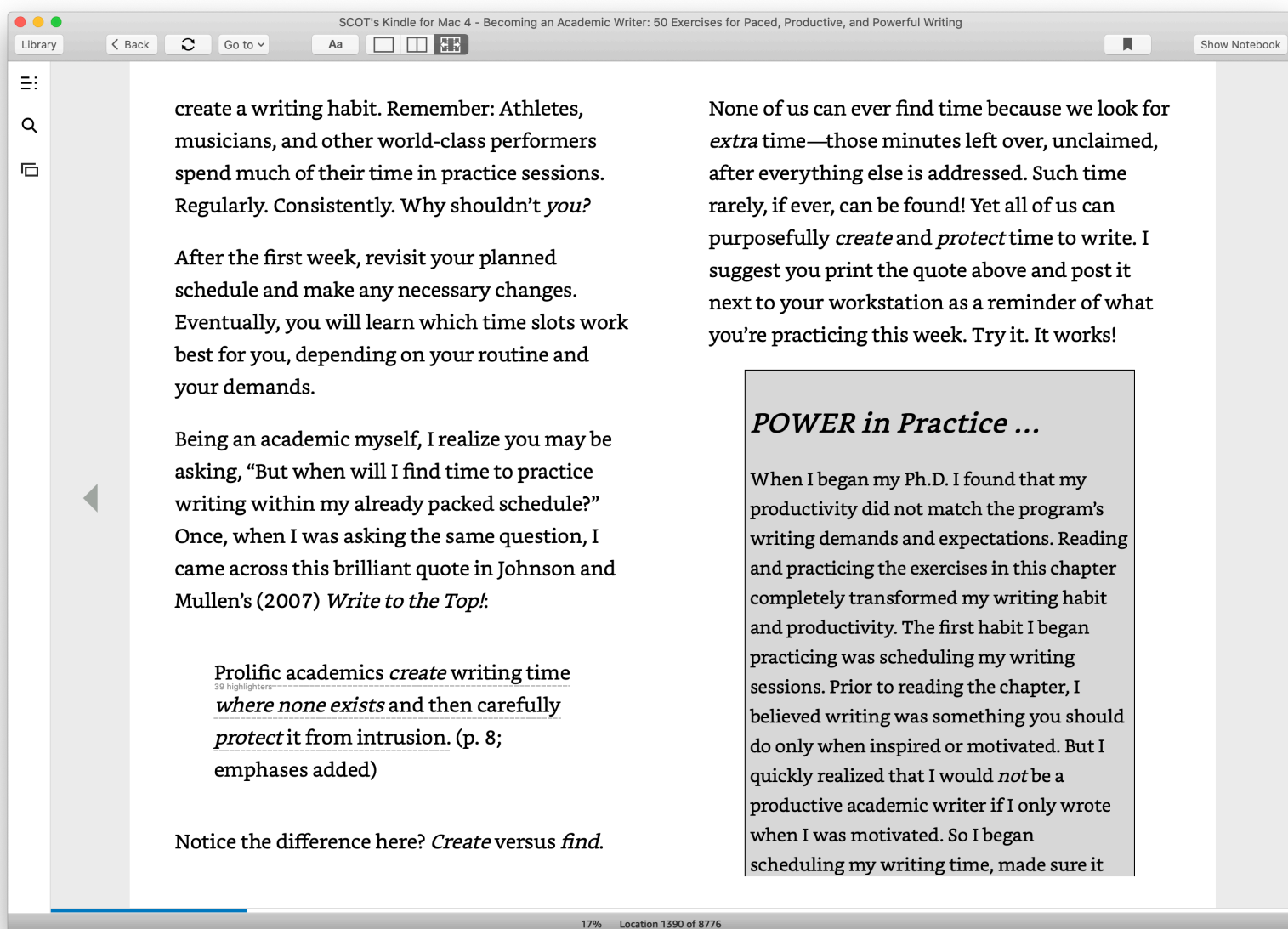


words will do:

- What does it take to get me to write (to begin and/or to continue)?
4. In each writing session this week, use 5 of your scheduled 15 minutes (or 30 minutes) to answer these other questions (one question per writing session):
- a. What keeps me away from writing?
 - b. What aspects of writing do I really enjoy?
 - c. What aspects of writing do I especially dislike?
 - d. How have I been treating my most important academic tool? Is it rusting away; out of reach or sight; needing repair, polishing, or sharpening? Or is it always right here, in a clean, airy place, fully functional and ready when I need it? In other words, how much time and how many resources have I dedicated lately to improving my writing?
 - e. Do I see myself as a writer? If the answer is *yes*, in what ways do I “wear” my identity as an academic writer; in other words, how do *others* see that I am an

academic writer? If the answer is *no*, what keeps me from viewing myself as an academic writer? Do I have a *fixed* or a *growth* mindset (Dweck, 2008) related to my academic writing?

After you’ve done Exercise 1, keep your writing schedule for this week. During each session, however, write (or don’t write) as you normally would. If you feel you have nothing to write about, read a journal article and note your thoughts as you write. If you’re really having difficulty figuring out what to write, practice copying a text—yes, copying (more on the benefits of copying in Exercise 15, [Chapter 4](#)). Or write about your experiences with developing a writing habit, or write a letter. I doubt—because you’re an academic—you will struggle to find *something* to write about. This week, the purpose is to begin developing a writing habit; the goal, to get used to showing up for your writing sessions. *What* you write about right now is not as important as training your body and your mind to follow a specific routine, to



create a writing habit. Remember: Athletes, musicians, and other world-class performers spend much of their time in practice sessions. Regularly. Consistently. Why shouldn't *you*?

After the first week, revisit your planned schedule and make any necessary changes. Eventually, you will learn which time slots work best for you, depending on your routine and your demands.

Being an academic myself, I realize you may be asking, "But when will I find time to practice writing within my already packed schedule?" Once, when I was asking the same question, I came across this brilliant quote in Johnson and Mullen's (2007) *Write to the Top!*:

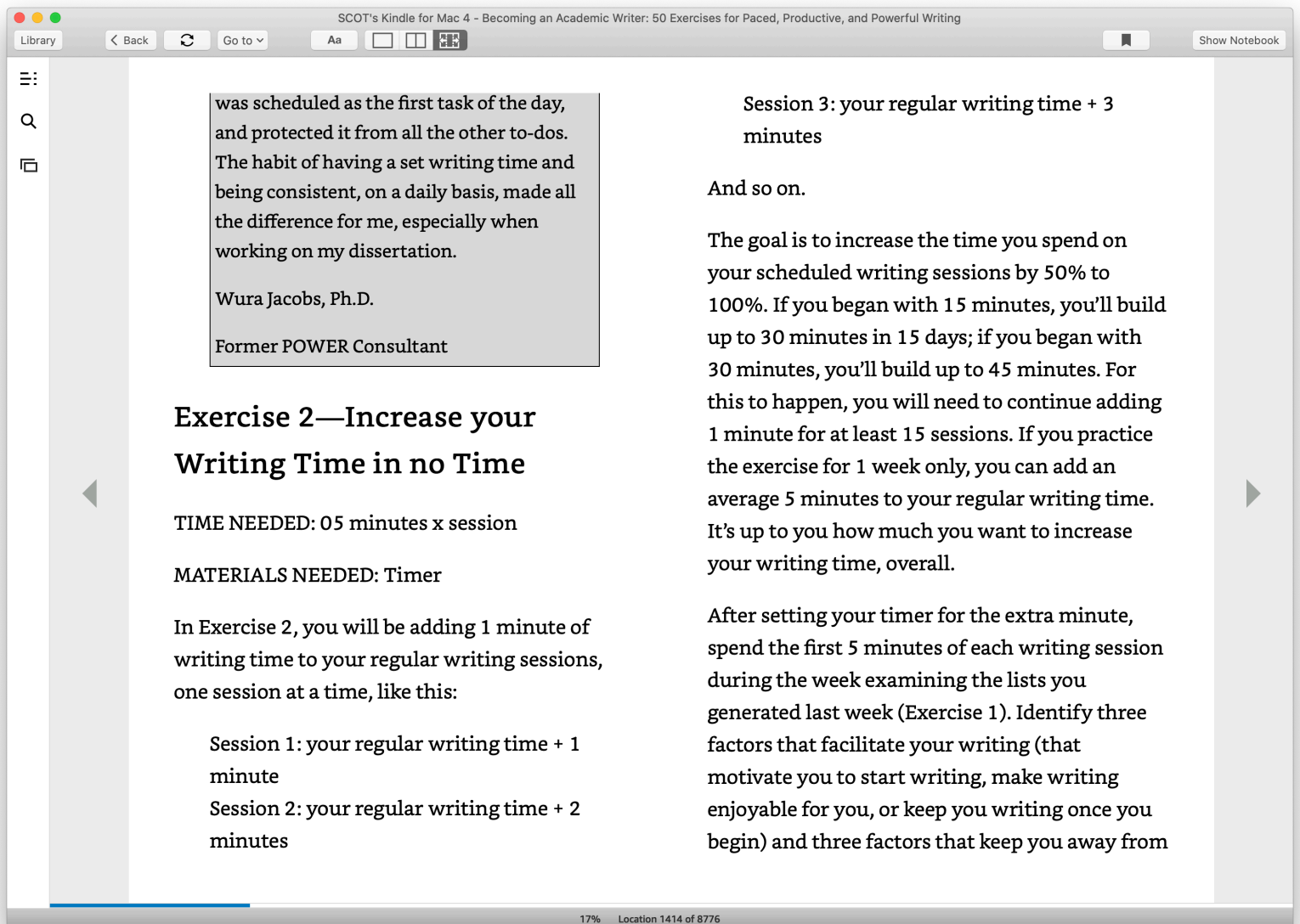
Prolific academics *create* writing time
where none exists and then carefully
protect it from intrusion. (p. 8;
emphases added)

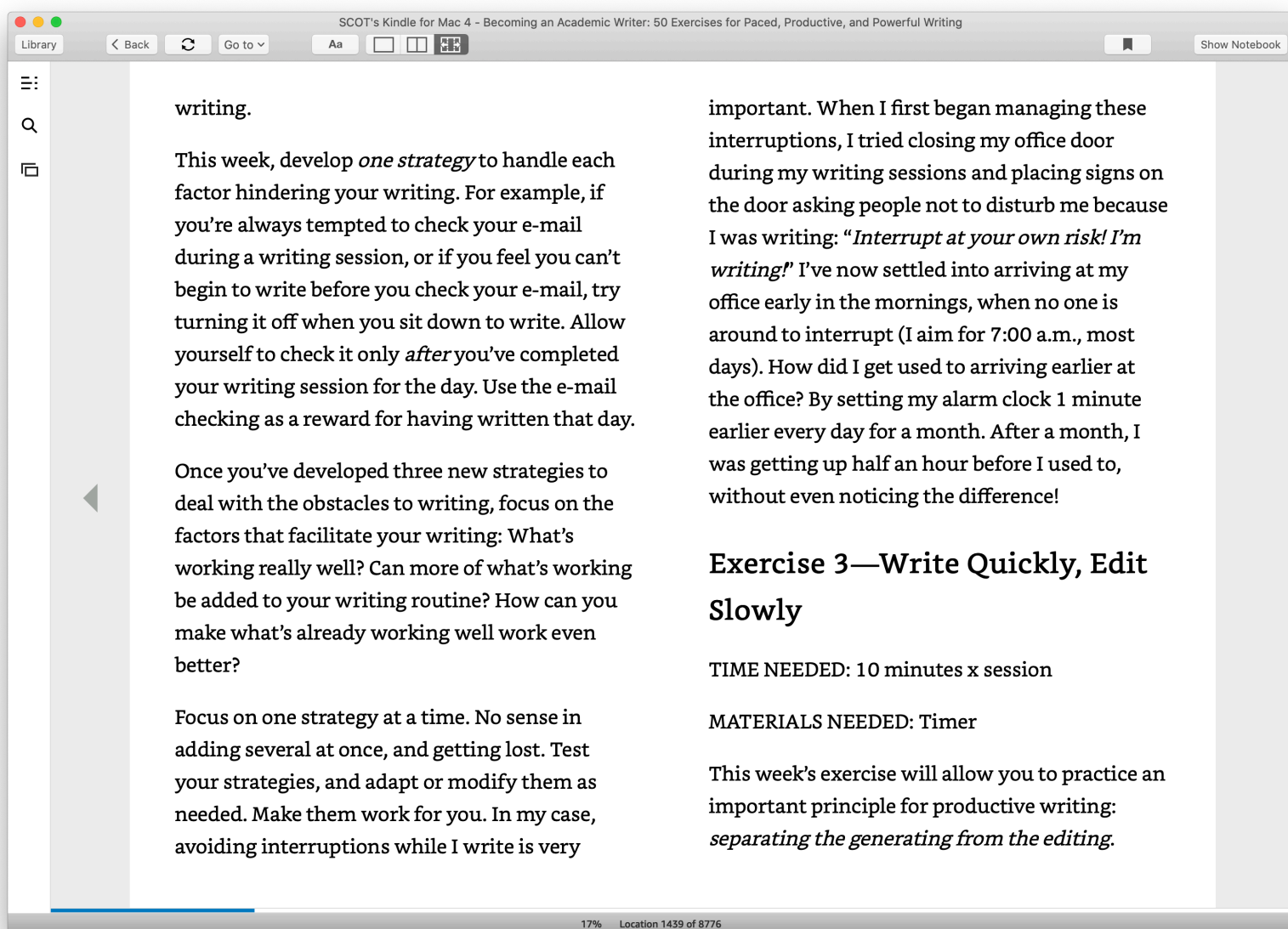
Notice the difference here? *Create* versus *find*.

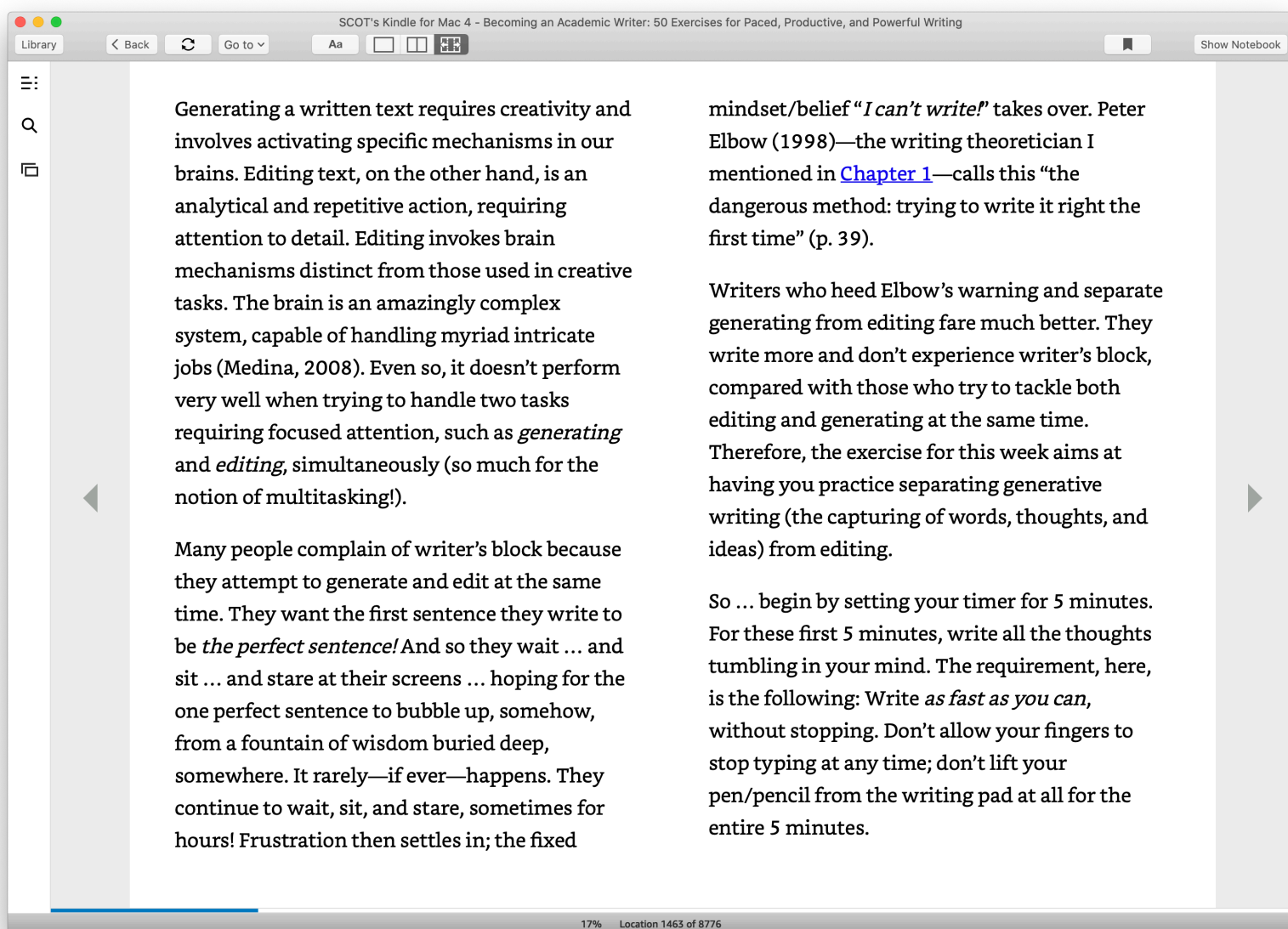
None of us can ever find time because we look for *extra* time—those minutes left over, unclaimed, after everything else is addressed. Such time rarely, if ever, can be found! Yet all of us can purposefully *create* and *protect* time to write. I suggest you print the quote above and post it next to your workstation as a reminder of what you're practicing this week. Try it. It works!

POWER in Practice ...

When I began my Ph.D. I found that my productivity did not match the program's writing demands and expectations. Reading and practicing the exercises in this chapter completely transformed my writing habit and productivity. The first habit I began practicing was scheduling my writing sessions. Prior to reading the chapter, I believed writing was something you should do only when inspired or motivated. But I quickly realized that I would *not* be a productive academic writer if I only wrote when I was motivated. So I began scheduling my writing time, made sure it







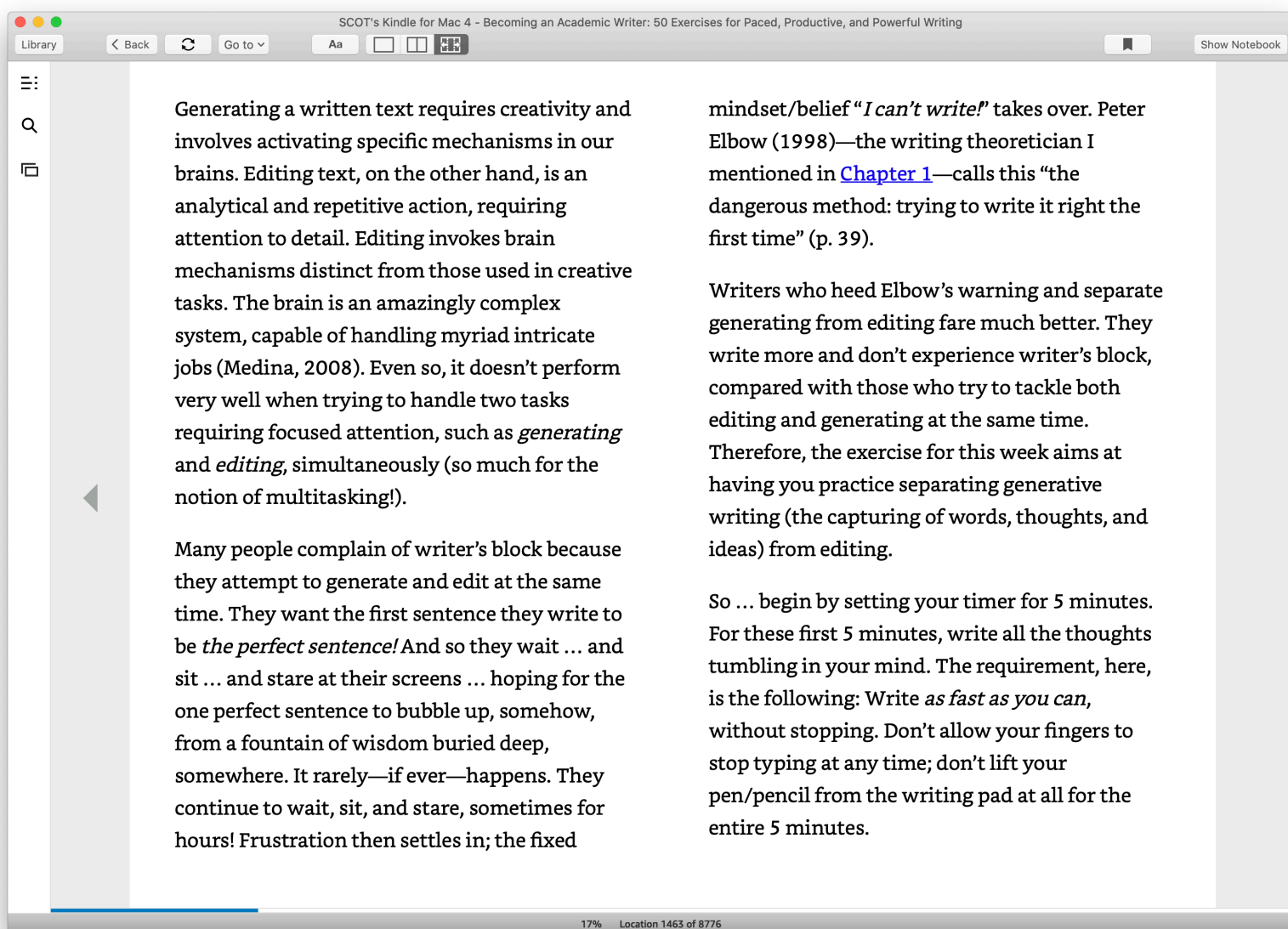
Generating a written text requires creativity and involves activating specific mechanisms in our brains. Editing text, on the other hand, is an analytical and repetitive action, requiring attention to detail. Editing invokes brain mechanisms distinct from those used in creative tasks. The brain is an amazingly complex system, capable of handling myriad intricate jobs (Medina, 2008). Even so, it doesn't perform very well when trying to handle two tasks requiring focused attention, such as *generating* and *editing*, simultaneously (so much for the notion of multitasking!).

Many people complain of writer's block because they attempt to generate and edit at the same time. They want the first sentence they write to be *the perfect sentence!* And so they wait ... and sit ... and stare at their screens ... hoping for the one perfect sentence to bubble up, somehow, from a fountain of wisdom buried deep, somewhere. It rarely—if ever—happens. They continue to wait, sit, and stare, sometimes for hours! Frustration then settles in; the fixed

mindset/belief "*I can't write!*" takes over. Peter Elbow (1998)—the writing theoretician I mentioned in [Chapter 1](#)—calls this "the dangerous method: trying to write it right the first time" (p. 39).

Writers who heed Elbow's warning and separate generating from editing fare much better. They write more and don't experience writer's block, compared with those who try to tackle both editing and generating at the same time. Therefore, the exercise for this week aims at having you practice separating generative writing (the capturing of words, thoughts, and ideas) from editing.

So ... begin by setting your timer for 5 minutes. For these first 5 minutes, write all the thoughts tumbling in your mind. The requirement, here, is the following: Write *as fast as you can*, without stopping. Don't allow your fingers to stop typing at any time; don't lift your pen/pencil from the writing pad at all for the entire 5 minutes.



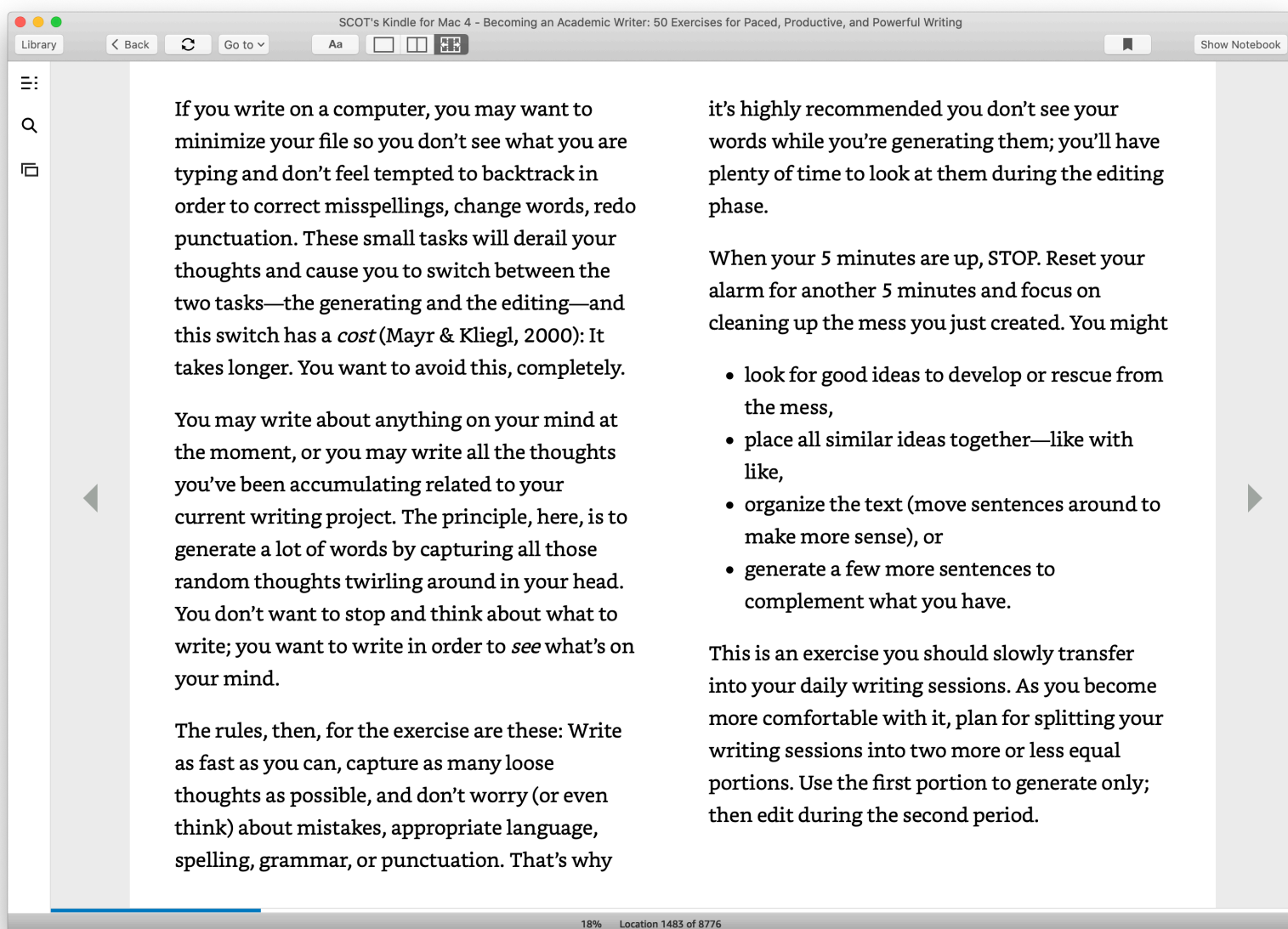
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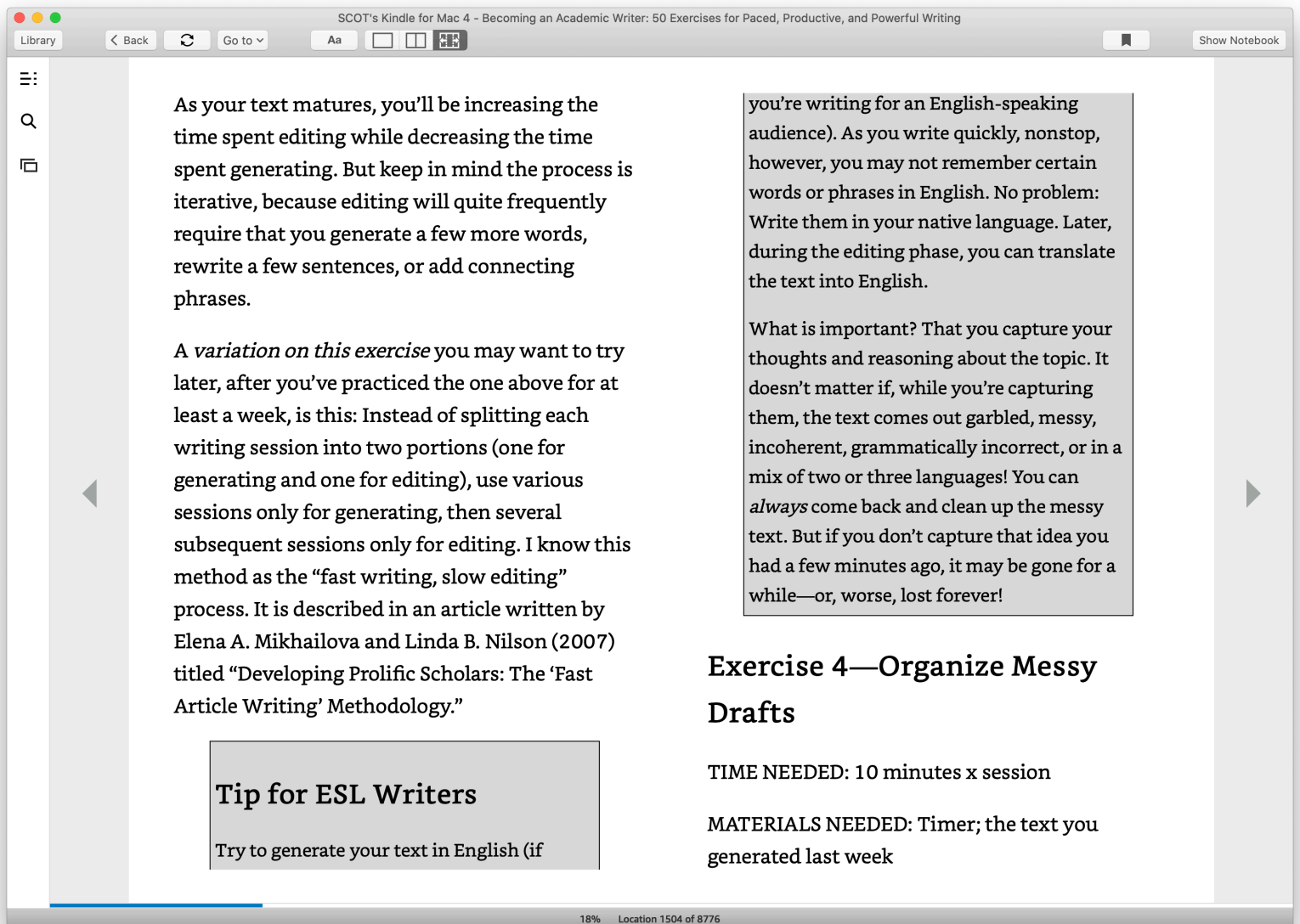
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As your text matures, you'll be increasing the time spent editing while decreasing the time spent generating. But keep in mind the process is iterative, because editing will quite frequently require that you generate a few more words, rewrite a few sentences, or add connecting phrases.

A *variation on this exercise* you may want to try later, after you've practiced the one above for at least a week, is this: Instead of splitting each writing session into two portions (one for generating and one for editing), use various sessions only for generating, then several subsequent sessions only for editing. I know this method as the "fast writing, slow editing" process. It is described in an article written by Elena A. Mikhailova and Linda B. Nilson (2007) titled "Developing Prolific Scholars: The 'Fast Article Writing' Methodology."

Tip for ESL Writers

Try to generate your text in English (if

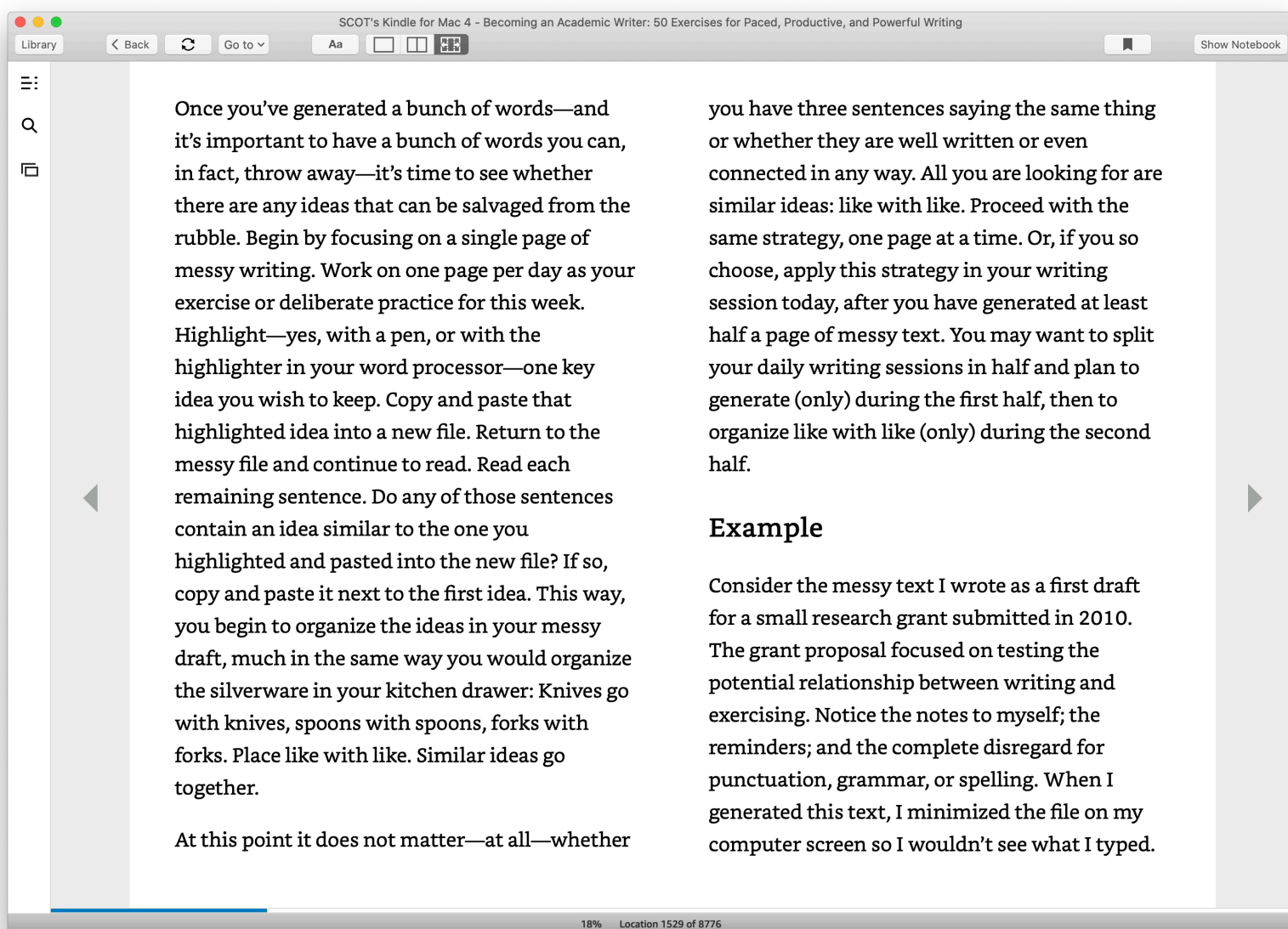
you're writing for an English-speaking audience). As you write quickly, nonstop, however, you may not remember certain words or phrases in English. No problem: Write them in your native language. Later, during the editing phase, you can translate the text into English.

What is important? That you capture your thoughts and reasoning about the topic. It doesn't matter if, while you're capturing them, the text comes out garbled, messy, incoherent, grammatically incorrect, or in a mix of two or three languages! You can *always* come back and clean up the messy text. But if you don't capture that idea you had a few minutes ago, it may be gone for a while—or, worse, lost forever!

Exercise 4—Organize Messy Drafts

TIME NEEDED: 10 minutes x session

MATERIALS NEEDED: Timer; the text you generated last week



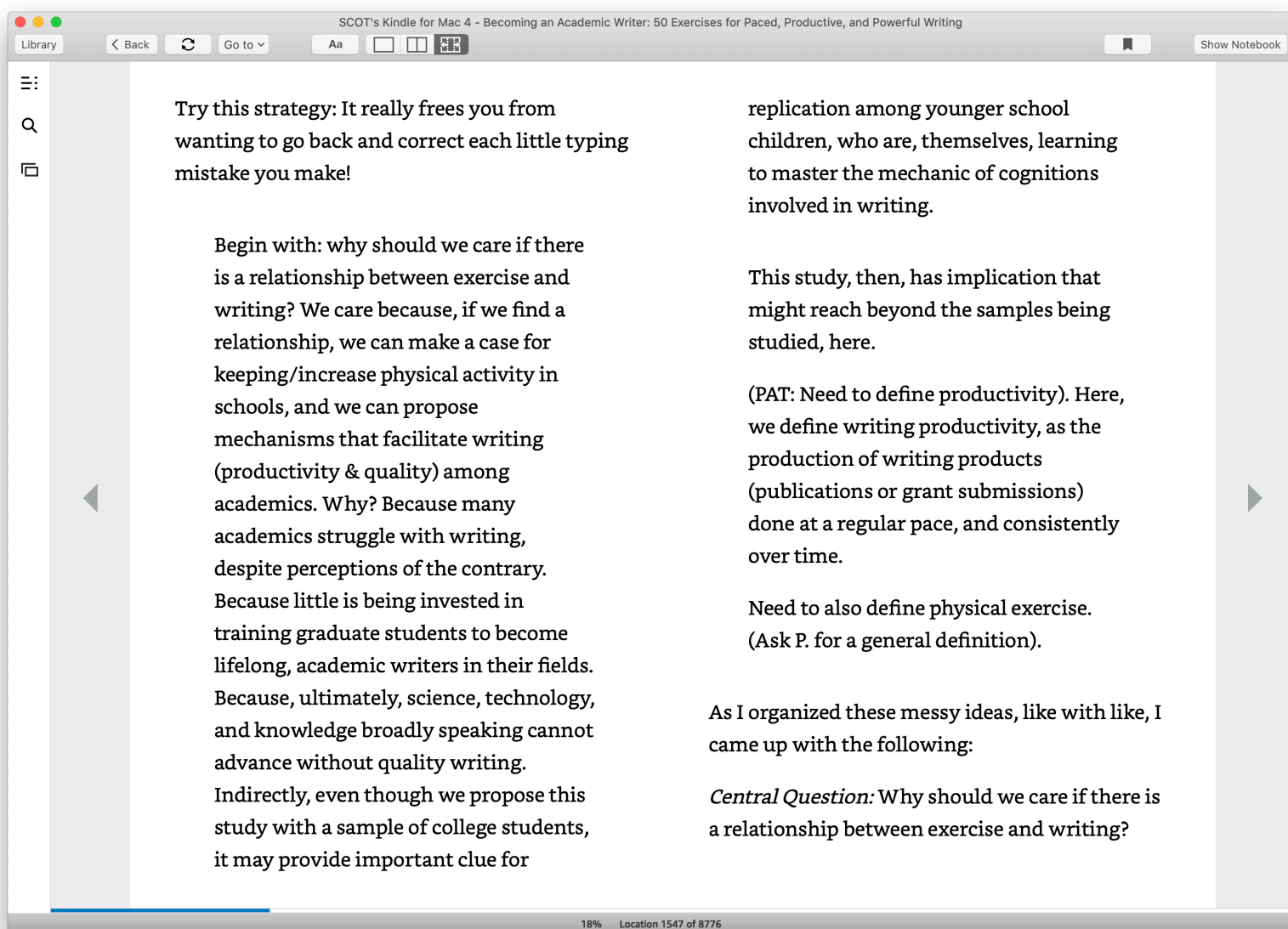
Once you've generated a bunch of words—and it's important to have a bunch of words you can, in fact, throw away—it's time to see whether there are any ideas that can be salvaged from the rubble. Begin by focusing on a single page of messy writing. Work on one page per day as your exercise or deliberate practice for this week. Highlight—yes, with a pen, or with the highlighter in your word processor—one key idea you wish to keep. Copy and paste that highlighted idea into a new file. Return to the messy file and continue to read. Read each remaining sentence. Do any of those sentences contain an idea similar to the one you highlighted and pasted into the new file? If so, copy and paste it next to the first idea. This way, you begin to organize the ideas in your messy draft, much in the same way you would organize the silverware in your kitchen drawer: Knives go with knives, spoons with spoons, forks with forks. Place like with like. Similar ideas go together.

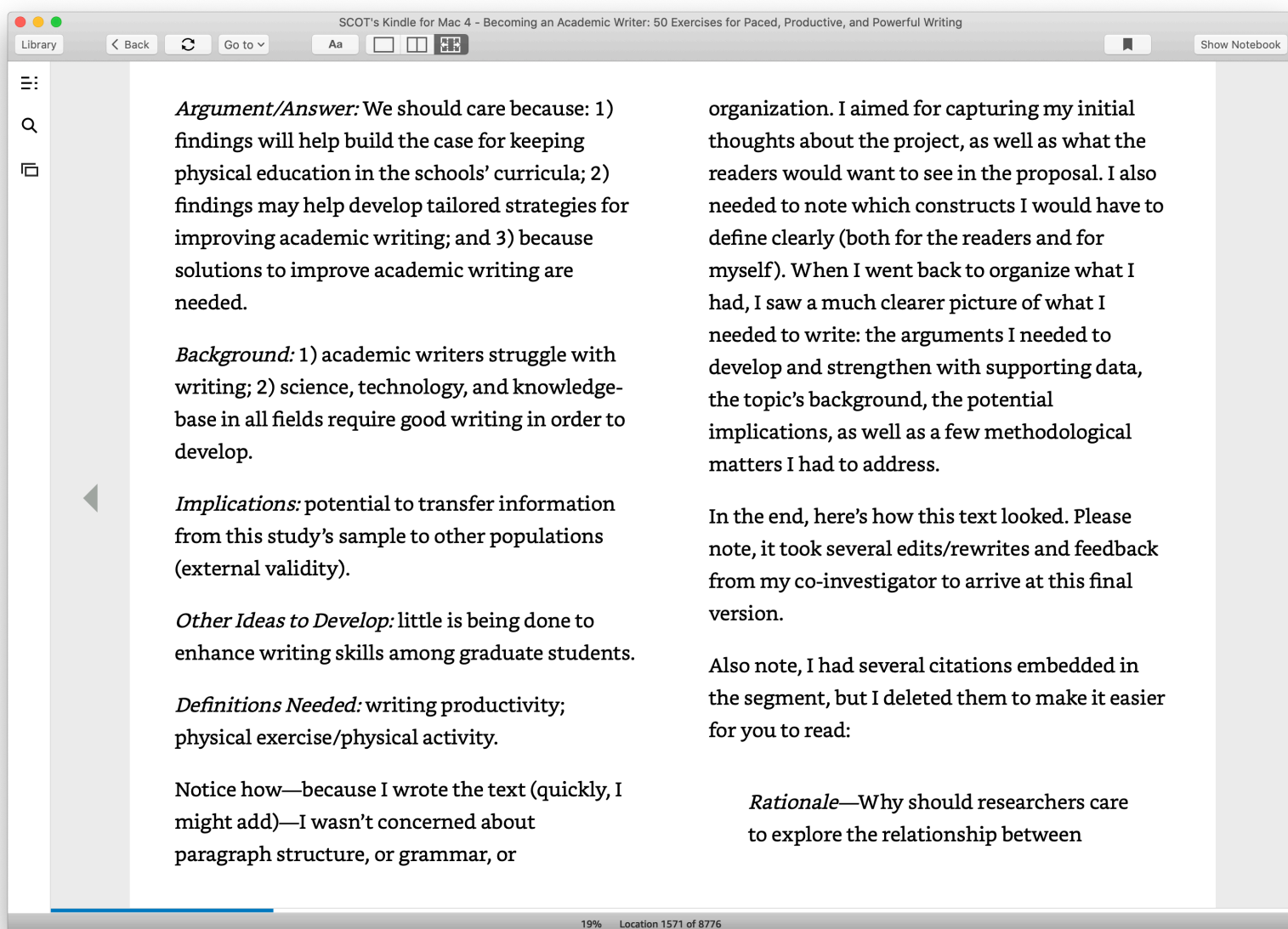
At this point it does not matter—at all—whether

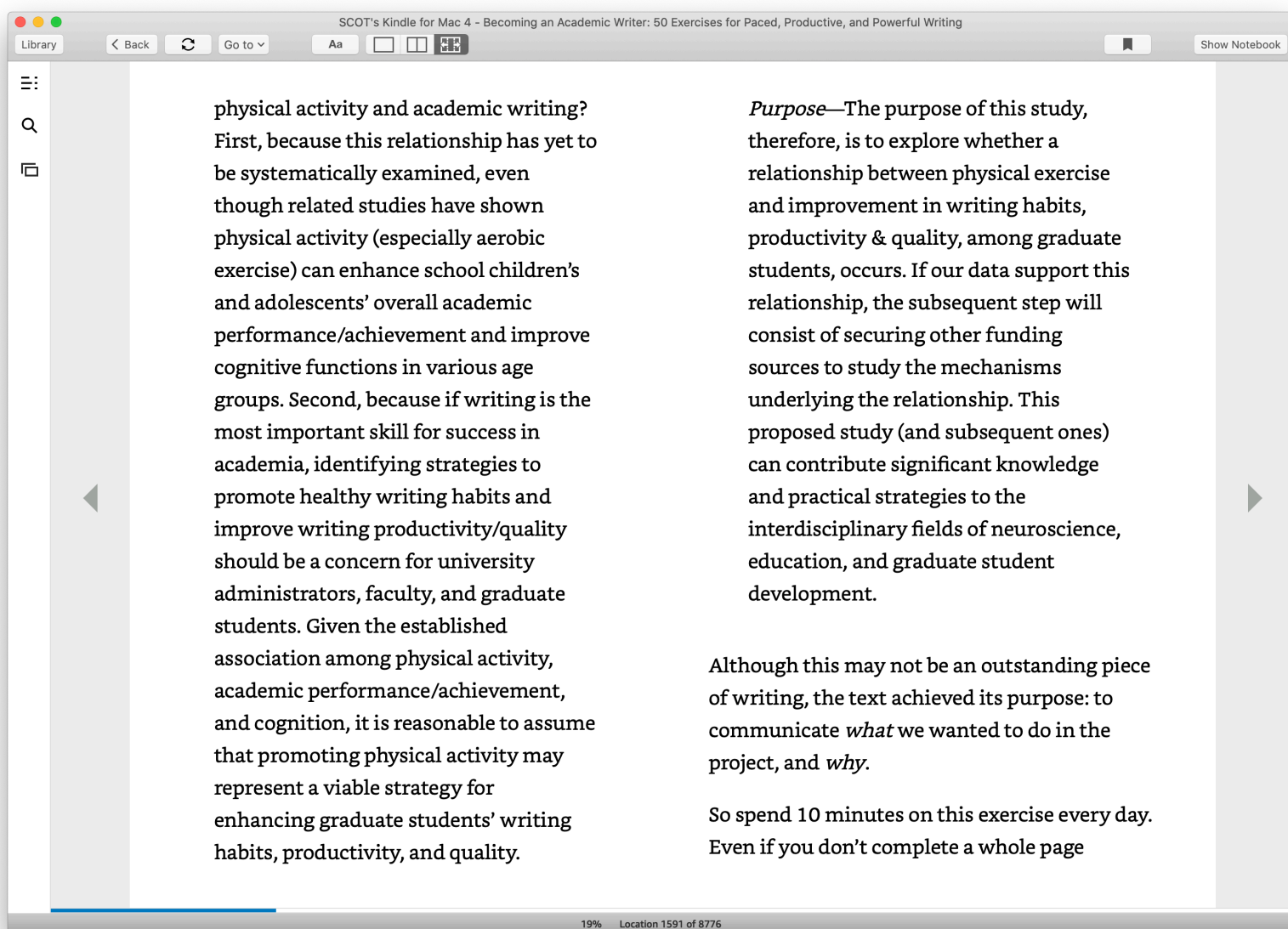
you have three sentences saying the same thing or whether they are well written or even connected in any way. All you are looking for are similar ideas: like with like. Proceed with the same strategy, one page at a time. Or, if you so choose, apply this strategy in your writing session today, after you have generated at least half a page of messy text. You may want to split your daily writing sessions in half and plan to generate (only) during the first half, then to organize like with like (only) during the second half.

Example

Consider the messy text I wrote as a first draft for a small research grant submitted in 2010. The grant proposal focused on testing the potential relationship between writing and exercising. Notice the notes to myself; the reminders; and the complete disregard for punctuation, grammar, or spelling. When I generated this text, I minimized the file on my computer screen so I wouldn't see what I typed.





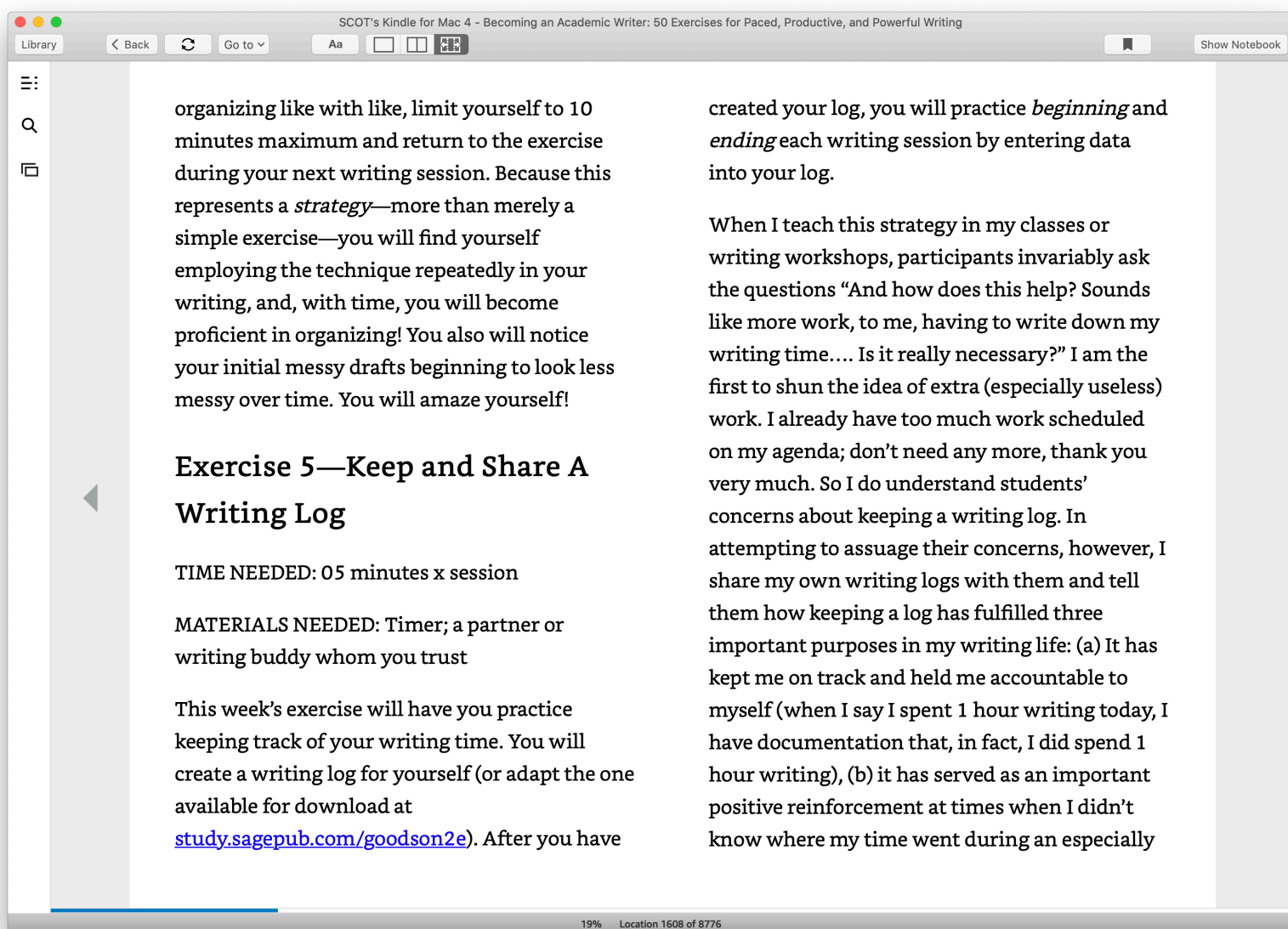


physical activity and academic writing? First, because this relationship has yet to be systematically examined, even though related studies have shown physical activity (especially aerobic exercise) can enhance school children's and adolescents' overall academic performance/achievement and improve cognitive functions in various age groups. Second, because if writing is the most important skill for success in academia, identifying strategies to promote healthy writing habits and improve writing productivity/quality should be a concern for university administrators, faculty, and graduate students. Given the established association among physical activity, academic performance/achievement, and cognition, it is reasonable to assume that promoting physical activity may represent a viable strategy for enhancing graduate students' writing habits, productivity, and quality.

Purpose—The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore whether a relationship between physical exercise and improvement in writing habits, productivity & quality, among graduate students, occurs. If our data support this relationship, the subsequent step will consist of securing other funding sources to study the mechanisms underlying the relationship. This proposed study (and subsequent ones) can contribute significant knowledge and practical strategies to the interdisciplinary fields of neuroscience, education, and graduate student development.

Although this may not be an outstanding piece of writing, the text achieved its purpose: to communicate *what* we wanted to do in the project, and *why*.

So spend 10 minutes on this exercise every day. Even if you don't complete a whole page



organizing like with like, limit yourself to 10 minutes maximum and return to the exercise during your next writing session. Because this represents a *strategy*—more than merely a simple exercise—you will find yourself employing the technique repeatedly in your writing, and, with time, you will become proficient in organizing! You also will notice your initial messy drafts beginning to look less messy over time. You will amaze yourself!

Exercise 5—Keep and Share A Writing Log

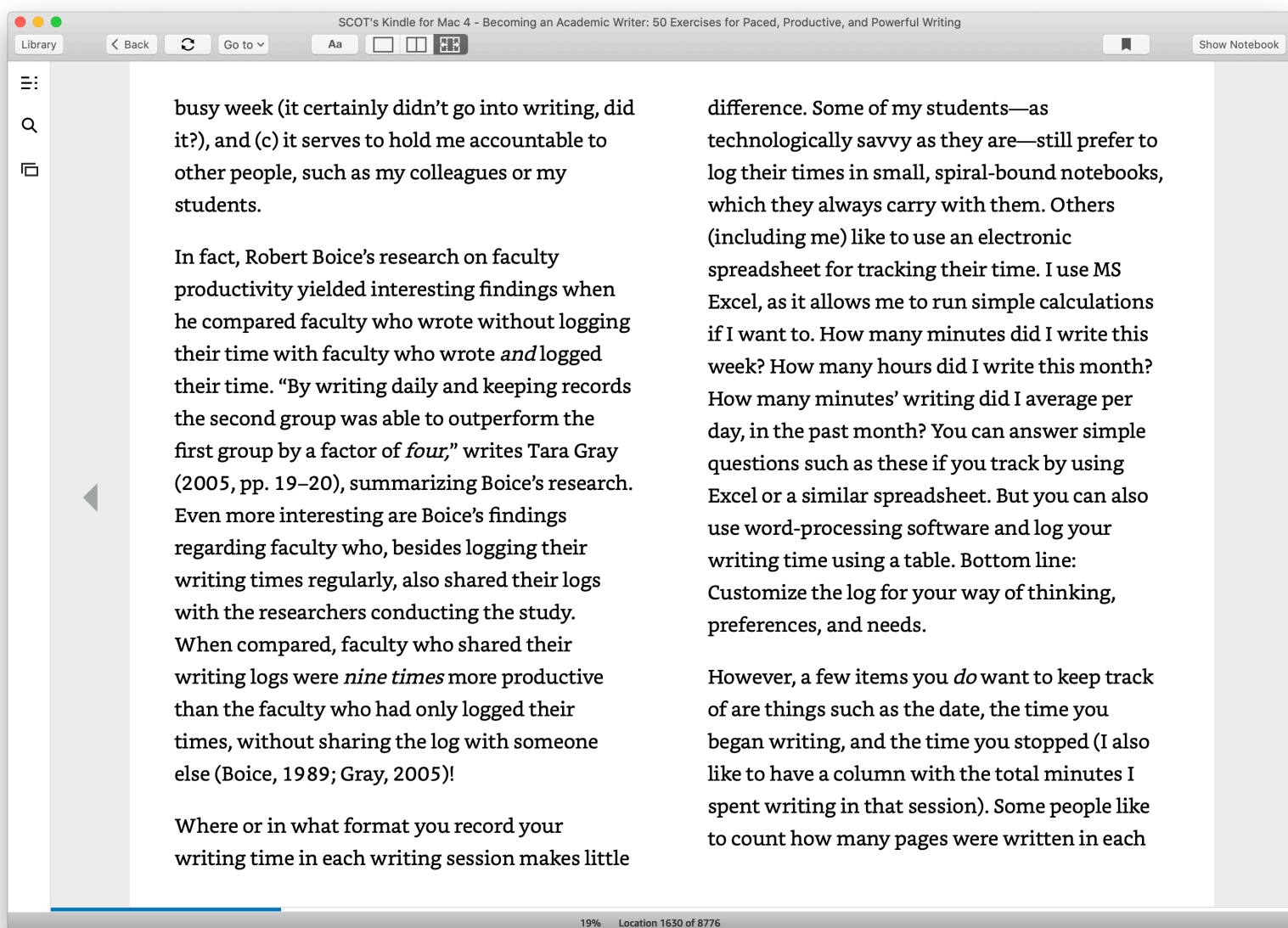
TIME NEEDED: 05 minutes x session

MATERIALS NEEDED: Timer; a partner or writing buddy whom you trust

This week's exercise will have you practice keeping track of your writing time. You will create a writing log for yourself (or adapt the one available for download at study.sagepub.com/goodson2e). After you have

created your log, you will practice *beginning* and *ending* each writing session by entering data into your log.

When I teach this strategy in my classes or writing workshops, participants invariably ask the questions “And how does this help? Sounds like more work, to me, having to write down my writing time.... Is it really necessary?” I am the first to shun the idea of extra (especially useless) work. I already have too much work scheduled on my agenda; don’t need any more, thank you very much. So I do understand students’ concerns about keeping a writing log. In attempting to assuage their concerns, however, I share my own writing logs with them and tell them how keeping a log has fulfilled three important purposes in my writing life: (a) It has kept me on track and held me accountable to myself (when I say I spent 1 hour writing today, I have documentation that, in fact, I did spend 1 hour writing), (b) it has served as an important positive reinforcement at times when I didn’t know where my time went during an especially



busy week (it certainly didn't go into writing, did it?), and (c) it serves to hold me accountable to other people, such as my colleagues or my students.

In fact, Robert Boice's research on faculty productivity yielded interesting findings when he compared faculty who wrote without logging their time with faculty who wrote *and* logged their time. "By writing daily and keeping records the second group was able to outperform the first group by a factor of *four*," writes Tara Gray (2005, pp. 19–20), summarizing Boice's research. Even more interesting are Boice's findings regarding faculty who, besides logging their writing times regularly, also shared their logs with the researchers conducting the study. When compared, faculty who shared their writing logs were *nine times* more productive than the faculty who had only logged their times, without sharing the log with someone else (Boice, 1989; Gray, 2005)!

Where or in what format you record your writing time in each writing session makes little

difference. Some of my students—as technologically savvy as they are—still prefer to log their times in small, spiral-bound notebooks, which they always carry with them. Others (including me) like to use an electronic spreadsheet for tracking their time. I use MS Excel, as it allows me to run simple calculations if I want to. How many minutes did I write this week? How many hours did I write this month? How many minutes' writing did I average per day, in the past month? You can answer simple questions such as these if you track by using Excel or a similar spreadsheet. But you can also use word-processing software and log your writing time using a table. Bottom line: Customize the log for your way of thinking, preferences, and needs.

However, a few items you *do* want to keep track of are things such as the date, the time you began writing, and the time you stopped (I also like to have a column with the total minutes I spent writing in that session). Some people like to count how many pages were written in each

session; others like to record the number of words written (I don't particularly care for counting words because, during editing stages, I'm cutting down the text and it feels as though I'm writing less and less when, in fact, I'm polishing more and more!). It also is important to note which writing project you worked on during the session you're recording: Write down something simple, such as "dissertation proposal" or "abstract for such-and-such conference." I like to have a column describing the project I intend to work on, as well as a column describing in brief detail what I actually accomplished during that particular writing session—for example, "Writing project: manuscript with Carol; Accomplished: edited the methods section." At times, I also like to have a column to note where I should begin in the next writing session—for example, "Next time: finish editing methods section." Finally, one of my students suggested the following idea, and I have used it ever since: Have a column where you can briefly note how you felt during that writing session. This helps you observe yourself

as a writer and how you have felt while dealing with a specific writing project. [Figure 2.1](#) gives you an example extracted from my writing log. I also placed a skeleton log on the book's website (study.sagepub.com/goodson2e).

Figure 2.1 Writing Log Example

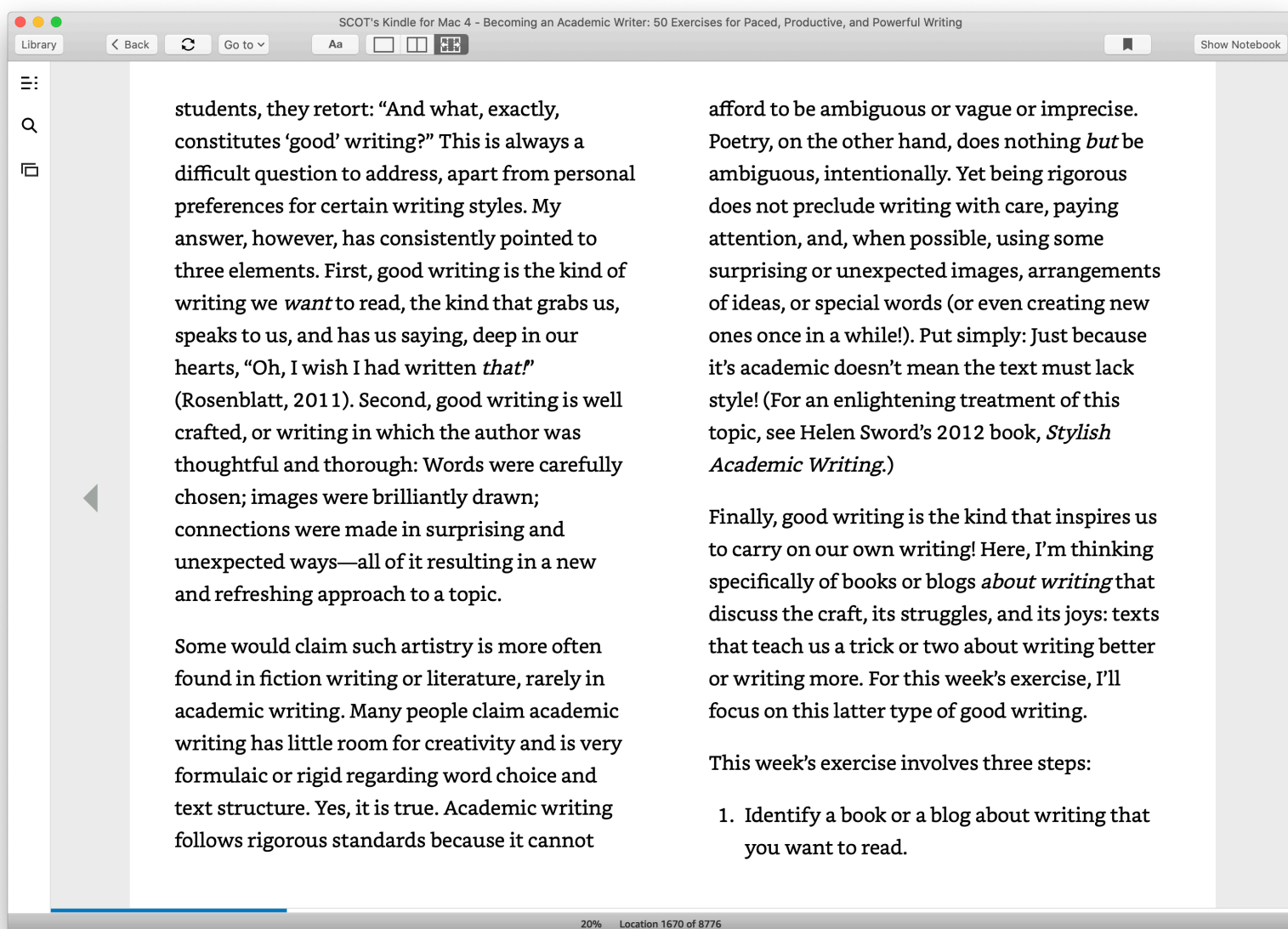
August	10	Monday	2015	Hailu	7:30 AM	7:35 AM	5	One more
August	10	Monday	2015	Nomination Letter for A.B.	7:35 AM	8:20 AM	45	
August	10	Monday	2015	Feedback on Student's B.R. for class	8:25 AM	9:30 AM		Just organizing the mfs. No writing.
August	10	Monday	2015	Feedback on Student's B.R. for class	11:15 AM	12:05 PM	50	(Reviewed 3 pieces).
August	10	Monday	2015	Feedback on Student's B.R. for class	6:30 PM	7:10 PM	40	
August	11	Tuesday	2015	Writer's Companion	7:15 AM	7:30 AM	15	
August	11	Tuesday	2015	Hailu	7:30 AM	7:35 AM	5	One more
August	11	Tuesday	2015	Feedback on Student's B.R. for class	7:35 AM	8:35 AM	60	Reviewed 3 pieces - 20 mins each
August	11	Tuesday	2015	Feedback on Student's B.R. for class	11:50 AM	12:15 PM	25	
August	12	Wednesday	2015	Writer's Companion	6:55 AM	7:05 AM	10	
August	12	Wednesday	2015	Hailu	7:05 AM	7:10 AM	5	4596 - will stop at # 500
August	12	Wednesday	2015	Nomination Letter for A.B.	7:10 AM	7:35 AM	25	Done!
August	12	Wednesday	2015	Feedback on Student's B.R. for class	7:40 AM	8:45 AM	65	DOH!!!
August	13	Thursday	2015	Writer's Companion	7:25 AM	7:35 AM	10	Writing in response to prompt
August	13	Thursday	2015	Hailu	7:35 AM	7:40 AM	5	
August	13	Thursday	2015	Ped HIV Study -	7:40 AM	9:35 AM	115	Beginning to edit/polish the memo.
August	14	Friday	2015	Writer's Companion	6:50 AM	6:55 AM	5	
August	14	Friday	2015	Hailu	6:55 AM	7:05 AM	5	
August	14	Friday	2015	Ped HIV Study -	7:05 AM	8:00 AM	60	Editing complex piece
August	15	Saturday	2015	Writer's Companion	7:50 PM	8:05 PM	15	
August	15	Saturday	2015	Conference submission with H.L.	8:05 PM	8:30 PM	25	
TOTAL HOURS THIS WEEK: 10 hrs								

Exercise 6—Read about Writing

TIME NEEDED: 10 minutes x session

MATERIALS NEEDED: Timer; a book about writing

Reading and writing go hand in hand. Reading other authors' good writing is an important ingredient in the recipe for writing well. Yet, invariably, when I raise this issue with my



students, they retort: "And what, exactly, constitutes 'good' writing?" This is always a difficult question to address, apart from personal preferences for certain writing styles. My answer, however, has consistently pointed to three elements. First, good writing is the kind of writing we *want* to read, the kind that grabs us, speaks to us, and has us saying, deep in our hearts, "Oh, I wish I had written *that!*" (Rosenblatt, 2011). Second, good writing is well crafted, or writing in which the author was thoughtful and thorough: Words were carefully chosen; images were brilliantly drawn; connections were made in surprising and unexpected ways—all of it resulting in a new and refreshing approach to a topic.

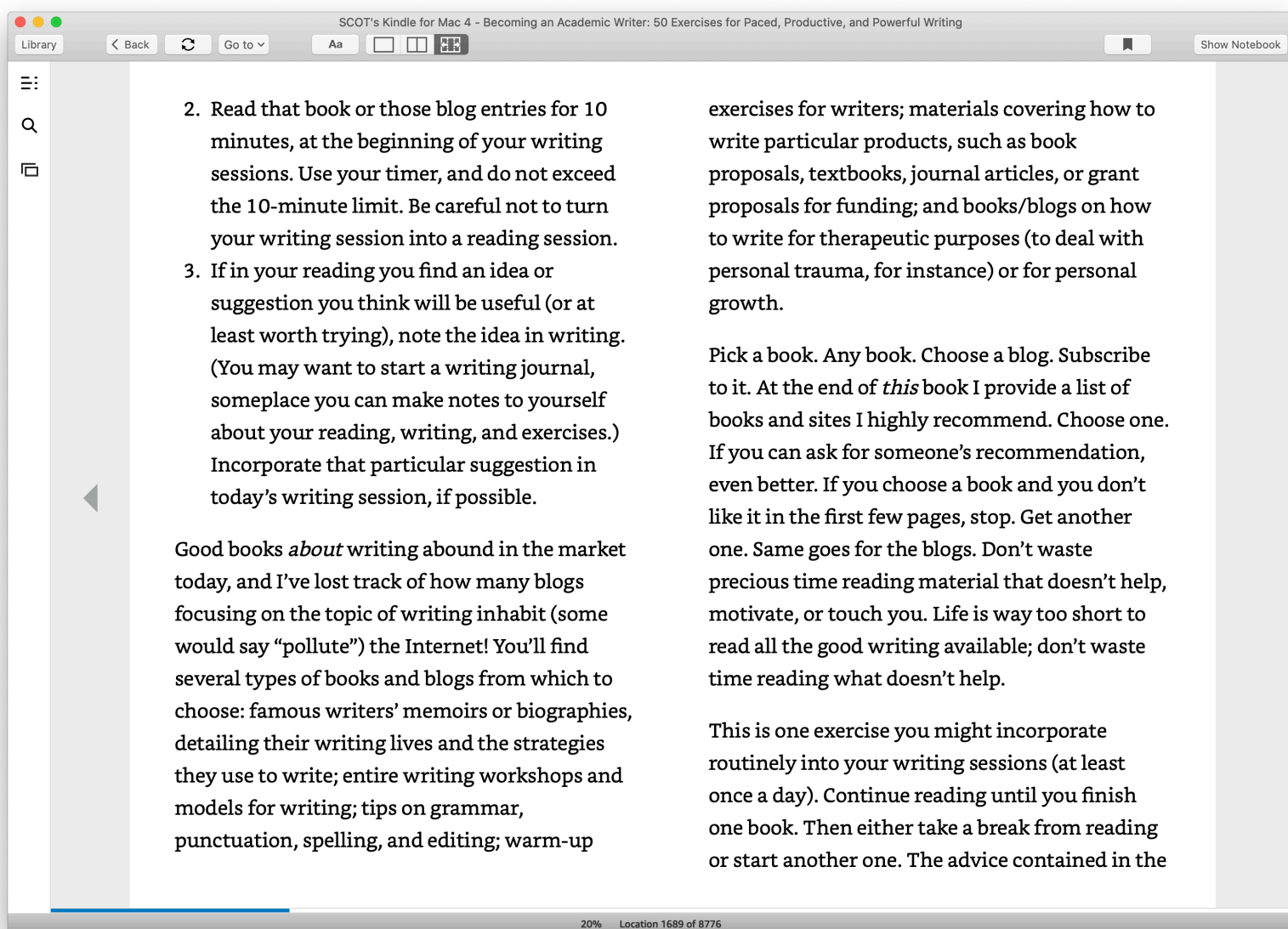
Some would claim such artistry is more often found in fiction writing or literature, rarely in academic writing. Many people claim academic writing has little room for creativity and is very formulaic or rigid regarding word choice and text structure. Yes, it is true. Academic writing follows rigorous standards because it cannot

afford to be ambiguous or vague or imprecise. Poetry, on the other hand, does nothing *but* be ambiguous, intentionally. Yet being rigorous does not preclude writing with care, paying attention, and, when possible, using some surprising or unexpected images, arrangements of ideas, or special words (or even creating new ones once in a while!). Put simply: Just because it's academic doesn't mean the text must lack style! (For an enlightening treatment of this topic, see Helen Sword's 2012 book, *Stylish Academic Writing*.)

Finally, good writing is the kind that inspires us to carry on our own writing! Here, I'm thinking specifically of books or blogs *about writing* that discuss the craft, its struggles, and its joys: texts that teach us a trick or two about writing better or writing more. For this week's exercise, I'll focus on this latter type of good writing.

This week's exercise involves three steps:

1. Identify a book or a blog about writing that you want to read.



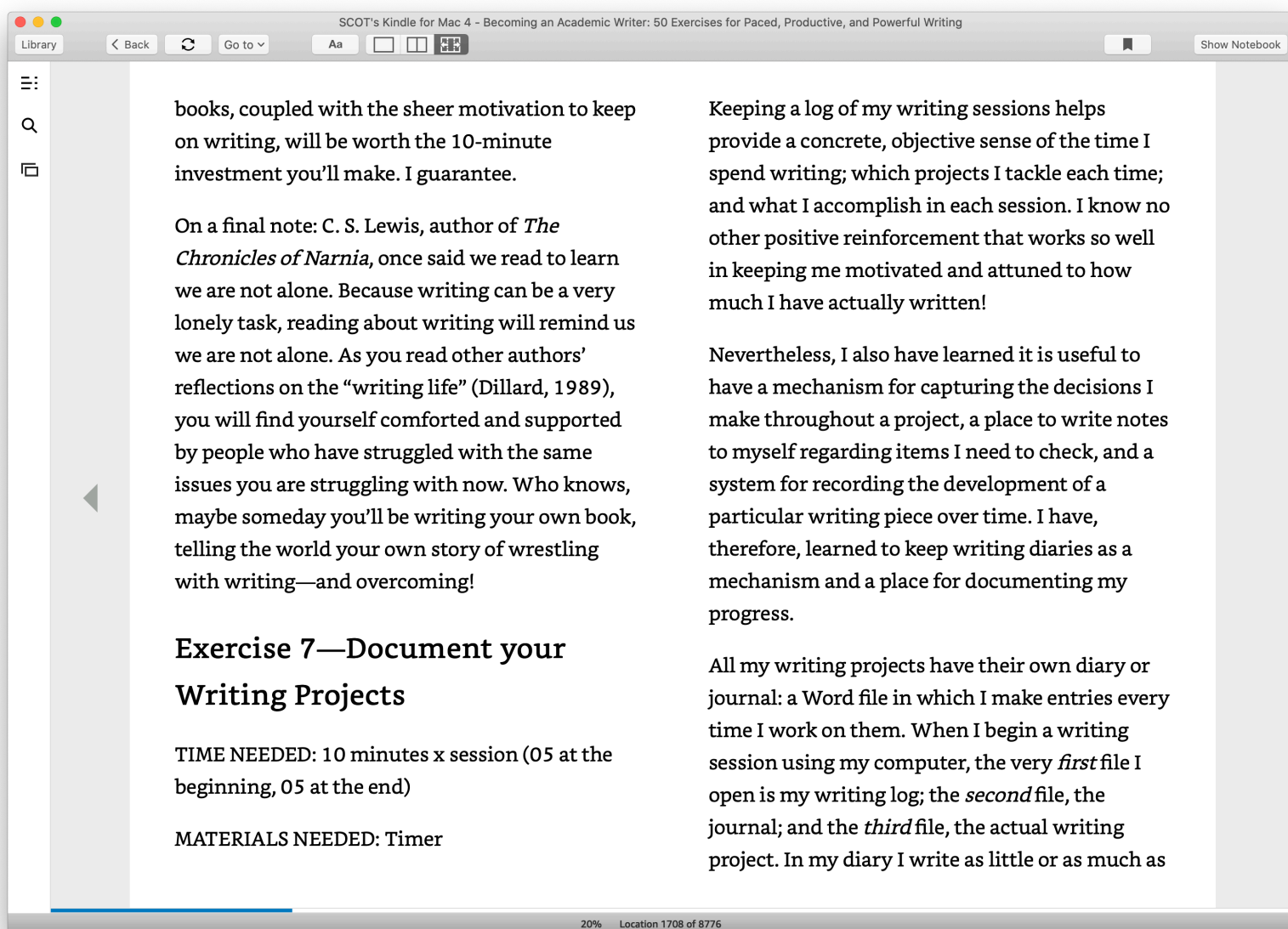
2. Read that book or those blog entries for 10 minutes, at the beginning of your writing sessions. Use your timer, and do not exceed the 10-minute limit. Be careful not to turn your writing session into a reading session.
3. If in your reading you find an idea or suggestion you think will be useful (or at least worth trying), note the idea in writing. (You may want to start a writing journal, someplace you can make notes to yourself about your reading, writing, and exercises.) Incorporate that particular suggestion in today's writing session, if possible.

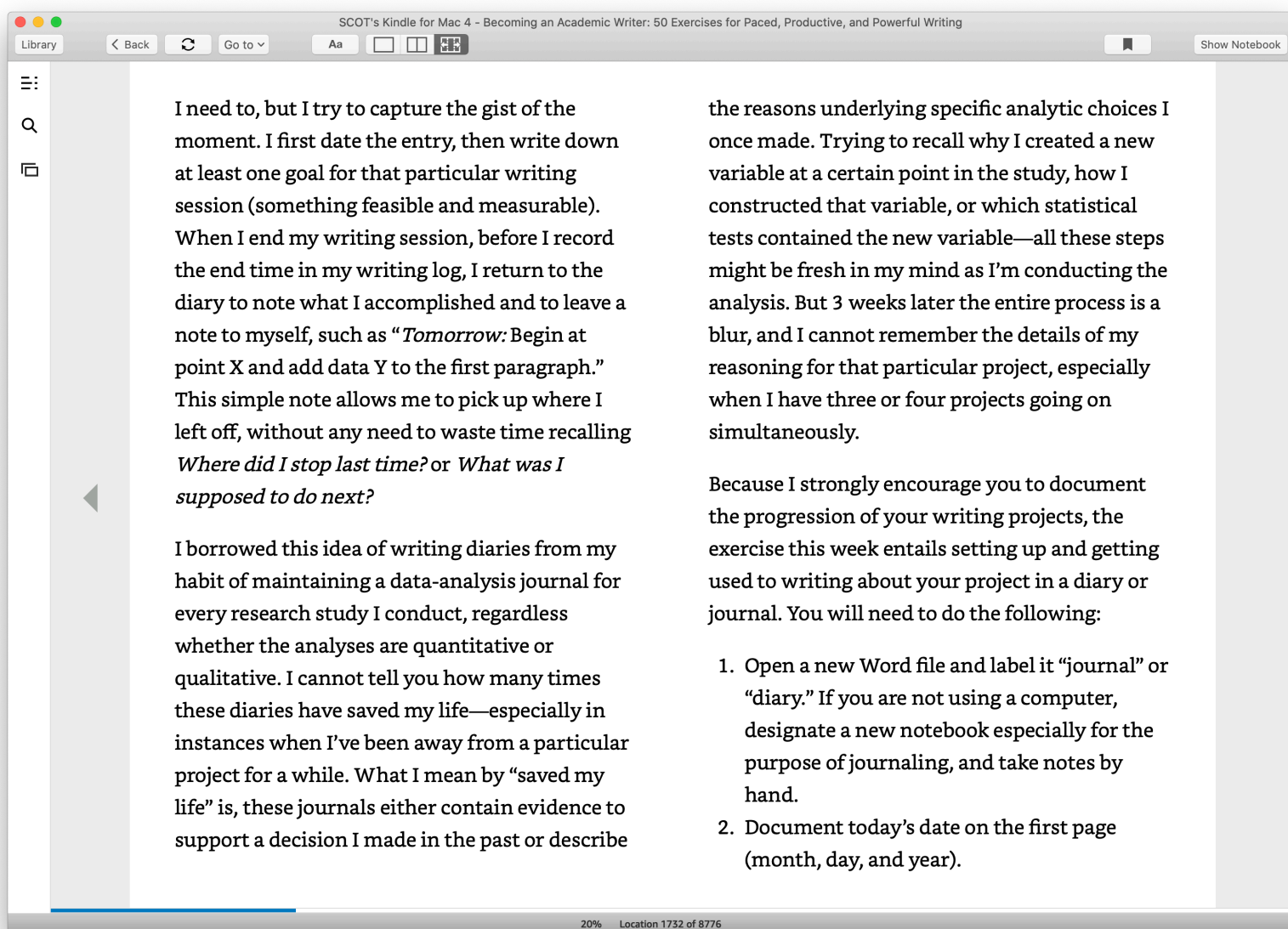
Good books *about* writing abound in the market today, and I've lost track of how many blogs focusing on the topic of writing inhabit (some would say "pollute") the Internet! You'll find several types of books and blogs from which to choose: famous writers' memoirs or biographies, detailing their writing lives and the strategies they use to write; entire writing workshops and models for writing; tips on grammar, punctuation, spelling, and editing; warm-up

exercises for writers; materials covering how to write particular products, such as book proposals, textbooks, journal articles, or grant proposals for funding; and books/blogs on how to write for therapeutic purposes (to deal with personal trauma, for instance) or for personal growth.

Pick a book. Any book. Choose a blog. Subscribe to it. At the end of *this* book I provide a list of books and sites I highly recommend. Choose one. If you can ask for someone's recommendation, even better. If you choose a book and you don't like it in the first few pages, stop. Get another one. Same goes for the blogs. Don't waste precious time reading material that doesn't help, motivate, or touch you. Life is way too short to read all the good writing available; don't waste time reading what doesn't help.

This is one exercise you might incorporate routinely into your writing sessions (at least once a day). Continue reading until you finish one book. Then either take a break from reading or start another one. The advice contained in the





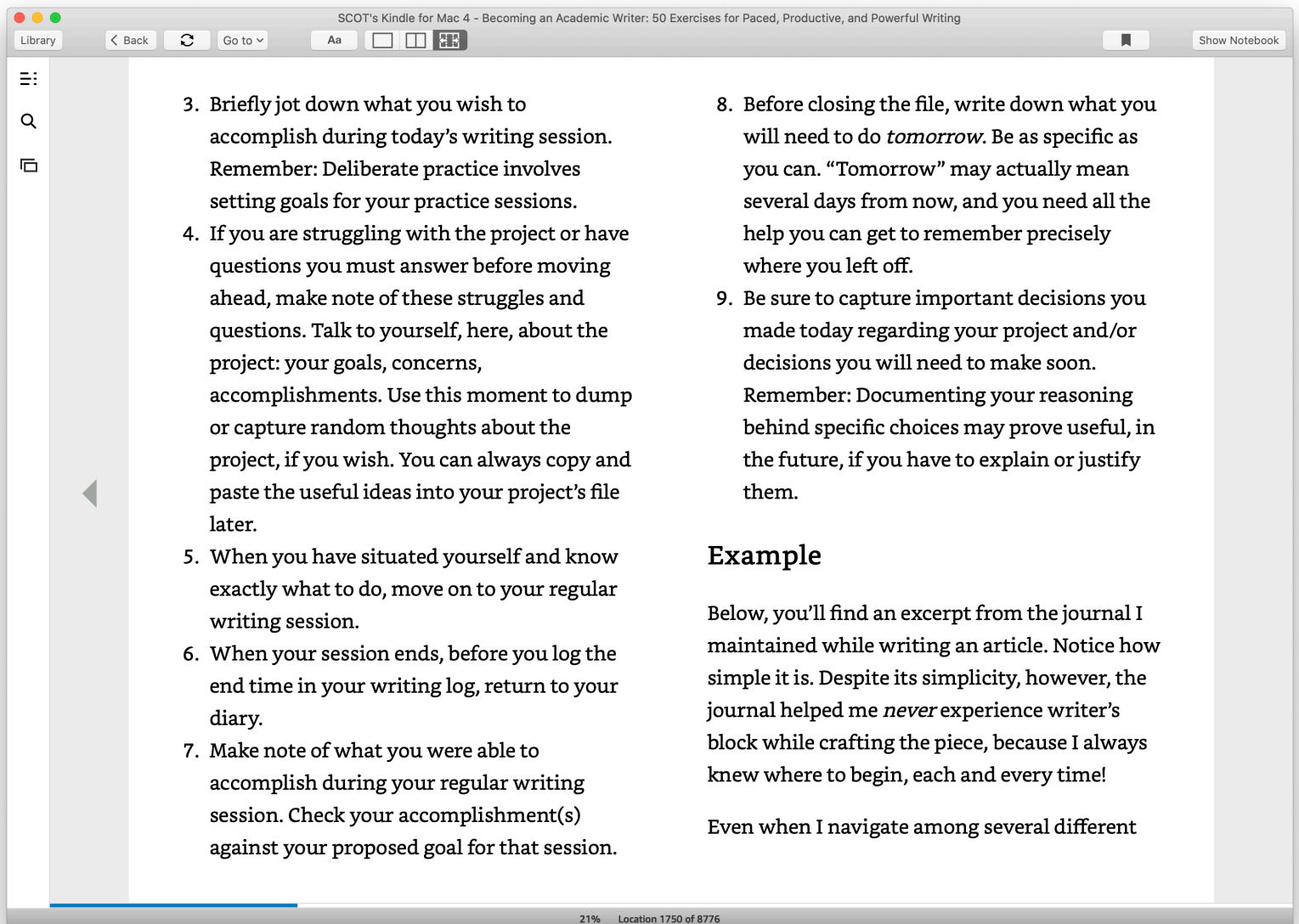
I need to, but I try to capture the gist of the moment. I first date the entry, then write down at least one goal for that particular writing session (something feasible and measurable). When I end my writing session, before I record the end time in my writing log, I return to the diary to note what I accomplished and to leave a note to myself, such as "*Tomorrow: Begin at point X and add data Y to the first paragraph.*" This simple note allows me to pick up where I left off, without any need to waste time recalling *Where did I stop last time?* or *What was I supposed to do next?*

I borrowed this idea of writing diaries from my habit of maintaining a data-analysis journal for every research study I conduct, regardless whether the analyses are quantitative or qualitative. I cannot tell you how many times these diaries have saved my life—especially in instances when I've been away from a particular project for a while. What I mean by "saved my life" is, these journals either contain evidence to support a decision I made in the past or describe

the reasons underlying specific analytic choices I once made. Trying to recall why I created a new variable at a certain point in the study, how I constructed that variable, or which statistical tests contained the new variable—all these steps might be fresh in my mind as I'm conducting the analysis. But 3 weeks later the entire process is a blur, and I cannot remember the details of my reasoning for that particular project, especially when I have three or four projects going on simultaneously.

Because I strongly encourage you to document the progression of your writing projects, the exercise this week entails setting up and getting used to writing about your project in a diary or journal. You will need to do the following:

1. Open a new Word file and label it "journal" or "diary." If you are not using a computer, designate a new notebook especially for the purpose of journaling, and take notes by hand.
2. Document today's date on the first page (month, day, and year).



3. Briefly jot down what you wish to accomplish during today's writing session.

Remember: Deliberate practice involves setting goals for your practice sessions.

4. If you are struggling with the project or have questions you must answer before moving ahead, make note of these struggles and questions. Talk to yourself, here, about the project: your goals, concerns, accomplishments. Use this moment to dump or capture random thoughts about the project, if you wish. You can always copy and paste the useful ideas into your project's file later.

5. When you have situated yourself and know exactly what to do, move on to your regular writing session.

6. When your session ends, before you log the end time in your writing log, return to your diary.

7. Make note of what you were able to accomplish during your regular writing session. Check your accomplishment(s) against your proposed goal for that session.

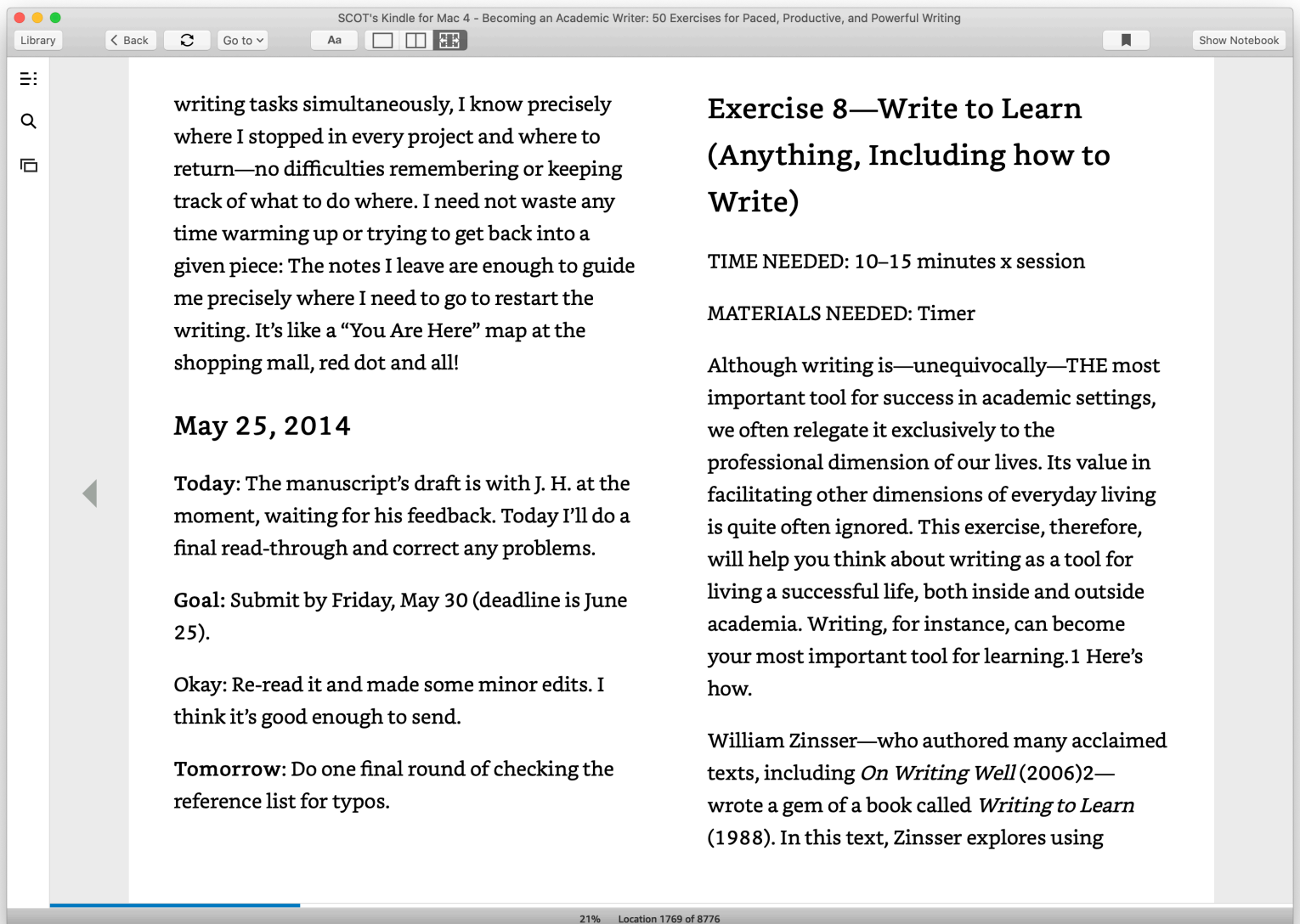
8. Before closing the file, write down what you will need to do *tomorrow*. Be as specific as you can. "Tomorrow" may actually mean several days from now, and you need all the help you can get to remember precisely where you left off.

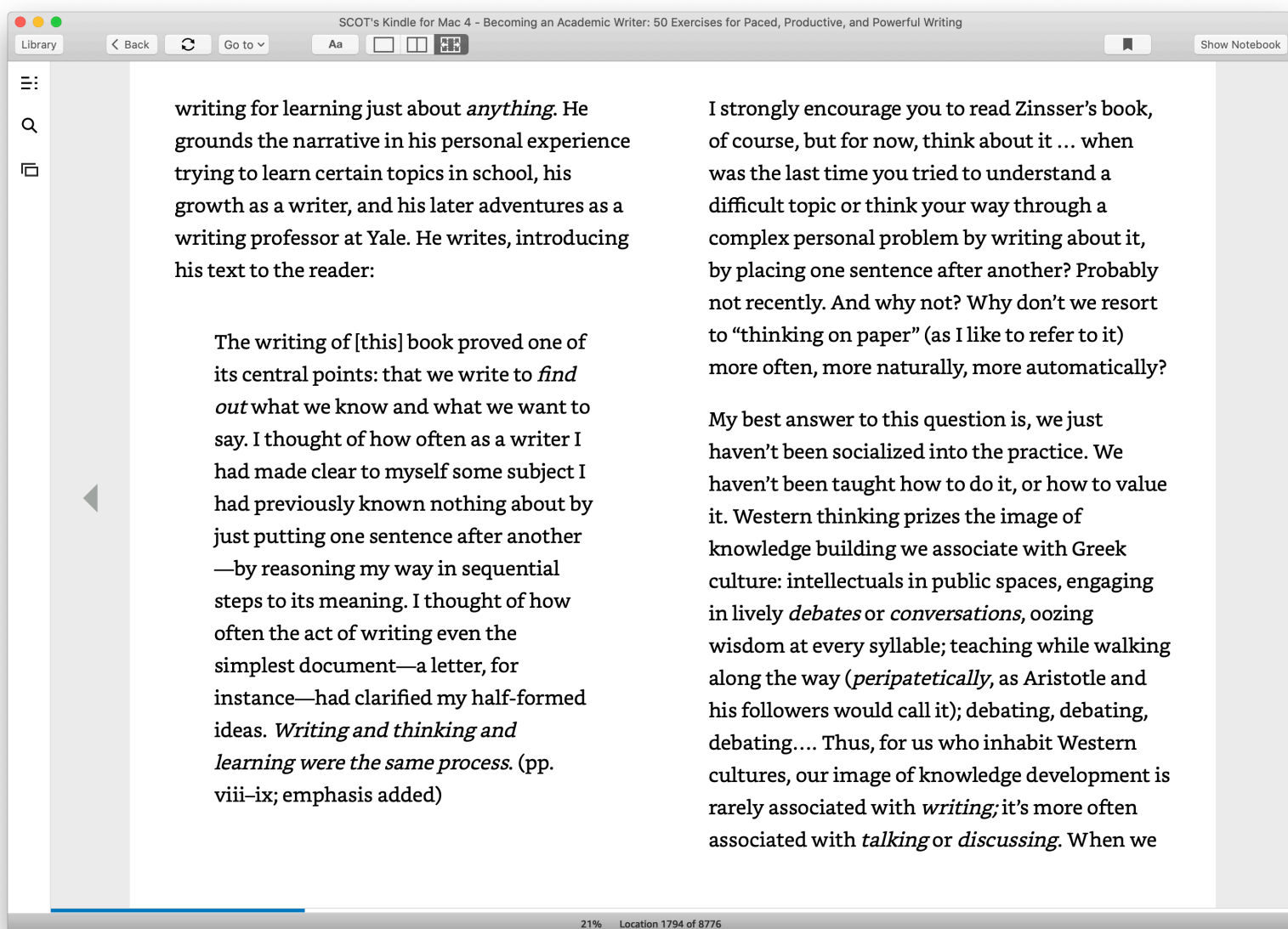
9. Be sure to capture important decisions you made today regarding your project and/or decisions you will need to make soon. Remember: Documenting your reasoning behind specific choices may prove useful, in the future, if you have to explain or justify them.

Example

Below, you'll find an excerpt from the journal I maintained while writing an article. Notice how simple it is. Despite its simplicity, however, the journal helped me *never* experience writer's block while crafting the piece, because I always knew where to begin, each and every time!

Even when I navigate among several different



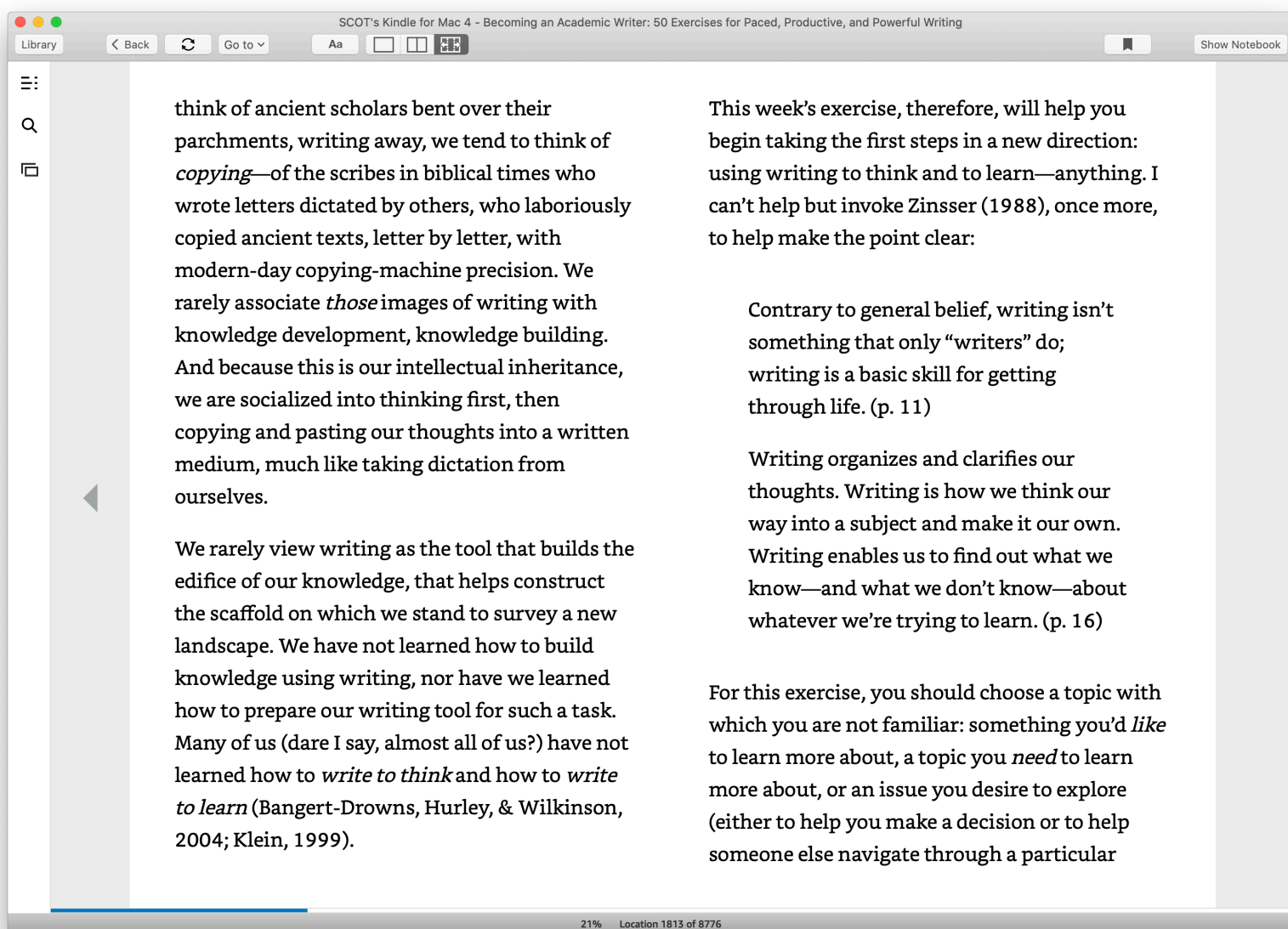


writing for learning just about *anything*. He grounds the narrative in his personal experience trying to learn certain topics in school, his growth as a writer, and his later adventures as a writing professor at Yale. He writes, introducing his text to the reader:

The writing of [this] book proved one of its central points: that we write to *find out* what we know and what we want to say. I thought of how often as a writer I had made clear to myself some subject I had previously known nothing about by just putting one sentence after another—by reasoning my way in sequential steps to its meaning. I thought of how often the act of writing even the simplest document—a letter, for instance—had clarified my half-formed ideas. *Writing and thinking and learning were the same process.* (pp. viii–ix; emphasis added)

I strongly encourage you to read Zinsser's book, of course, but for now, think about it ... when was the last time you tried to understand a difficult topic or think your way through a complex personal problem by writing about it, by placing one sentence after another? Probably not recently. And why not? Why don't we resort to "thinking on paper" (as I like to refer to it) more often, more naturally, more automatically?

My best answer to this question is, we just haven't been socialized into the practice. We haven't been taught how to do it, or how to value it. Western thinking prizes the image of knowledge building we associate with Greek culture: intellectuals in public spaces, engaging in lively *debates* or *conversations*, oozing wisdom at every syllable; teaching while walking along the way (*peripatetically*, as Aristotle and his followers would call it); debating, debating, debating.... Thus, for us who inhabit Western cultures, our image of knowledge development is rarely associated with *writing*; it's more often associated with *talking* or *discussing*. When we



think of ancient scholars bent over their parchments, writing away, we tend to think of *copying*—of the scribes in biblical times who wrote letters dictated by others, who laboriously copied ancient texts, letter by letter, with modern-day copying-machine precision. We rarely associate *those* images of writing with knowledge development, knowledge building. And because this is our intellectual inheritance, we are socialized into thinking first, then copying and pasting our thoughts into a written medium, much like taking dictation from ourselves.

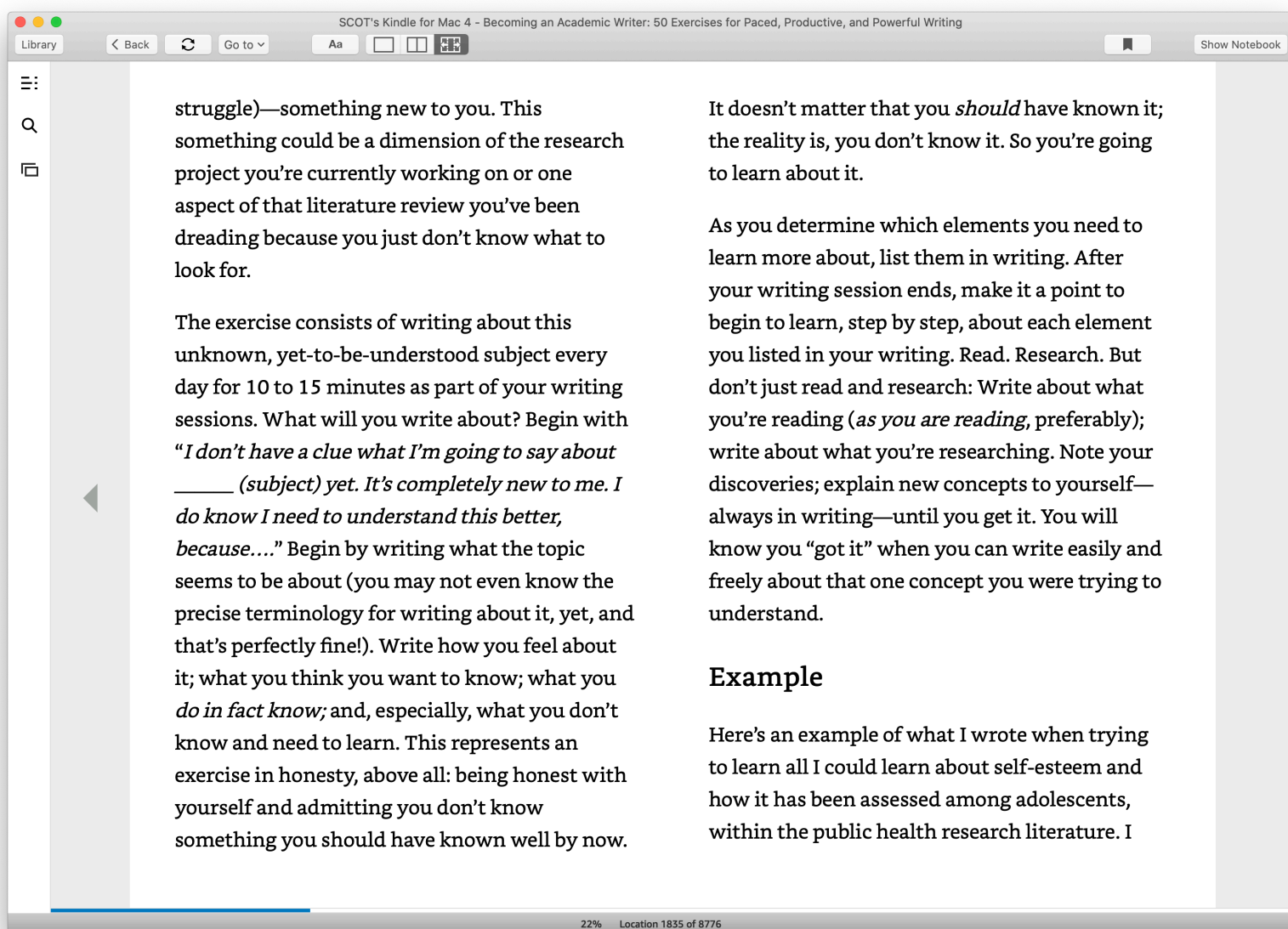
We rarely view writing as the tool that builds the edifice of our knowledge, that helps construct the scaffold on which we stand to survey a new landscape. We have not learned how to build knowledge using writing, nor have we learned how to prepare our writing tool for such a task. Many of us (dare I say, almost all of us?) have not learned how to *write to think* and how to *write to learn* (Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, & Wilkinson, 2004; Klein, 1999).

This week's exercise, therefore, will help you begin taking the first steps in a new direction: using writing to think and to learn—anything. I can't help but invoke Zinsser (1988), once more, to help make the point clear:

Contrary to general belief, writing isn't something that only "writers" do; writing is a basic skill for getting through life. (p. 11)

Writing organizes and clarifies our thoughts. Writing is how we think our way into a subject and make it our own. Writing enables us to find out what we know—and what we don't know—about whatever we're trying to learn. (p. 16)

For this exercise, you should choose a topic with which you are not familiar: something you'd *like* to learn more about, a topic you *need* to learn more about, or an issue you desire to explore (either to help you make a decision or to help someone else navigate through a particular



struggle)—something new to you. This something could be a dimension of the research project you're currently working on or one aspect of that literature review you've been dreading because you just don't know what to look for.

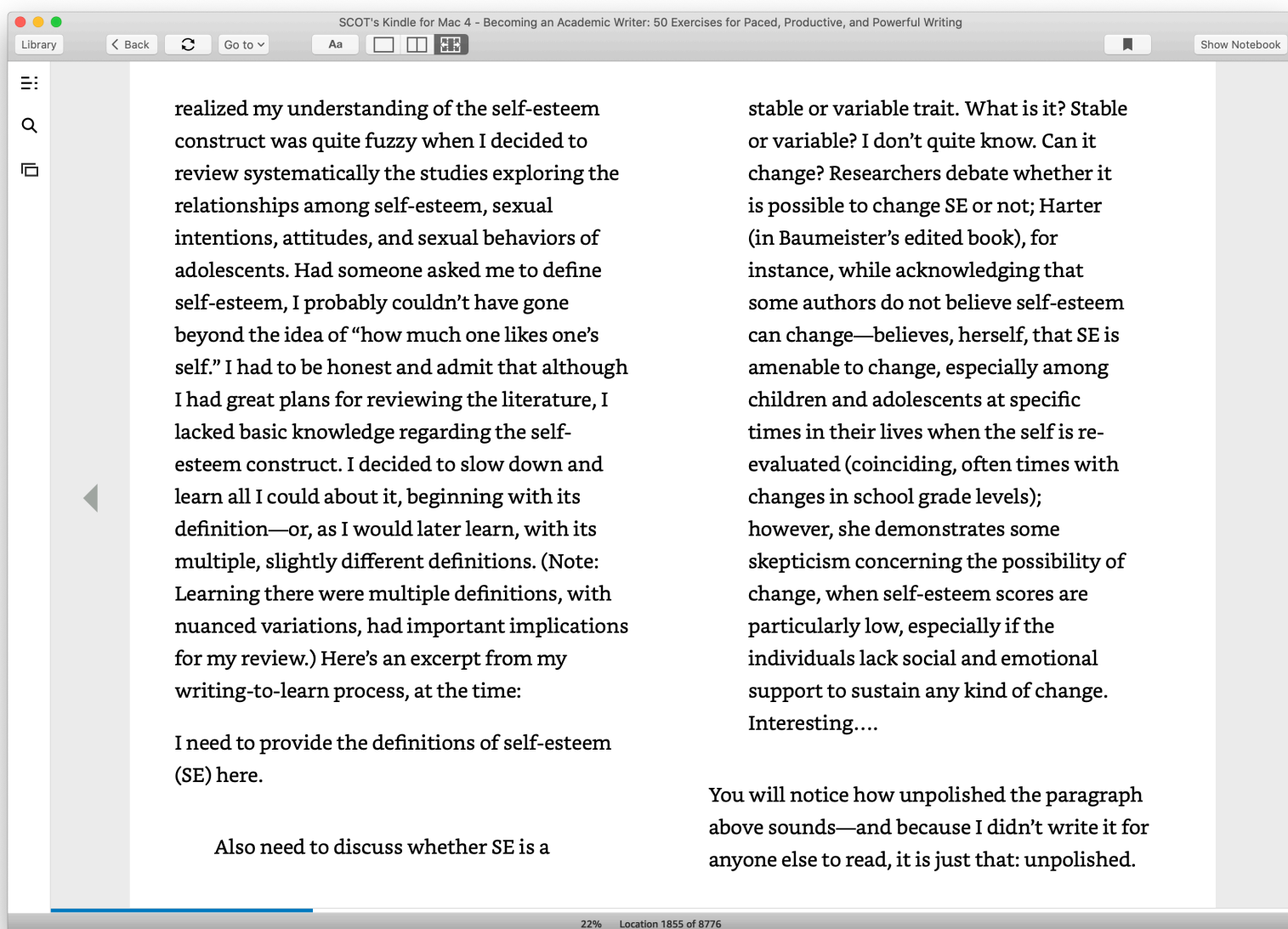
The exercise consists of writing about this unknown, yet-to-be-understood subject every day for 10 to 15 minutes as part of your writing sessions. What will you write about? Begin with *"I don't have a clue what I'm going to say about _____ (subject) yet. It's completely new to me. I do know I need to understand this better, because...."* Begin by writing what the topic seems to be about (you may not even know the precise terminology for writing about it, yet, and that's perfectly fine!). Write how you feel about it; what you think you want to know; what you *do in fact know*; and, especially, what you don't know and need to learn. This represents an exercise in honesty, above all: being honest with yourself and admitting you don't know something you should have known well by now.

It doesn't matter that you *should* have known it; the reality is, you don't know it. So you're going to learn about it.

As you determine which elements you need to learn more about, list them in writing. After your writing session ends, make it a point to begin to learn, step by step, about each element you listed in your writing. Read. Research. But don't just read and research: Write about what you're reading (*as you are reading*, preferably); write about what you're researching. Note your discoveries; explain new concepts to yourself—always in writing—until you get it. You will know you "got it" when you can write easily and freely about that one concept you were trying to understand.

Example

Here's an example of what I wrote when trying to learn all I could learn about self-esteem and how it has been assessed among adolescents, within the public health research literature. I



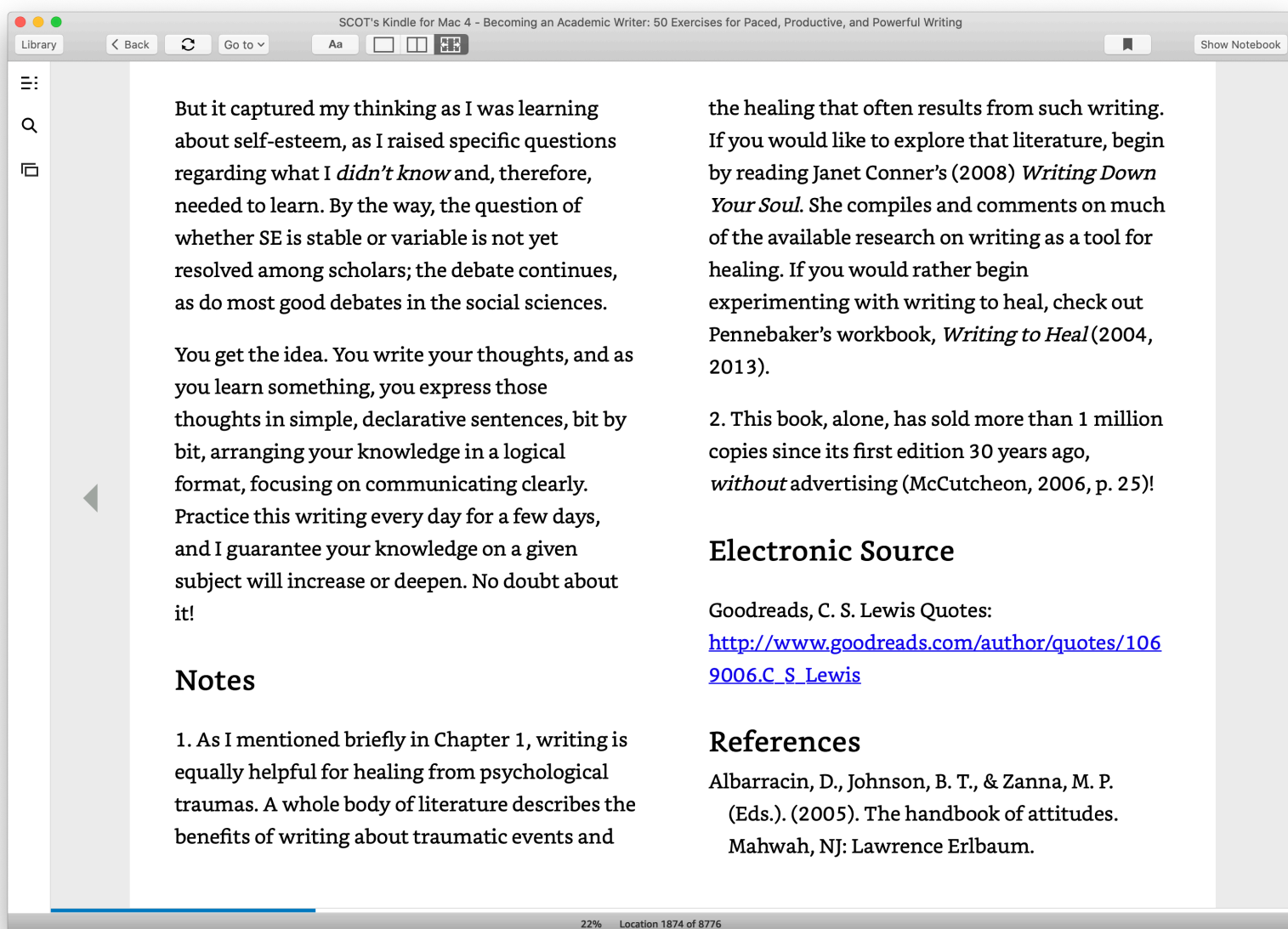
realized my understanding of the self-esteem construct was quite fuzzy when I decided to review systematically the studies exploring the relationships among self-esteem, sexual intentions, attitudes, and sexual behaviors of adolescents. Had someone asked me to define self-esteem, I probably couldn't have gone beyond the idea of "how much one likes one's self." I had to be honest and admit that although I had great plans for reviewing the literature, I lacked basic knowledge regarding the self-esteem construct. I decided to slow down and learn all I could about it, beginning with its definition—or, as I would later learn, with its multiple, slightly different definitions. (Note: Learning there were multiple definitions, with nuanced variations, had important implications for my review.) Here's an excerpt from my writing-to-learn process, at the time:

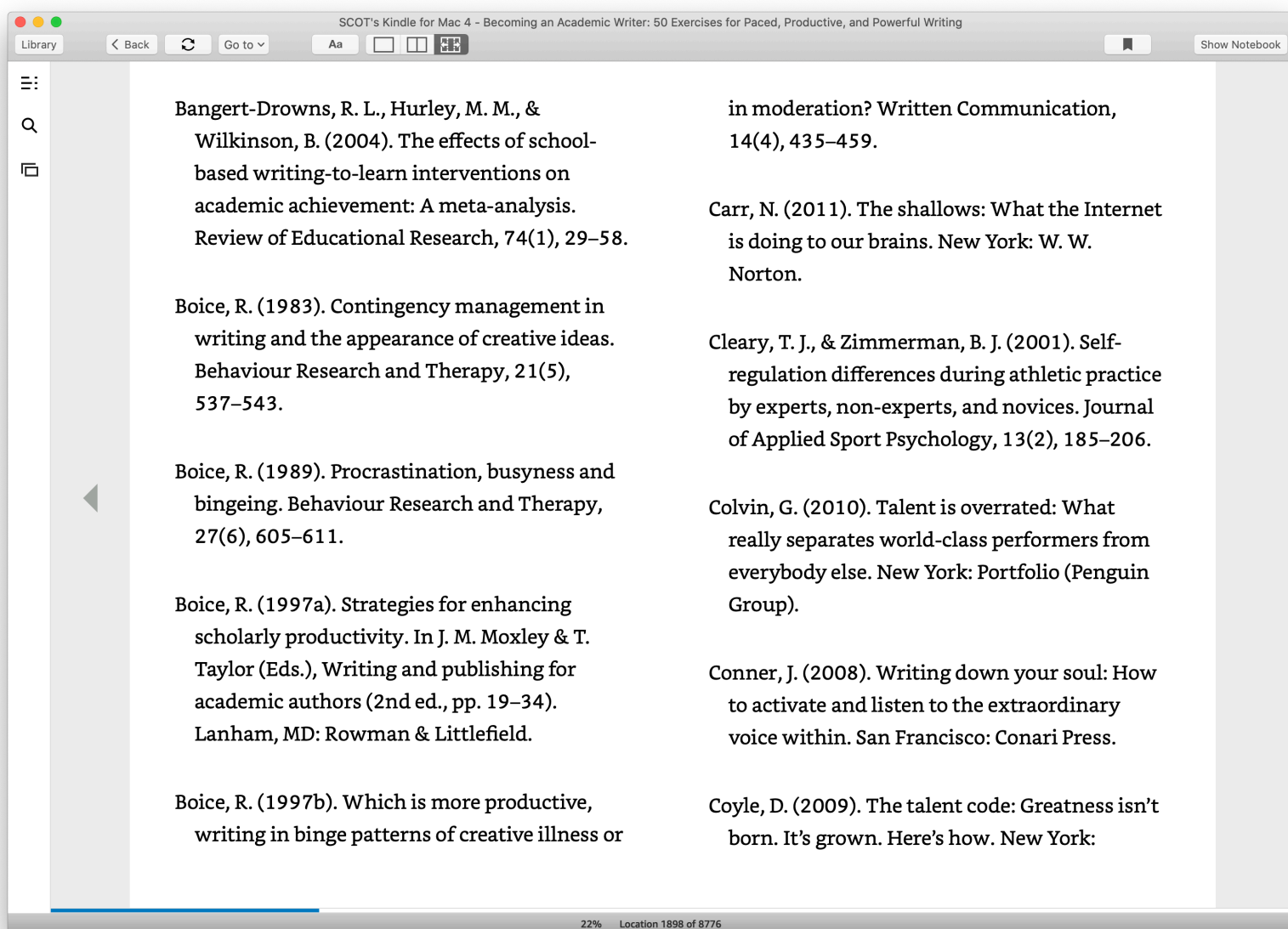
I need to provide the definitions of self-esteem (SE) here.

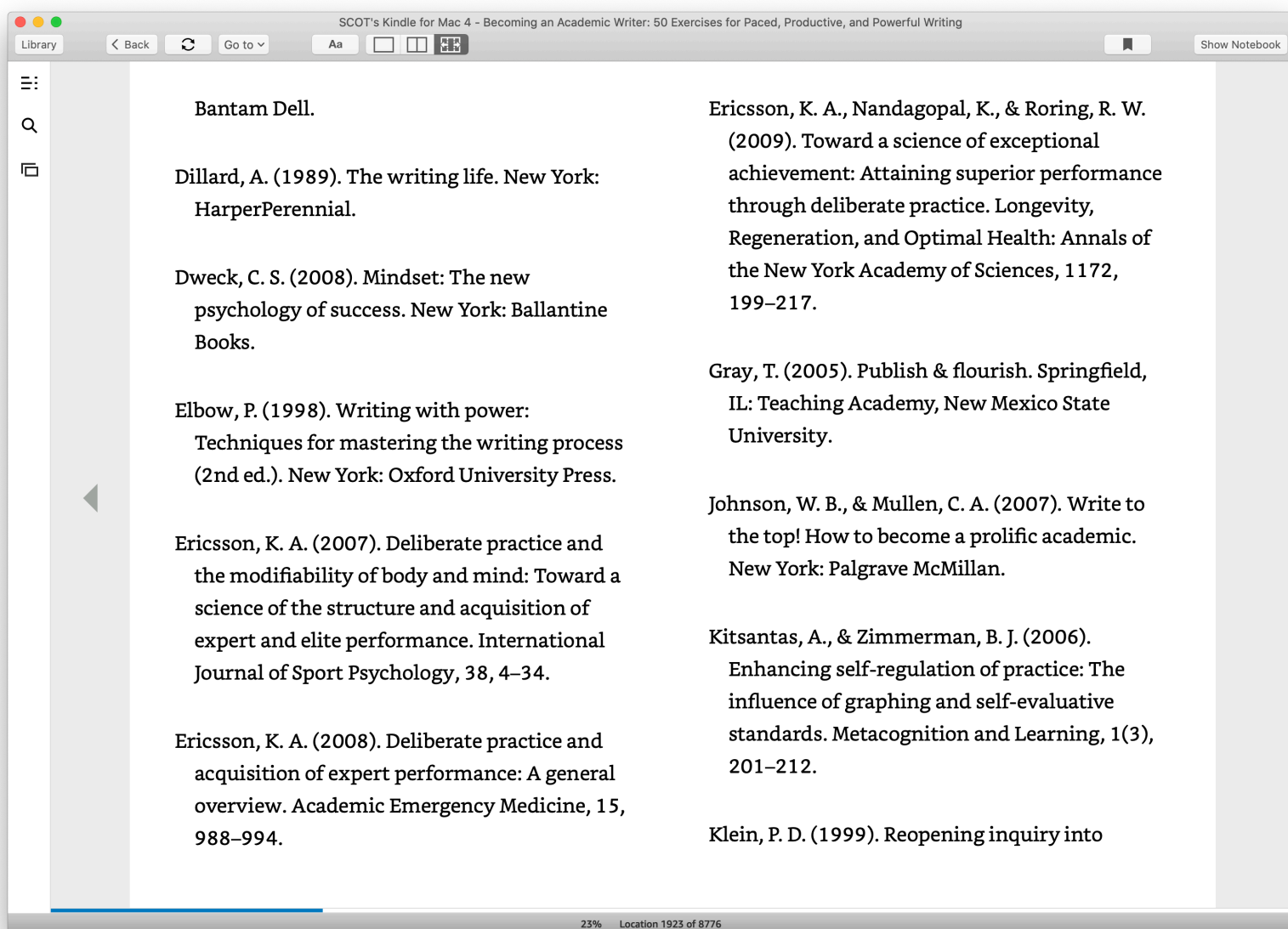
Also need to discuss whether SE is a

stable or variable trait. What is it? Stable or variable? I don't quite know. Can it change? Researchers debate whether it is possible to change SE or not; Harter (in Baumeister's edited book), for instance, while acknowledging that some authors do not believe self-esteem can change—believes, herself, that SE is amenable to change, especially among children and adolescents at specific times in their lives when the self is re-evaluated (coinciding, often times with changes in school grade levels); however, she demonstrates some skepticism concerning the possibility of change, when self-esteem scores are particularly low, especially if the individuals lack social and emotional support to sustain any kind of change. Interesting....

You will notice how unpolished the paragraph above sounds—and because I didn't write it for anyone else to read, it is just that: unpolished.







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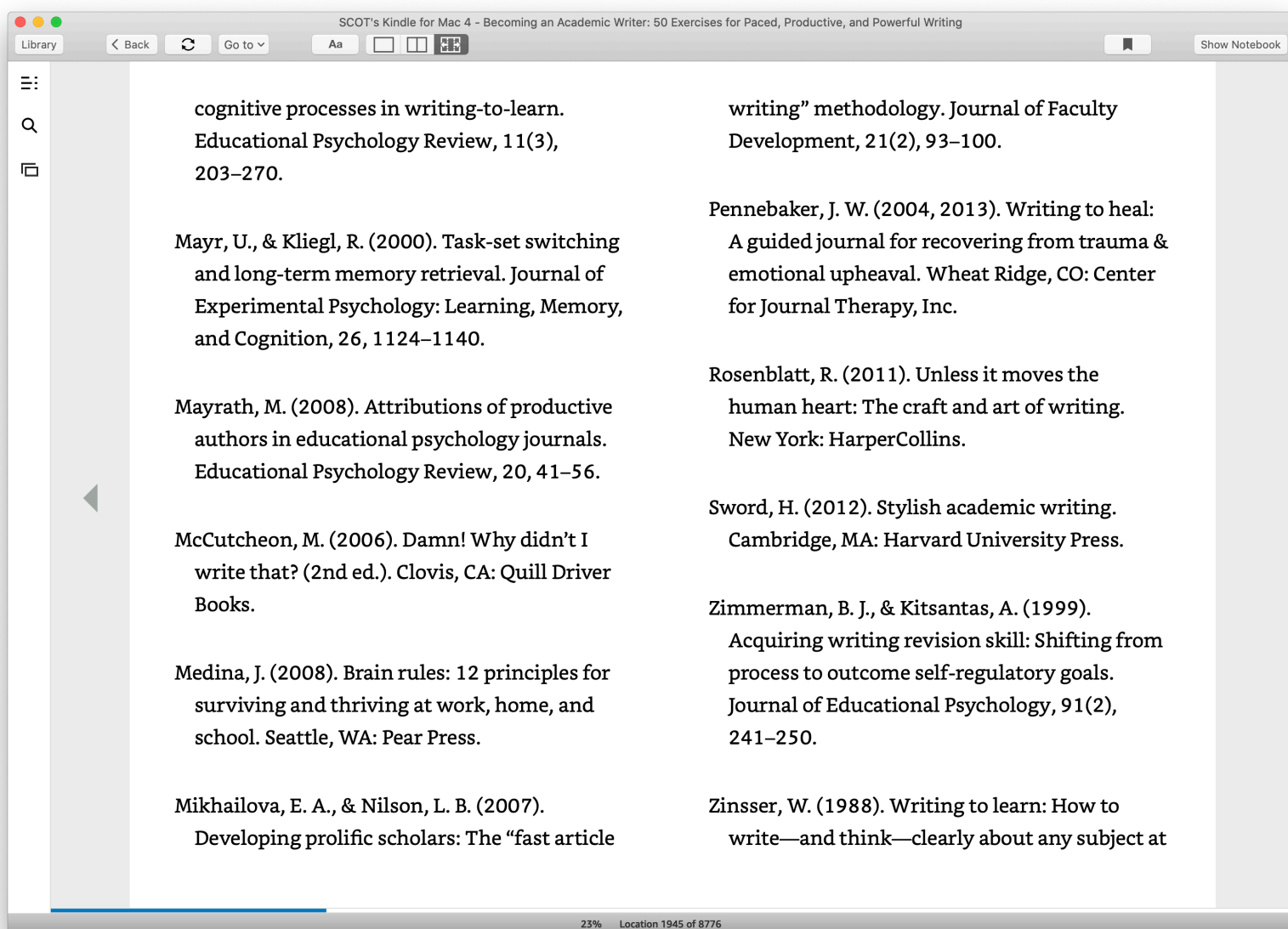
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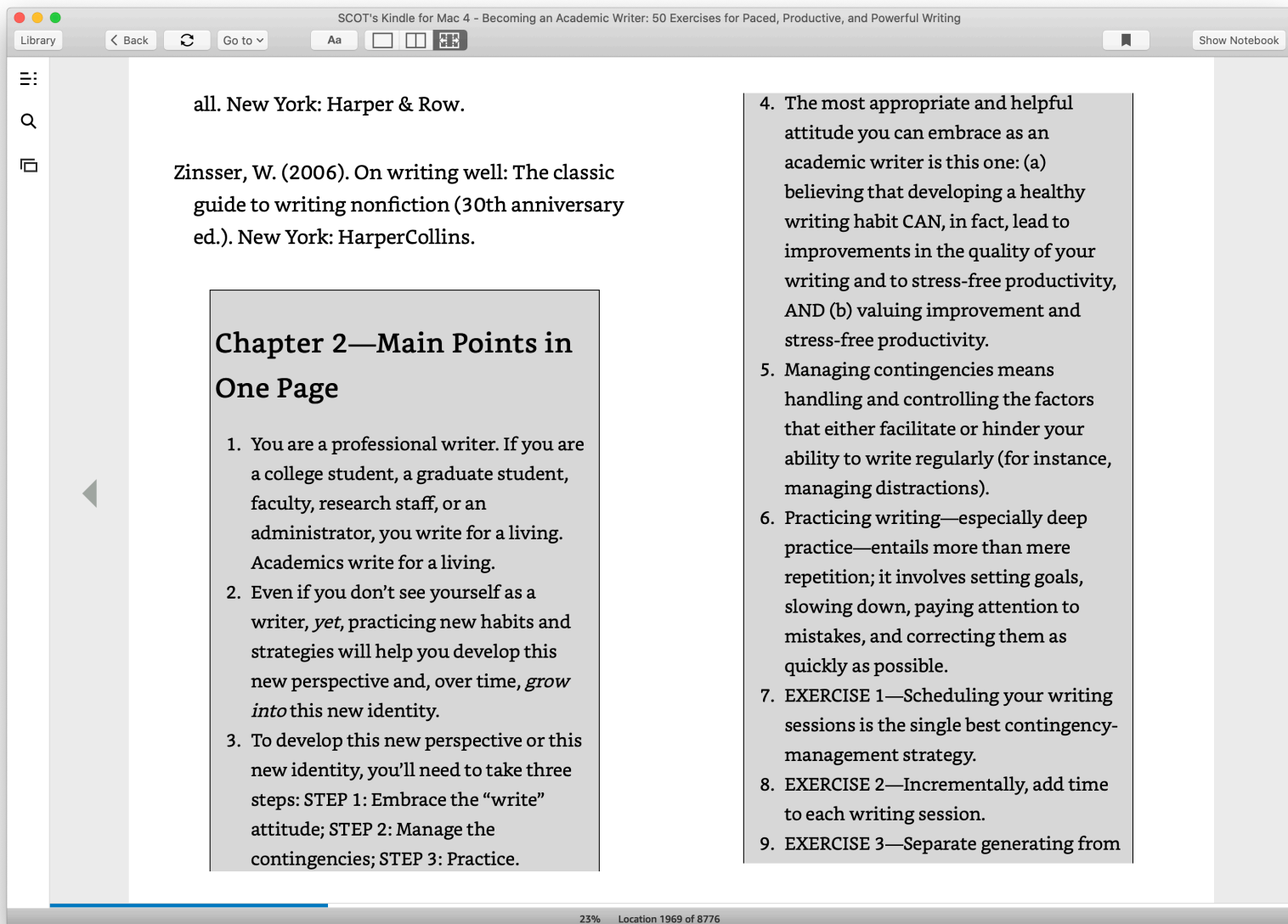
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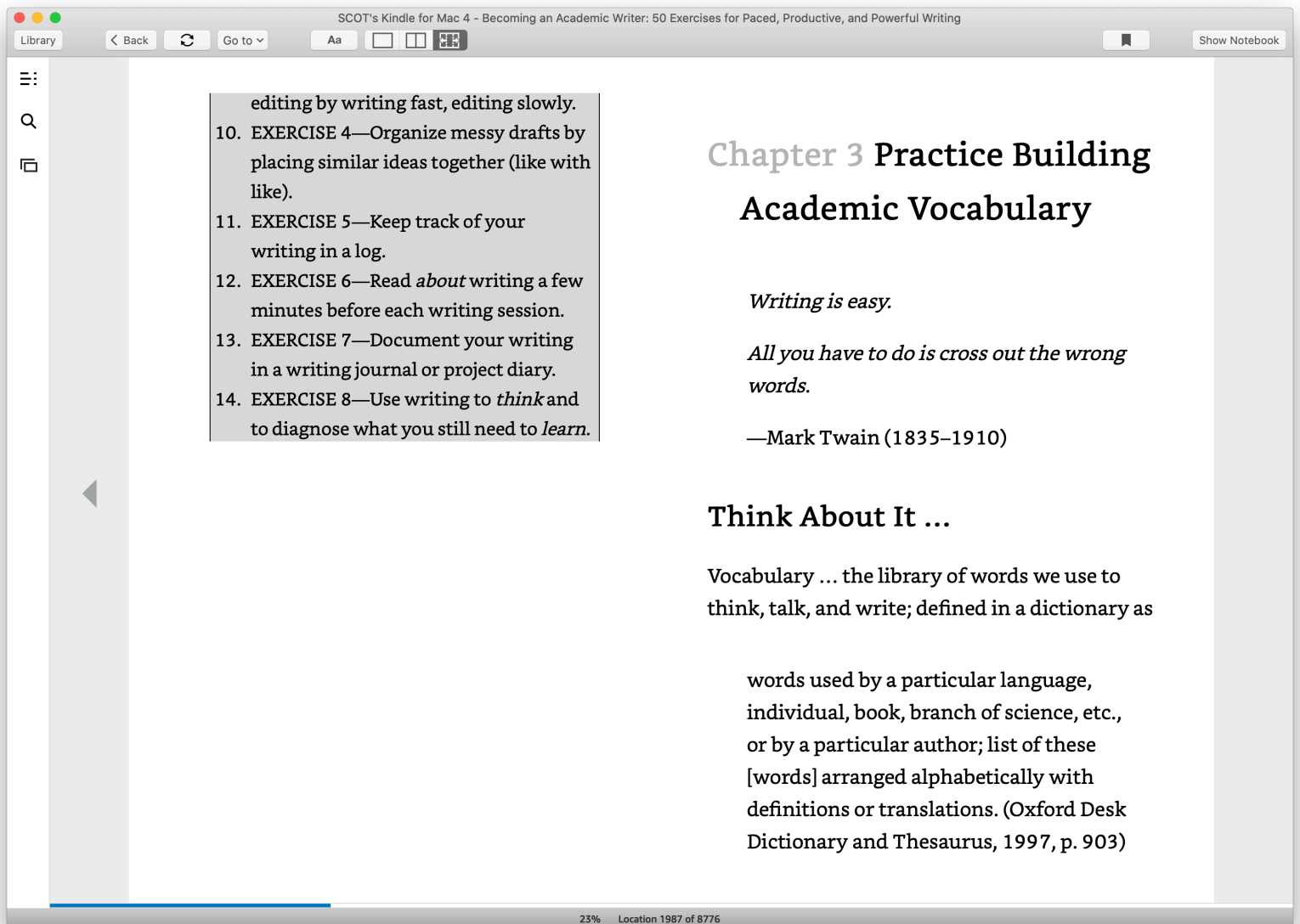
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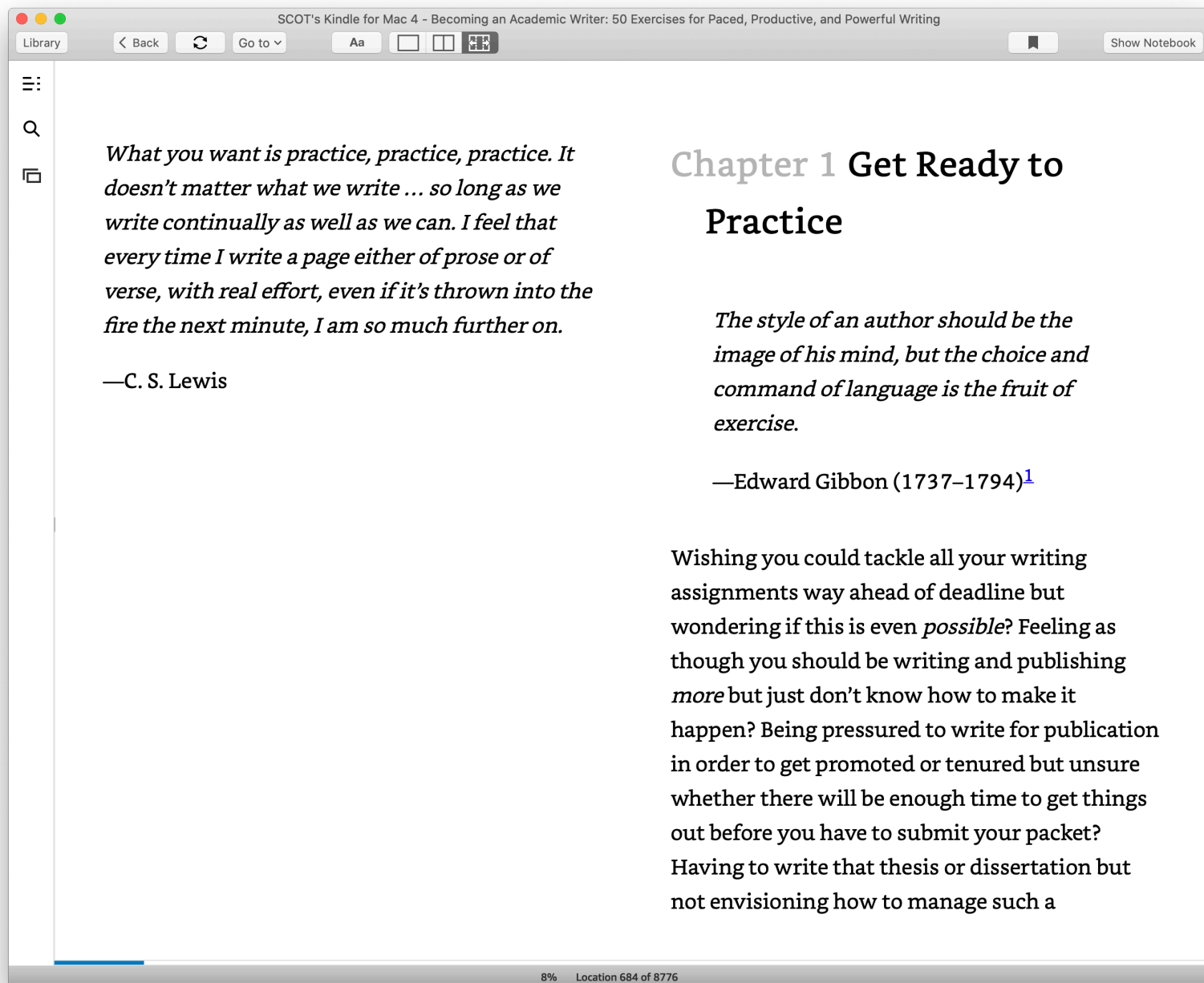
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Chapter 2—Main Points in One Page

1. You are a professional writer. If you are a college student, a graduate student, faculty, research staff, or an administrator, you write for a living. Academics write for a living.
2. Even if you don't see yourself as a writer, *yet*, practicing new habits and strategies will help you develop this new perspective and, over time, *grow into* this new identity.
3. To develop this new perspective or this new identity, you'll need to take three steps: STEP 1: Embrace the "write" attitude; STEP 2: Manage the contingencies; STEP 3: Practice.

4. The most appropriate and helpful attitude you can embrace as an academic writer is this one: (a) believing that developing a healthy writing habit CAN, in fact, lead to improvements in the quality of your writing and to stress-free productivity, AND (b) valuing improvement and stress-free productivity.
5. Managing contingencies means handling and controlling the factors that either facilitate or hinder your ability to write regularly (for instance, managing distractions).
6. Practicing writing—especially deep practice—entails more than mere repetition; it involves setting goals, slowing down, paying attention to mistakes, and correcting them as quickly as possible.
7. EXERCISE 1—Scheduling your writing sessions is the single best contingency-management strategy.
8. EXERCISE 2—Incrementally, add time to each writing session.
9. EXERCISE 3—Separate generating from





What you want is practice, practice, practice. It doesn't matter what we write ... so long as we write continually as well as we can. I feel that every time I write a page either of prose or of verse, with real effort, even if it's thrown into the fire the next minute, I am so much further on.

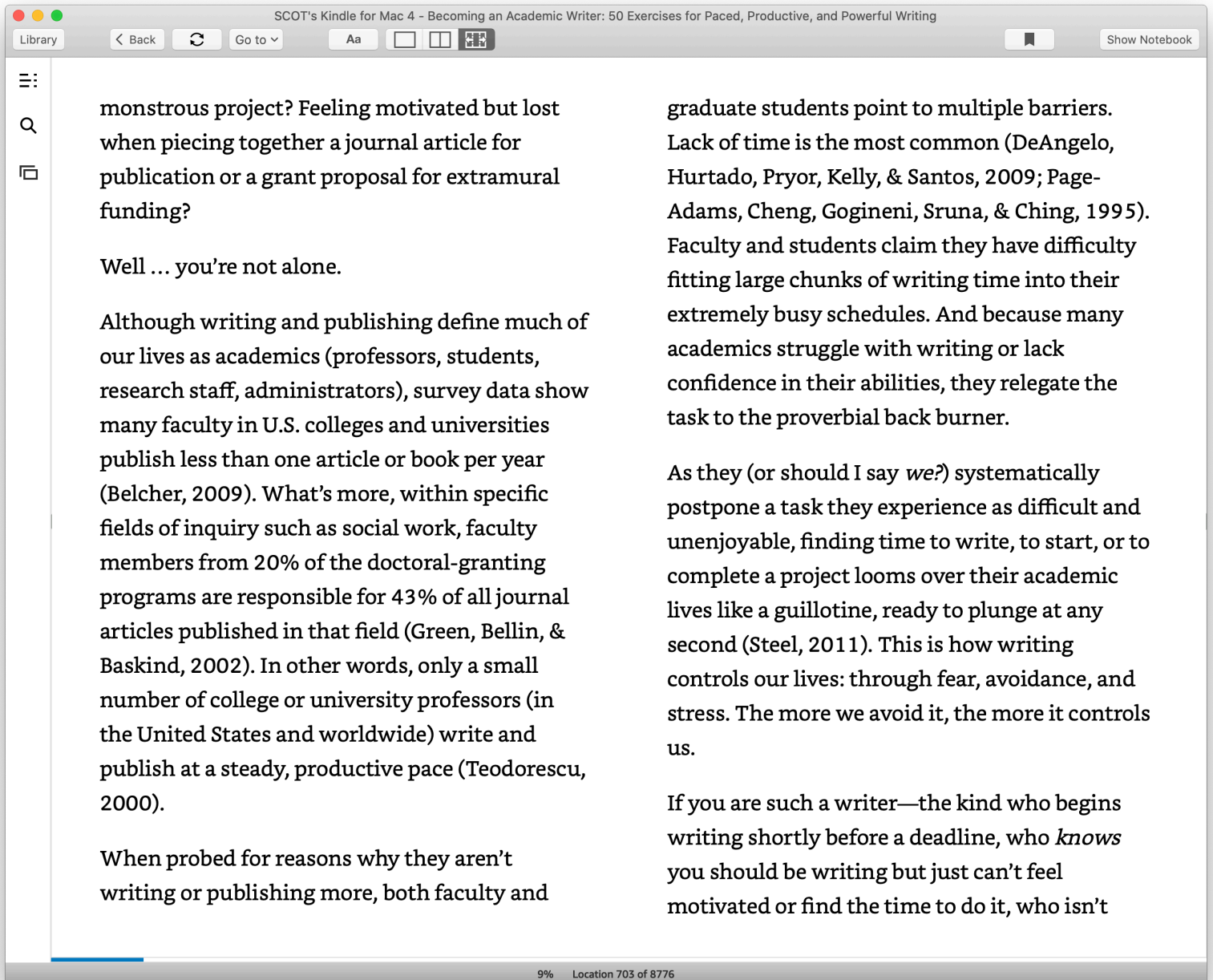
—C. S. Lewis

Chapter 1 Get Ready to Practice

The style of an author should be the image of his mind, but the choice and command of language is the fruit of exercise.

—Edward Gibbon (1737–1794)¹

Wishing you could tackle all your writing assignments way ahead of deadline but wondering if this is even *possible*? Feeling as though you should be writing and publishing *more* but just don't know how to make it happen? Being pressured to write for publication in order to get promoted or tenured but unsure whether there will be enough time to get things out before you have to submit your packet? Having to write that thesis or dissertation but not envisioning how to manage such a



monstrous project? Feeling motivated but lost when piecing together a journal article for publication or a grant proposal for extramural funding?

Well ... you're not alone.

Although writing and publishing define much of our lives as academics (professors, students, research staff, administrators), survey data show many faculty in U.S. colleges and universities publish less than one article or book per year (Belcher, 2009). What's more, within specific fields of inquiry such as social work, faculty members from 20% of the doctoral-granting programs are responsible for 43% of all journal articles published in that field (Green, Bellin, & Baskind, 2002). In other words, only a small number of college or university professors (in the United States and worldwide) write and publish at a steady, productive pace (Teodorescu, 2000).

When probed for reasons why they aren't writing or publishing more, both faculty and

graduate students point to multiple barriers. Lack of time is the most common (DeAngelo, Hurtado, Pryor, Kelly, & Santos, 2009; Page-Adams, Cheng, Gogineni, Srana, & Ching, 1995). Faculty and students claim they have difficulty fitting large chunks of writing time into their extremely busy schedules. And because many academics struggle with writing or lack confidence in their abilities, they relegate the task to the proverbial back burner.

As they (or should I say *we*?) systematically postpone a task they experience as difficult and unenjoyable, finding time to write, to start, or to complete a project looms over their academic lives like a guillotine, ready to plunge at any second (Steel, 2011). This is how writing controls our lives: through fear, avoidance, and stress. The more we avoid it, the more it controls us.

If you are such a writer—the kind who begins writing shortly before a deadline, who *knows* you should be writing but just can't feel motivated or find the time to do it, who isn't



quite sure how to put together a publishable piece of academic writing—this book is for you. It will help you gain (or regain) control over your writing and disarm forever the guillotine of anxiety, fear, and stress.

The POWER Model

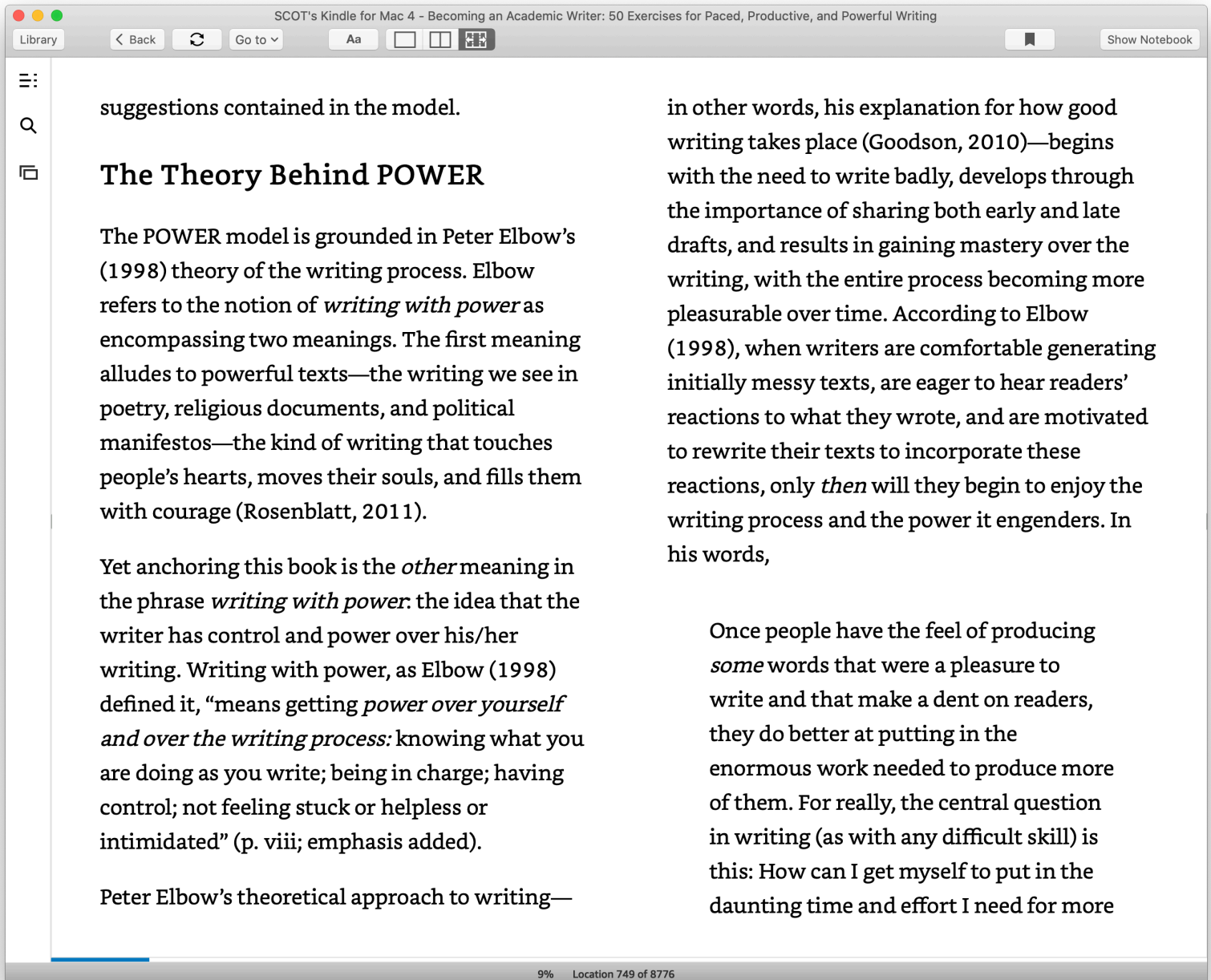
This book describes a model for taking control of the academic writing process—the POWER model (Promoting Outstanding Writing for Excellence in Research)—and provides weekly exercises to improve control. The model combines certain behavioral *principles* with specific *practices* to help you master and become comfortable with your writing. If you understand the principles and practice the exercises on a weekly basis, you will

- a. establish a *stress-free writing habit* that will serve you throughout your academic career;
- b. *increase your writing (and publishing) productivity* at a comfortable, consistent pace; and

- c. *improve the quality* of your academic writing (in two words: *write better*).

POWER embodies two related elements: (a) a writing support service created for faculty and graduate students at Texas A&M University (as a service provided by the College of Education and Human Development) and (b) a set of principles and practices for promoting academic writing productivity and quality (in other words, a writing *model*).

POWER Services² are based on the POWER model. The model represents my effort to organize available theory and research data into useful strategies anyone can use. Peter Elbow (1998), Robert Boice (1990), Joseph Moxley and Todd Taylor (1997), along with Michael Mayrath (2008), are a few of the scholars who developed the theory and conducted the research supporting these strategies. Moreover, the neuroscience and psychology literatures regarding the characteristics of elite performers, such as Olympic athletes, chess champions, and expert musicians, also anchor the exercises and



suggestions contained in the model.

The Theory Behind POWER

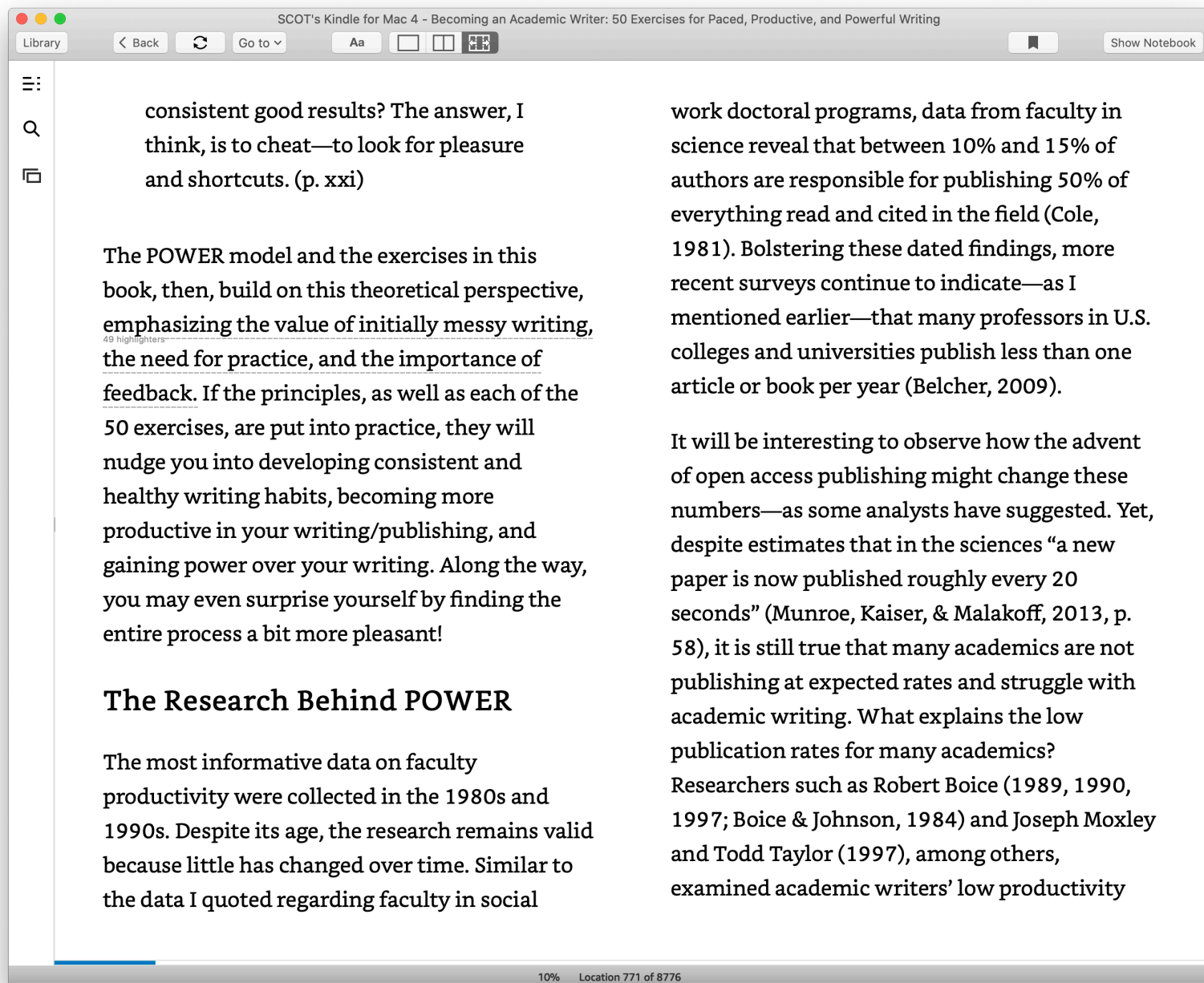
The POWER model is grounded in Peter Elbow's (1998) theory of the writing process. Elbow refers to the notion of *writing with power* as encompassing two meanings. The first meaning alludes to powerful texts—the writing we see in poetry, religious documents, and political manifestos—the kind of writing that touches people's hearts, moves their souls, and fills them with courage (Rosenblatt, 2011).

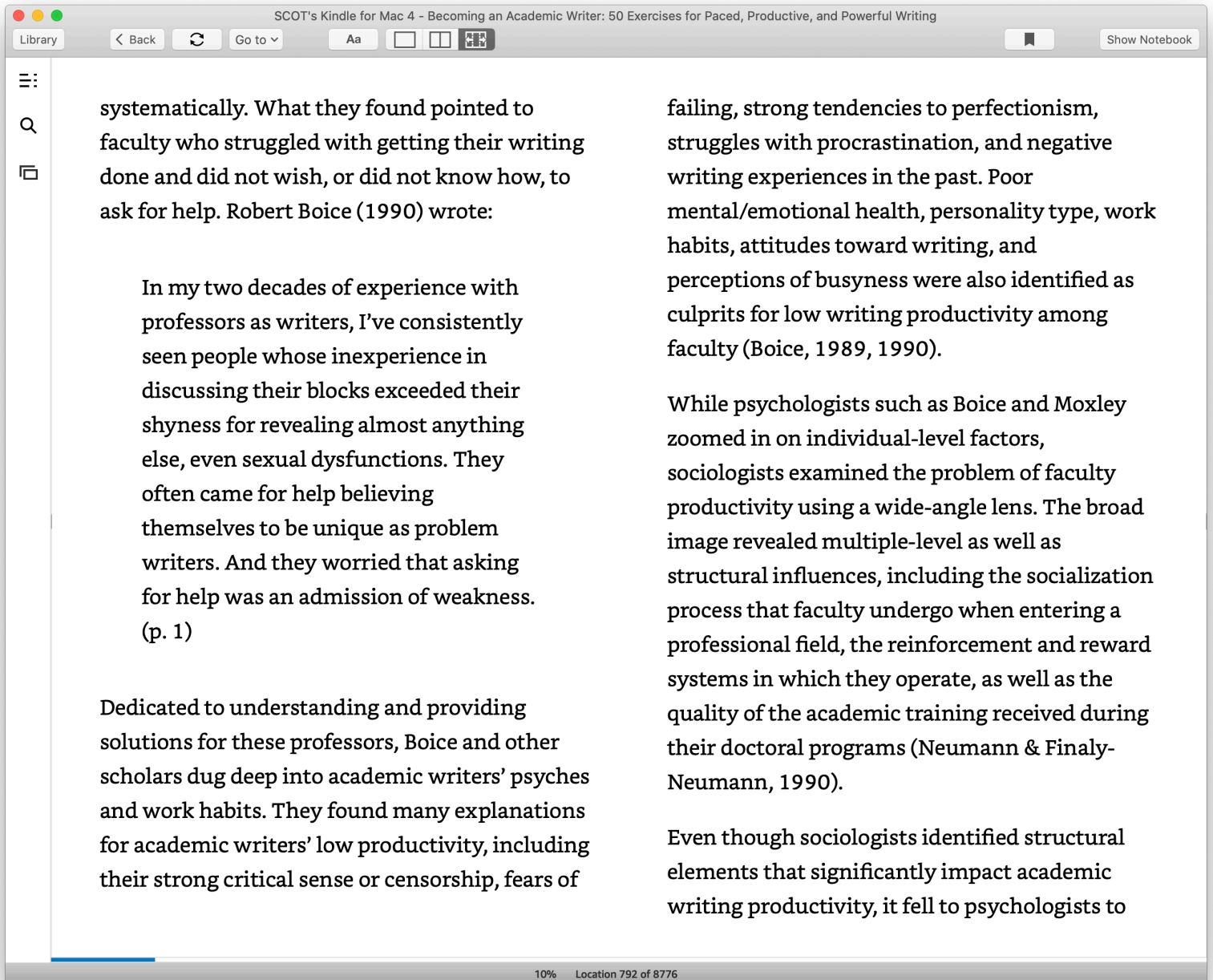
Yet anchoring this book is the *other* meaning in the phrase *writing with power*: the idea that the writer has control and power over his/her writing. Writing with power, as Elbow (1998) defined it, "means getting *power over yourself and over the writing process*: knowing what you are doing as you write; being in charge; having control; not feeling stuck or helpless or intimidated" (p. viii; emphasis added).

Peter Elbow's theoretical approach to writing—

in other words, his explanation for how good writing takes place (Goodson, 2010)—begins with the need to write badly, develops through the importance of sharing both early and late drafts, and results in gaining mastery over the writing, with the entire process becoming more pleasurable over time. According to Elbow (1998), when writers are comfortable generating initially messy texts, are eager to hear readers' reactions to what they wrote, and are motivated to rewrite their texts to incorporate these reactions, only *then* will they begin to enjoy the writing process and the power it engenders. In his words,

Once people have the feel of producing *some* words that were a pleasure to write and that make a dent on readers, they do better at putting in the enormous work needed to produce more of them. For really, the central question in writing (as with any difficult skill) is this: How can I get myself to put in the daunting time and effort I need for more





systematically. What they found pointed to faculty who struggled with getting their writing done and did not wish, or did not know how, to ask for help. Robert Boice (1990) wrote:

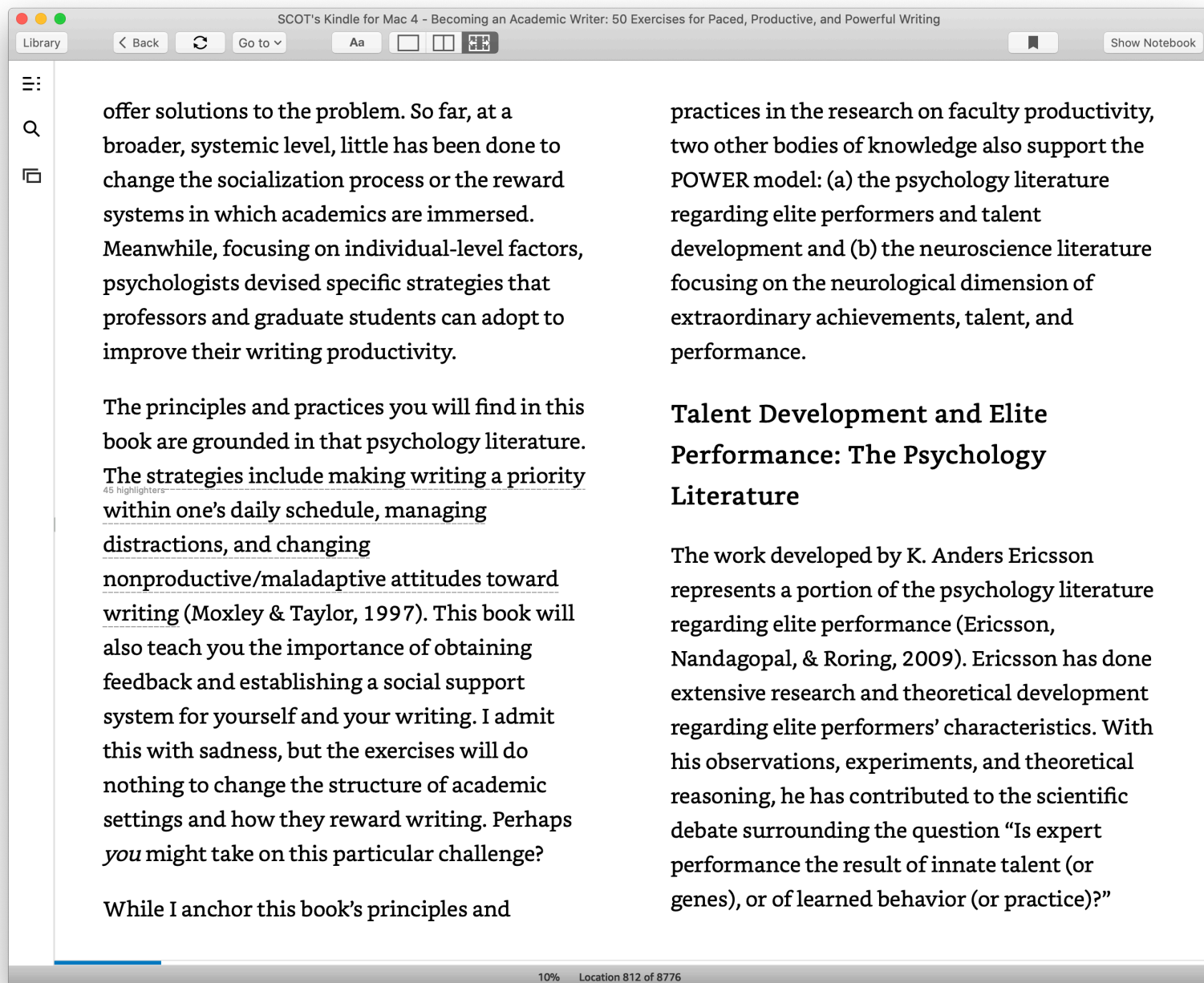
In my two decades of experience with professors as writers, I've consistently seen people whose inexperience in discussing their blocks exceeded their shyness for revealing almost anything else, even sexual dysfunctions. They often came for help believing themselves to be unique as problem writers. And they worried that asking for help was an admission of weakness. (p. 1)

Dedicated to understanding and providing solutions for these professors, Boice and other scholars dug deep into academic writers' psyches and work habits. They found many explanations for academic writers' low productivity, including their strong critical sense or censorship, fears of

failing, strong tendencies to perfectionism, struggles with procrastination, and negative writing experiences in the past. Poor mental/emotional health, personality type, work habits, attitudes toward writing, and perceptions of busyness were also identified as culprits for low writing productivity among faculty (Boice, 1989, 1990).

While psychologists such as Boice and Moxley zoomed in on individual-level factors, sociologists examined the problem of faculty productivity using a wide-angle lens. The broad image revealed multiple-level as well as structural influences, including the socialization process that faculty undergo when entering a professional field, the reinforcement and reward systems in which they operate, as well as the quality of the academic training received during their doctoral programs (Neumann & Finaly-Neumann, 1990).

Even though sociologists identified structural elements that significantly impact academic writing productivity, it fell to psychologists to



offer solutions to the problem. So far, at a broader, systemic level, little has been done to change the socialization process or the reward systems in which academics are immersed. Meanwhile, focusing on individual-level factors, psychologists devised specific strategies that professors and graduate students can adopt to improve their writing productivity.

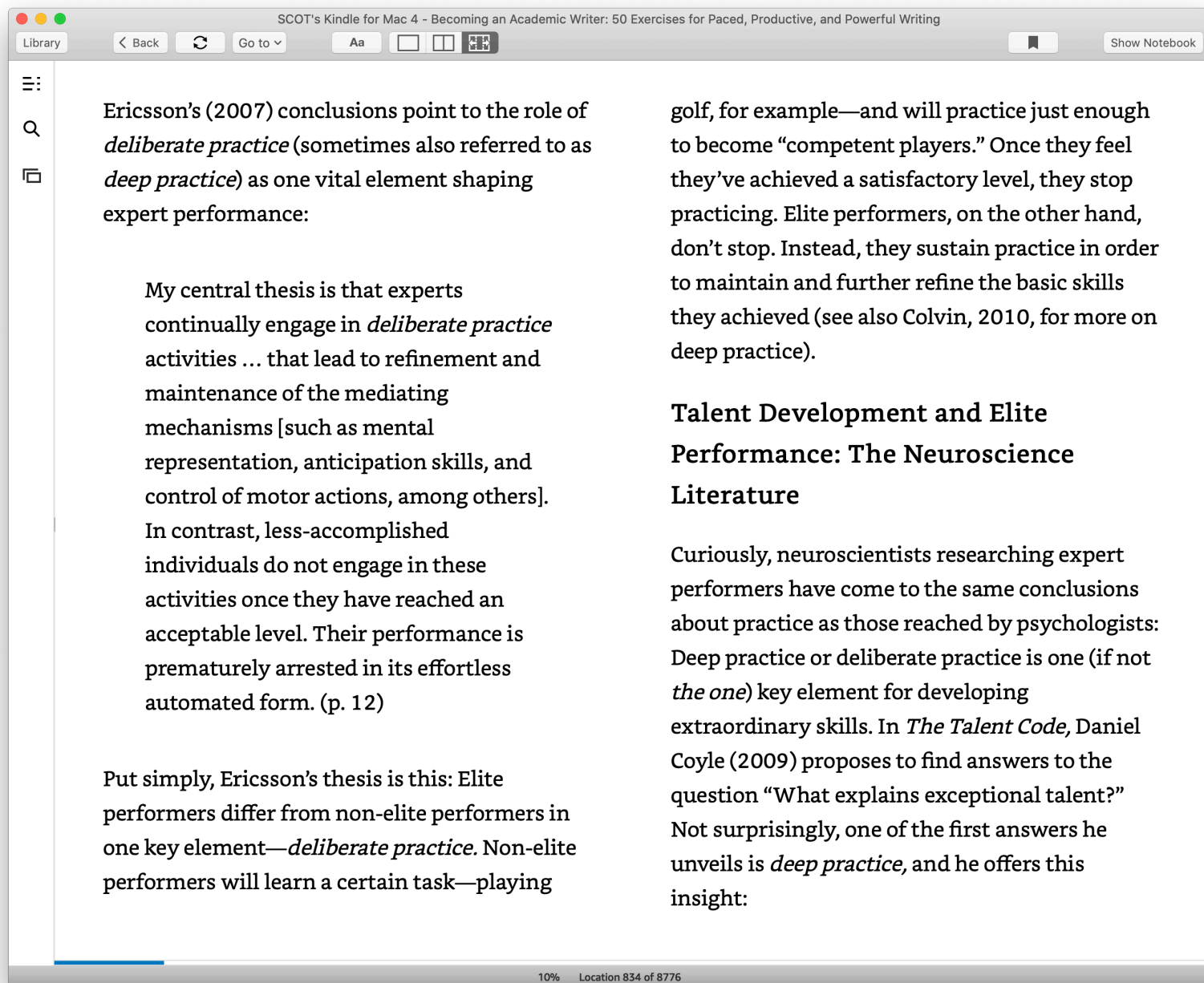
The principles and practices you will find in this book are grounded in that psychology literature. The strategies include making writing a priority within one's daily schedule, managing distractions, and changing nonproductive/maladaptive attitudes toward writing (Moxley & Taylor, 1997). This book will also teach you the importance of obtaining feedback and establishing a social support system for yourself and your writing. I admit this with sadness, but the exercises will do nothing to change the structure of academic settings and how they reward writing. Perhaps you might take on this particular challenge?

While I anchor this book's principles and

practices in the research on faculty productivity, two other bodies of knowledge also support the POWER model: (a) the psychology literature regarding elite performers and talent development and (b) the neuroscience literature focusing on the neurological dimension of extraordinary achievements, talent, and performance.

Talent Development and Elite Performance: The Psychology Literature

The work developed by K. Anders Ericsson represents a portion of the psychology literature regarding elite performance (Ericsson, Nandagopal, & Roring, 2009). Ericsson has done extensive research and theoretical development regarding elite performers' characteristics. With his observations, experiments, and theoretical reasoning, he has contributed to the scientific debate surrounding the question "Is expert performance the result of innate talent (or genes), or of learned behavior (or practice)?"



Ericsson's (2007) conclusions point to the role of *deliberate practice* (sometimes also referred to as *deep practice*) as one vital element shaping expert performance:

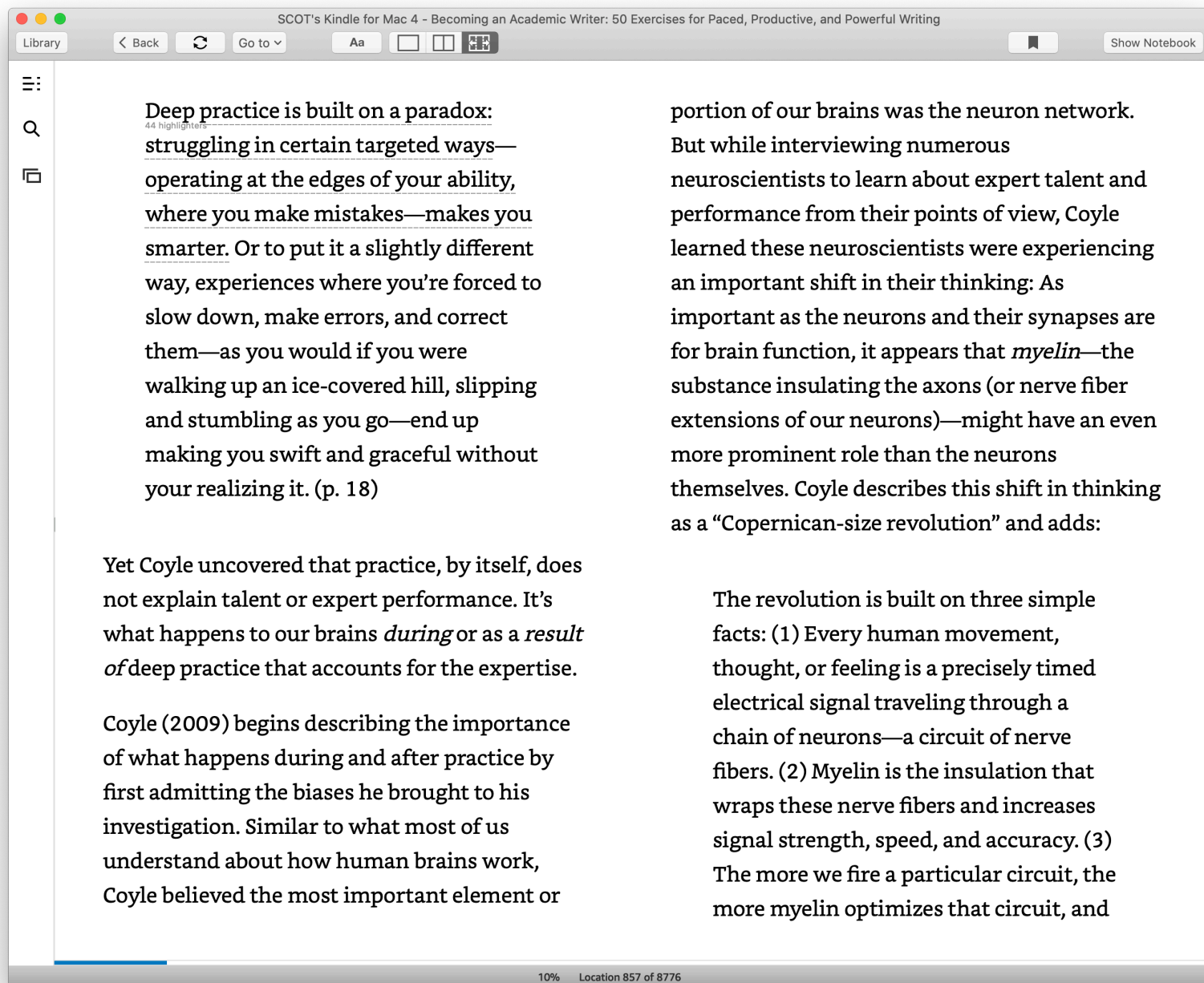
My central thesis is that experts continually engage in *deliberate practice* activities ... that lead to refinement and maintenance of the mediating mechanisms [such as mental representation, anticipation skills, and control of motor actions, among others]. In contrast, less-accomplished individuals do not engage in these activities once they have reached an acceptable level. Their performance is prematurely arrested in its effortless automated form. (p. 12)

Put simply, Ericsson's thesis is this: Elite performers differ from non-elite performers in one key element—*deliberate practice*. Non-elite performers will learn a certain task—playing

golf, for example—and will practice just enough to become “competent players.” Once they feel they’ve achieved a satisfactory level, they stop practicing. Elite performers, on the other hand, don’t stop. Instead, they sustain practice in order to maintain and further refine the basic skills they achieved (see also Colvin, 2010, for more on deep practice).

Talent Development and Elite Performance: The Neuroscience Literature

Curiously, neuroscientists researching expert performers have come to the same conclusions about practice as those reached by psychologists: Deep practice or deliberate practice is one (if not *the one*) key element for developing extraordinary skills. In *The Talent Code*, Daniel Coyle (2009) proposes to find answers to the question “What explains exceptional talent?” Not surprisingly, one of the first answers he unveils is *deep practice*, and he offers this insight:



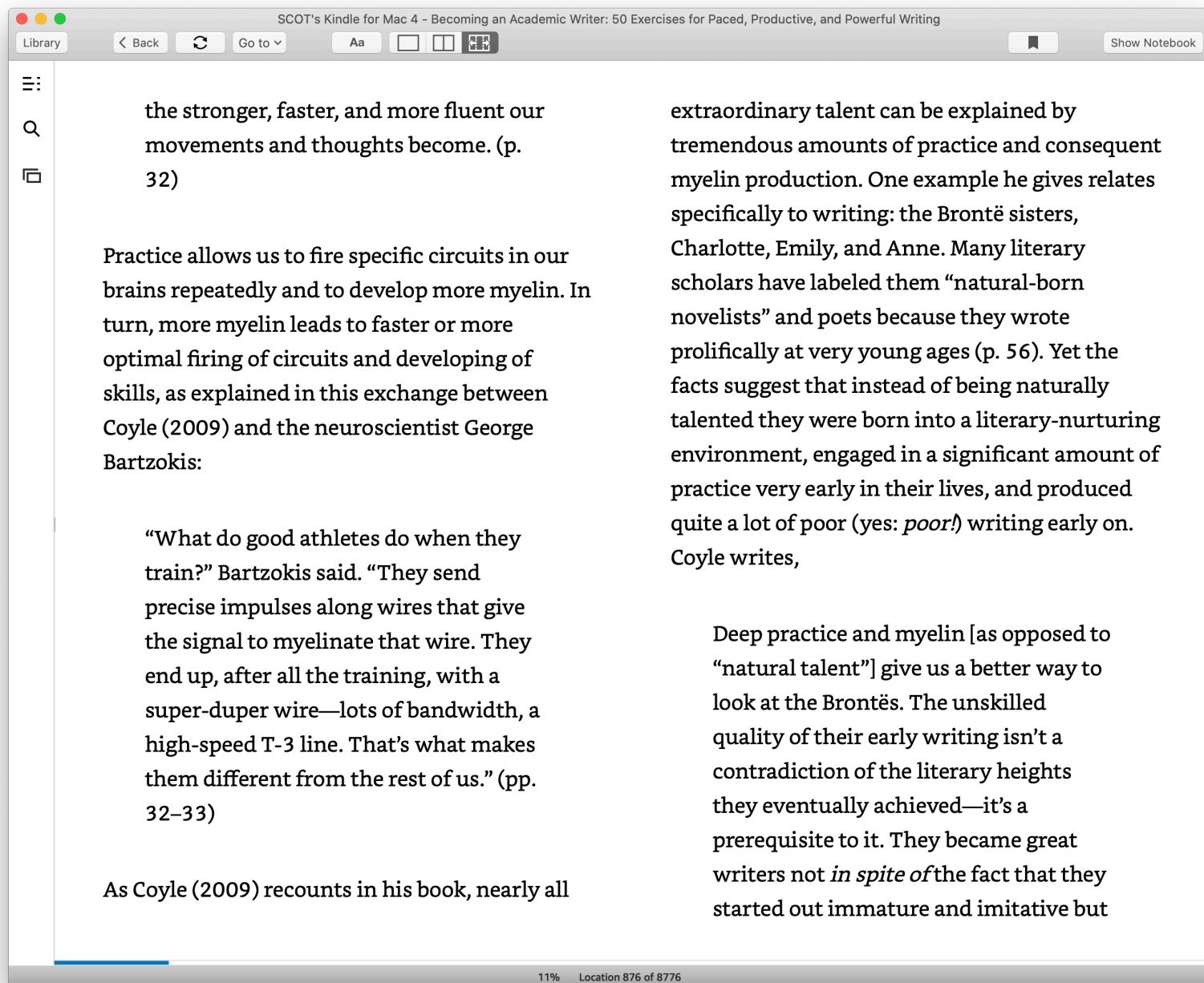
Deep practice is built on a paradox:
struggling in certain targeted ways—
operating at the edges of your ability,
where you make mistakes—makes you
smarter. Or to put it a slightly different
way, experiences where you're forced to
slow down, make errors, and correct
them—as you would if you were
walking up an ice-covered hill, slipping
and stumbling as you go—end up
making you swift and graceful without
your realizing it. (p. 18)

Yet Coyle uncovered that practice, by itself, does not explain talent or expert performance. It's what happens to our brains *during* or as a *result of* deep practice that accounts for the expertise.

Coyle (2009) begins describing the importance of what happens during and after practice by first admitting the biases he brought to his investigation. Similar to what most of us understand about how human brains work, Coyle believed the most important element or

portion of our brains was the neuron network. But while interviewing numerous neuroscientists to learn about expert talent and performance from their points of view, Coyle learned these neuroscientists were experiencing an important shift in their thinking: As important as the neurons and their synapses are for brain function, it appears that *myelin*—the substance insulating the axons (or nerve fiber extensions of our neurons)—might have an even more prominent role than the neurons themselves. Coyle describes this shift in thinking as a “Copernican-size revolution” and adds:

The revolution is built on three simple facts: (1) Every human movement, thought, or feeling is a precisely timed electrical signal traveling through a chain of neurons—a circuit of nerve fibers. (2) Myelin is the insulation that wraps these nerve fibers and increases signal strength, speed, and accuracy. (3) The more we fire a particular circuit, the more myelin optimizes that circuit, and



the stronger, faster, and more fluent our movements and thoughts become. (p. 32)

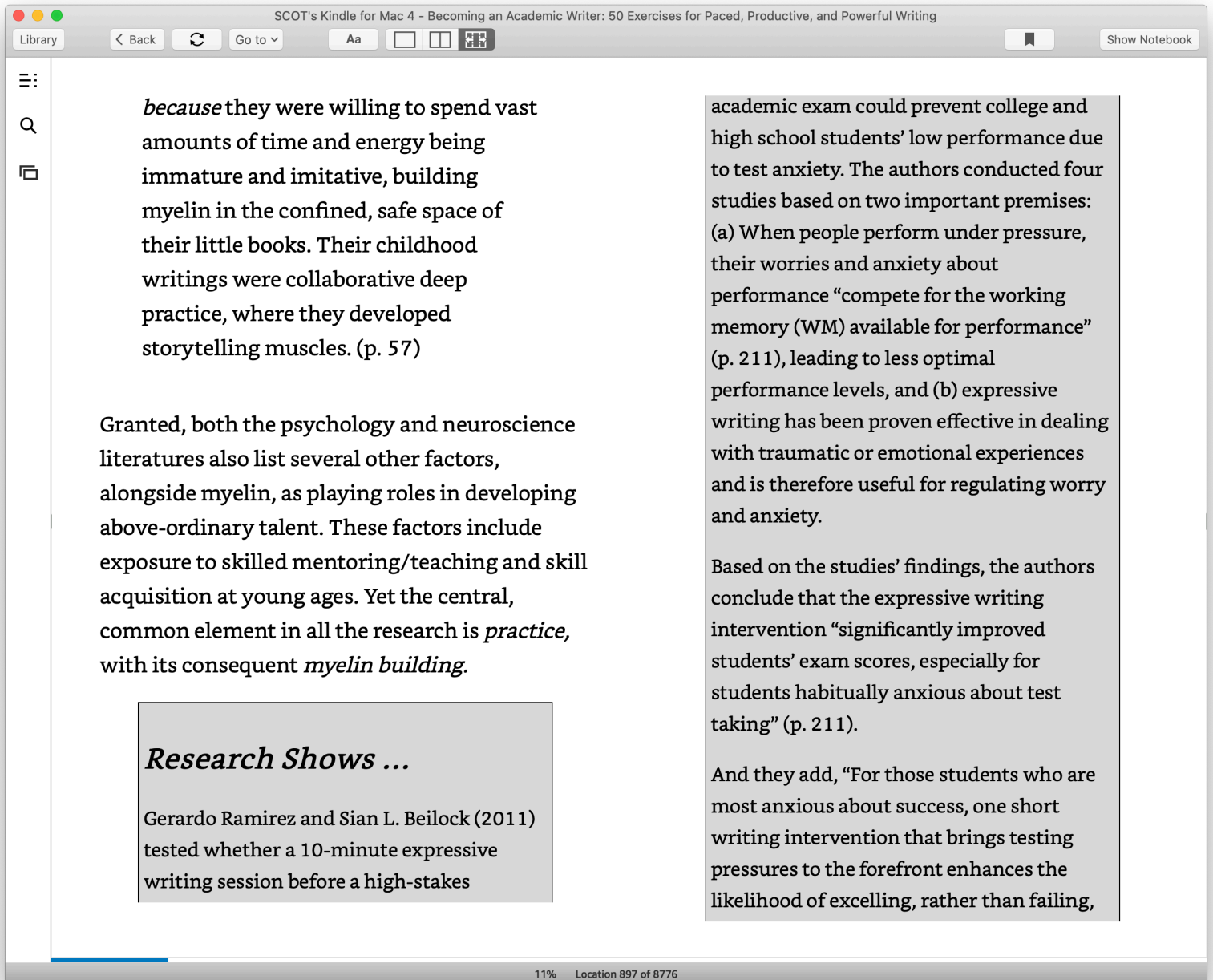
Practice allows us to fire specific circuits in our brains repeatedly and to develop more myelin. In turn, more myelin leads to faster or more optimal firing of circuits and developing of skills, as explained in this exchange between Coyle (2009) and the neuroscientist George Bartzokis:

“What do good athletes do when they train?” Bartzokis said. “They send precise impulses along wires that give the signal to myelinate that wire. They end up, after all the training, with a super-duper wire—lots of bandwidth, a high-speed T-3 line. That’s what makes them different from the rest of us.” (pp. 32–33)

As Coyle (2009) recounts in his book, nearly all

extraordinary talent can be explained by tremendous amounts of practice and consequent myelin production. One example he gives relates specifically to writing: the Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne. Many literary scholars have labeled them “natural-born novelists” and poets because they wrote prolifically at very young ages (p. 56). Yet the facts suggest that instead of being naturally talented they were born into a literary-nurturing environment, engaged in a significant amount of practice very early in their lives, and produced quite a lot of poor (yes: *poor!*) writing early on. Coyle writes,

Deep practice and myelin [as opposed to “natural talent”] give us a better way to look at the Brontës. The unskilled quality of their early writing isn’t a contradiction of the literary heights they eventually achieved—it’s a prerequisite to it. They became great writers not *in spite of* the fact that they started out immature and imitative but



because they were willing to spend vast amounts of time and energy being immature and imitative, building myelin in the confined, safe space of their little books. Their childhood writings were collaborative deep practice, where they developed storytelling muscles. (p. 57)

Granted, both the psychology and neuroscience literatures also list several other factors, alongside myelin, as playing roles in developing above-ordinary talent. These factors include exposure to skilled mentoring/teaching and skill acquisition at young ages. Yet the central, common element in all the research is *practice*, with its consequent *myelin building*.

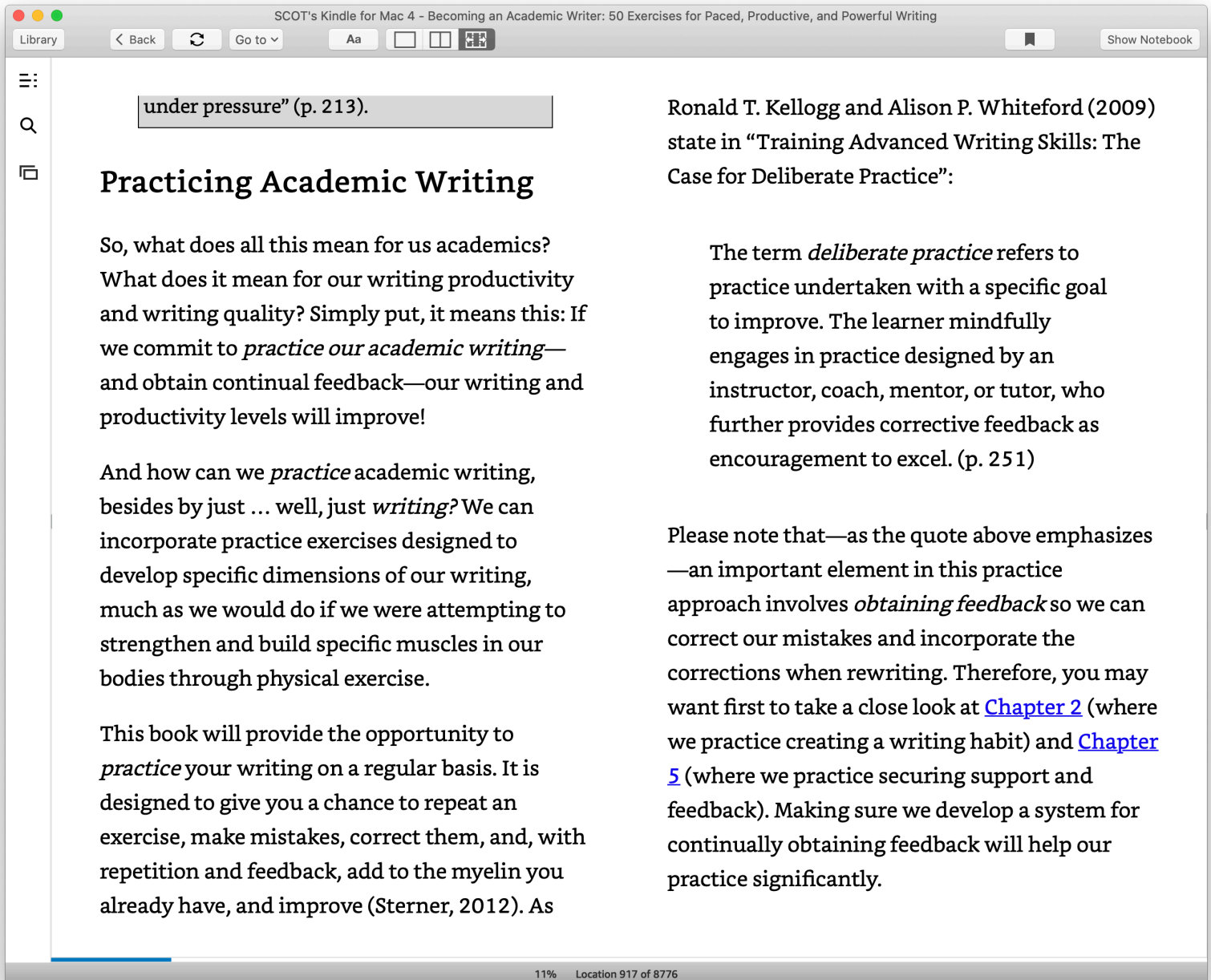
Research Shows ...

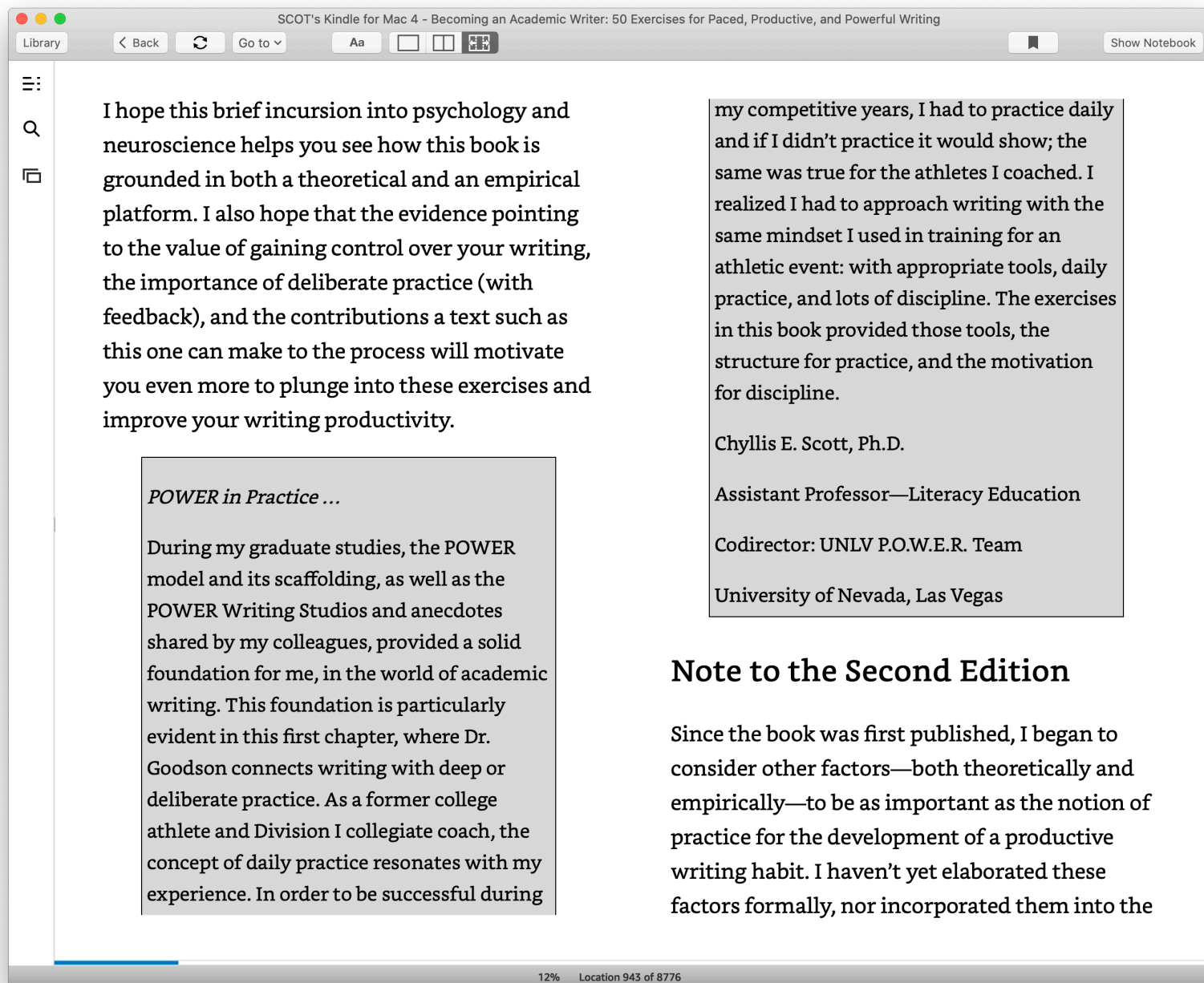
Gerardo Ramirez and Sian L. Beilock (2011) tested whether a 10-minute expressive writing session before a high-stakes

academic exam could prevent college and high school students' low performance due to test anxiety. The authors conducted four studies based on two important premises: (a) When people perform under pressure, their worries and anxiety about performance "compete for the working memory (WM) available for performance" (p. 211), leading to less optimal performance levels, and (b) expressive writing has been proven effective in dealing with traumatic or emotional experiences and is therefore useful for regulating worry and anxiety.

Based on the studies' findings, the authors conclude that the expressive writing intervention "significantly improved students' exam scores, especially for students habitually anxious about test taking" (p. 211).

And they add, "For those students who are most anxious about success, one short writing intervention that brings testing pressures to the forefront enhances the likelihood of excelling, rather than failing,





I hope this brief incursion into psychology and neuroscience helps you see how this book is grounded in both a theoretical and an empirical platform. I also hope that the evidence pointing to the value of gaining control over your writing, the importance of deliberate practice (with feedback), and the contributions a text such as this one can make to the process will motivate you even more to plunge into these exercises and improve your writing productivity.

POWER in Practice ...

During my graduate studies, the POWER model and its scaffolding, as well as the POWER Writing Studios and anecdotes shared by my colleagues, provided a solid foundation for me, in the world of academic writing. This foundation is particularly evident in this first chapter, where Dr. Goodson connects writing with deep or deliberate practice. As a former college athlete and Division I collegiate coach, the concept of daily practice resonates with my experience. In order to be successful during

my competitive years, I had to practice daily and if I didn't practice it would show; the same was true for the athletes I coached. I realized I had to approach writing with the same mindset I used in training for an athletic event: with appropriate tools, daily practice, and lots of discipline. The exercises in this book provided those tools, the structure for practice, and the motivation for discipline.

Chyllis E. Scott, Ph.D.

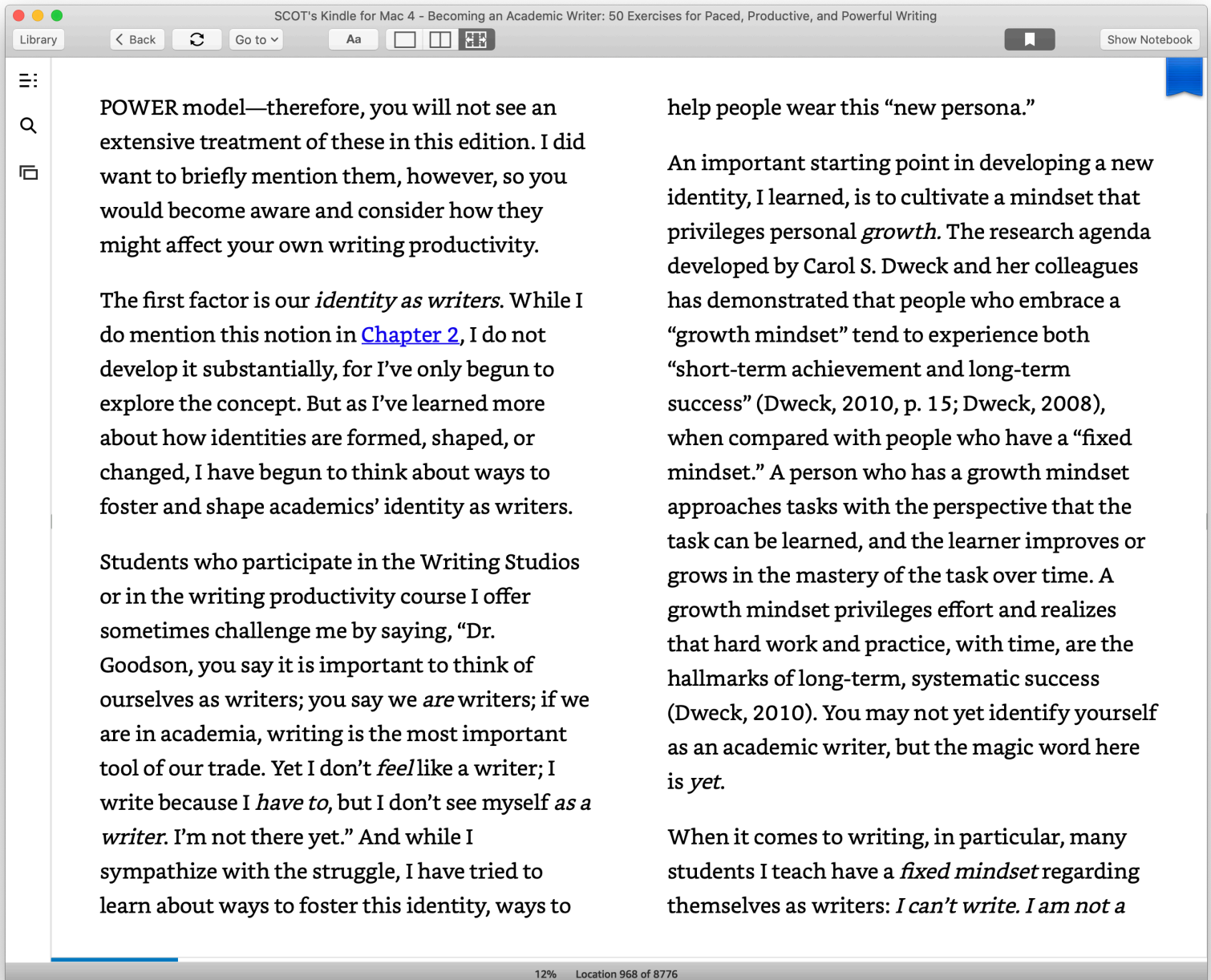
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Note to the Second Edition

Since the book was first published, I began to consider other factors—both theoretically and empirically—to be as important as the notion of practice for the development of a productive writing habit. I haven't yet elaborated these factors formally, nor incorporated them into the



POWER model—therefore, you will not see an extensive treatment of these in this edition. I did want to briefly mention them, however, so you would become aware and consider how they might affect your own writing productivity.

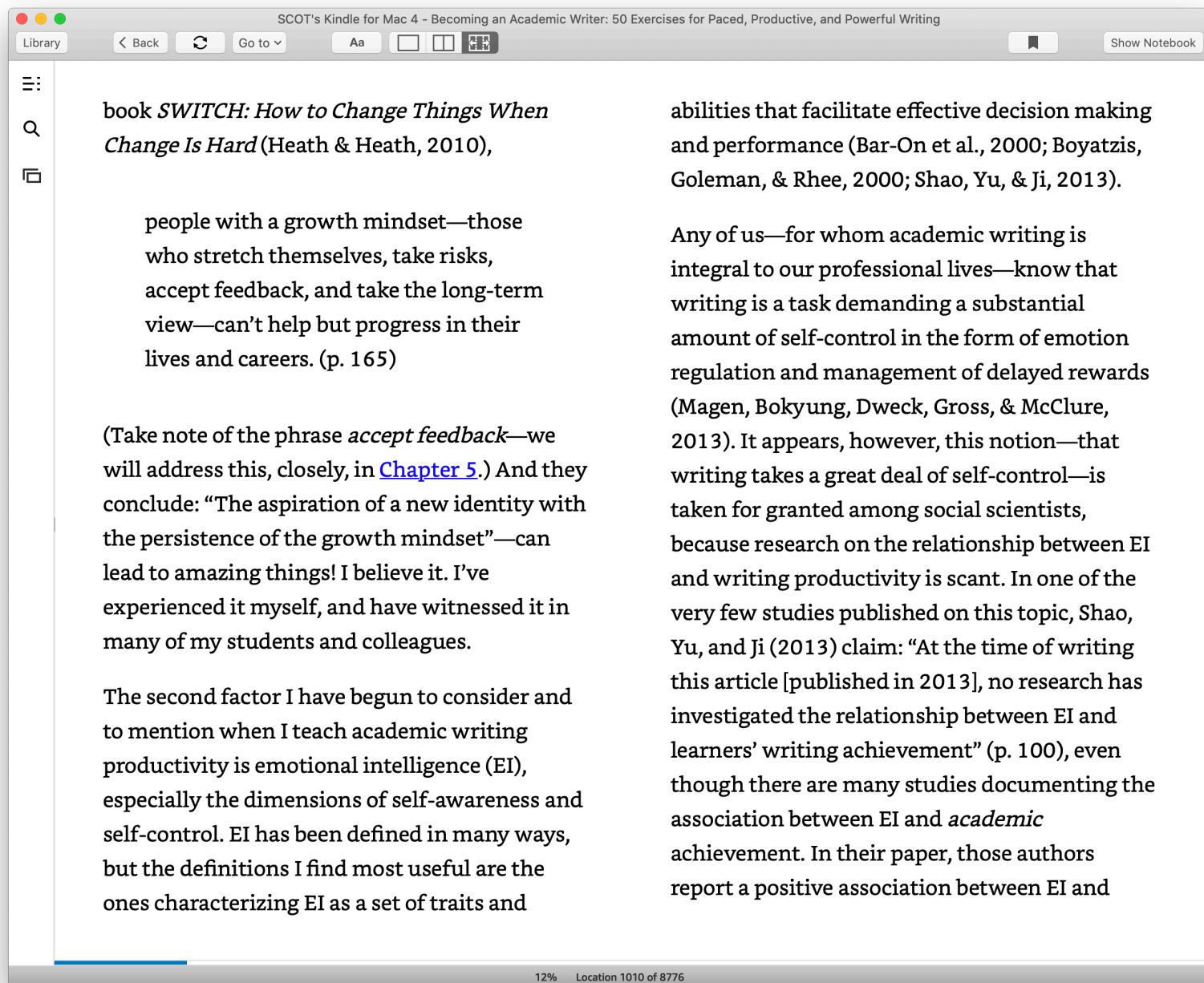
The first factor is our *identity as writers*. While I do mention this notion in [Chapter 2](#), I do not develop it substantially, for I've only begun to explore the concept. But as I've learned more about how identities are formed, shaped, or changed, I have begun to think about ways to foster and shape academics' identity as writers.

Students who participate in the Writing Studios or in the writing productivity course I offer sometimes challenge me by saying, "Dr. Goodson, you say it is important to think of ourselves as writers; you say we *are* writers; if we are in academia, writing is the most important tool of our trade. Yet I don't *feel* like a writer; I write because I *have to*, but I don't see myself *as a writer*. I'm not there yet." And while I sympathize with the struggle, I have tried to learn about ways to foster this identity, ways to

help people wear this "new persona."

An important starting point in developing a new identity, I learned, is to cultivate a mindset that privileges personal *growth*. The research agenda developed by Carol S. Dweck and her colleagues has demonstrated that people who embrace a "growth mindset" tend to experience both "short-term achievement and long-term success" (Dweck, 2010, p. 15; Dweck, 2008), when compared with people who have a "fixed mindset." A person who has a growth mindset approaches tasks with the perspective that the task can be learned, and the learner improves or grows in the mastery of the task over time. A growth mindset privileges effort and realizes that hard work and practice, with time, are the hallmarks of long-term, systematic success (Dweck, 2010). You may not yet identify yourself as an academic writer, but the magic word here is *yet*.

When it comes to writing, in particular, many students I teach have a *fixed mindset* regarding themselves as writers: *I can't write. I am not a*



book *SWITCH: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* (Heath & Heath, 2010),

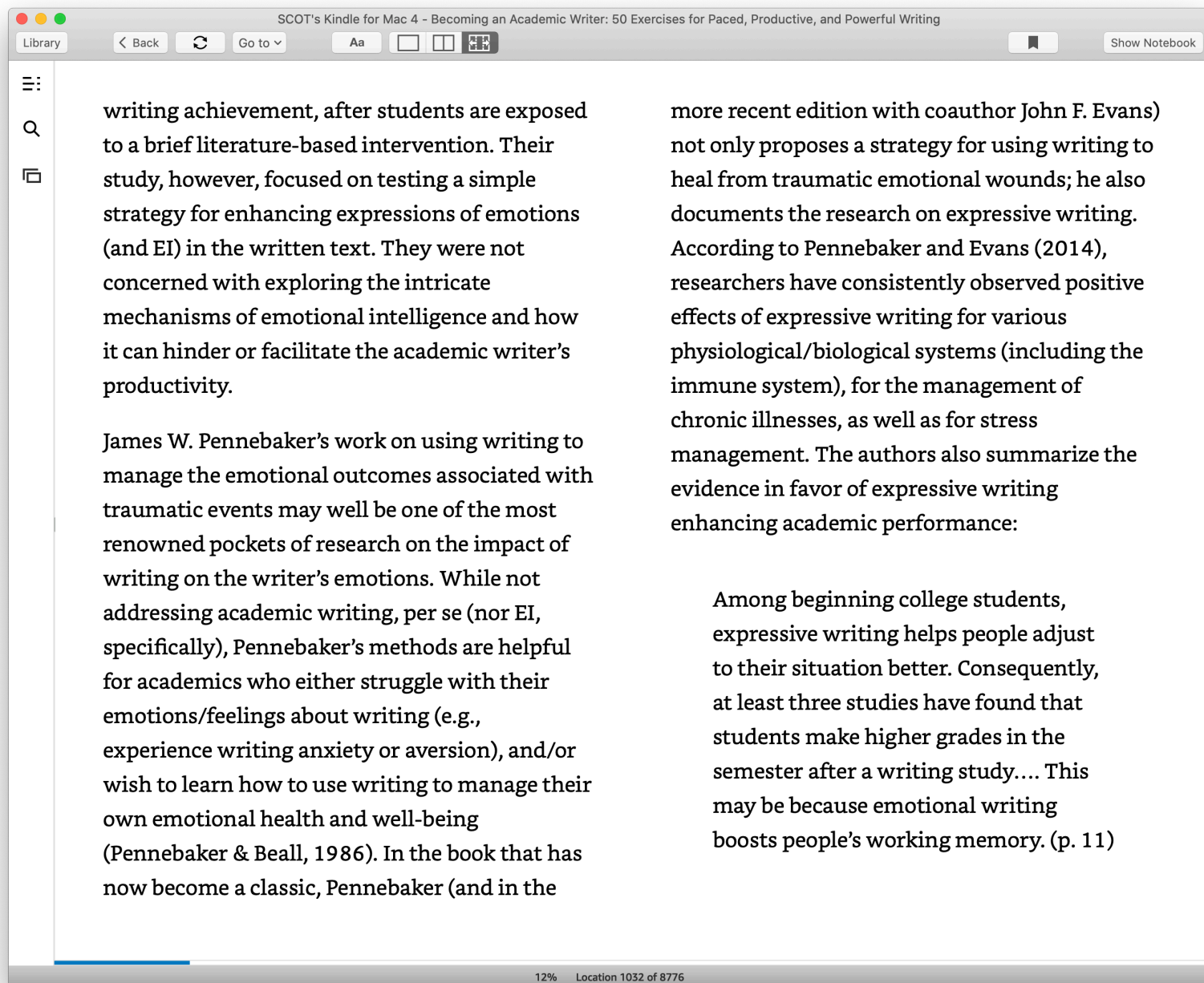
people with a growth mindset—those who stretch themselves, take risks, accept feedback, and take the long-term view—can't help but progress in their lives and careers. (p. 165)

(Take note of the phrase *accept feedback*—we will address this, closely, in [Chapter 5](#).) And they conclude: “The aspiration of a new identity with the persistence of the growth mindset”—can lead to amazing things! I believe it. I’ve experienced it myself, and have witnessed it in many of my students and colleagues.

The second factor I have begun to consider and to mention when I teach academic writing productivity is emotional intelligence (EI), especially the dimensions of self-awareness and self-control. EI has been defined in many ways, but the definitions I find most useful are the ones characterizing EI as a set of traits and

abilities that facilitate effective decision making and performance (Bar-On et al., 2000; Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000; Shao, Yu, & Ji, 2013).

Any of us—for whom academic writing is integral to our professional lives—know that writing is a task demanding a substantial amount of self-control in the form of emotion regulation and management of delayed rewards (Magen, Bokyoung, Dweck, Gross, & McClure, 2013). It appears, however, this notion—that writing takes a great deal of self-control—is taken for granted among social scientists, because research on the relationship between EI and writing productivity is scant. In one of the very few studies published on this topic, Shao, Yu, and Ji (2013) claim: “At the time of writing this article [published in 2013], no research has investigated the relationship between EI and learners’ writing achievement” (p. 100), even though there are many studies documenting the association between EI and *academic* achievement. In their paper, those authors report a positive association between EI and

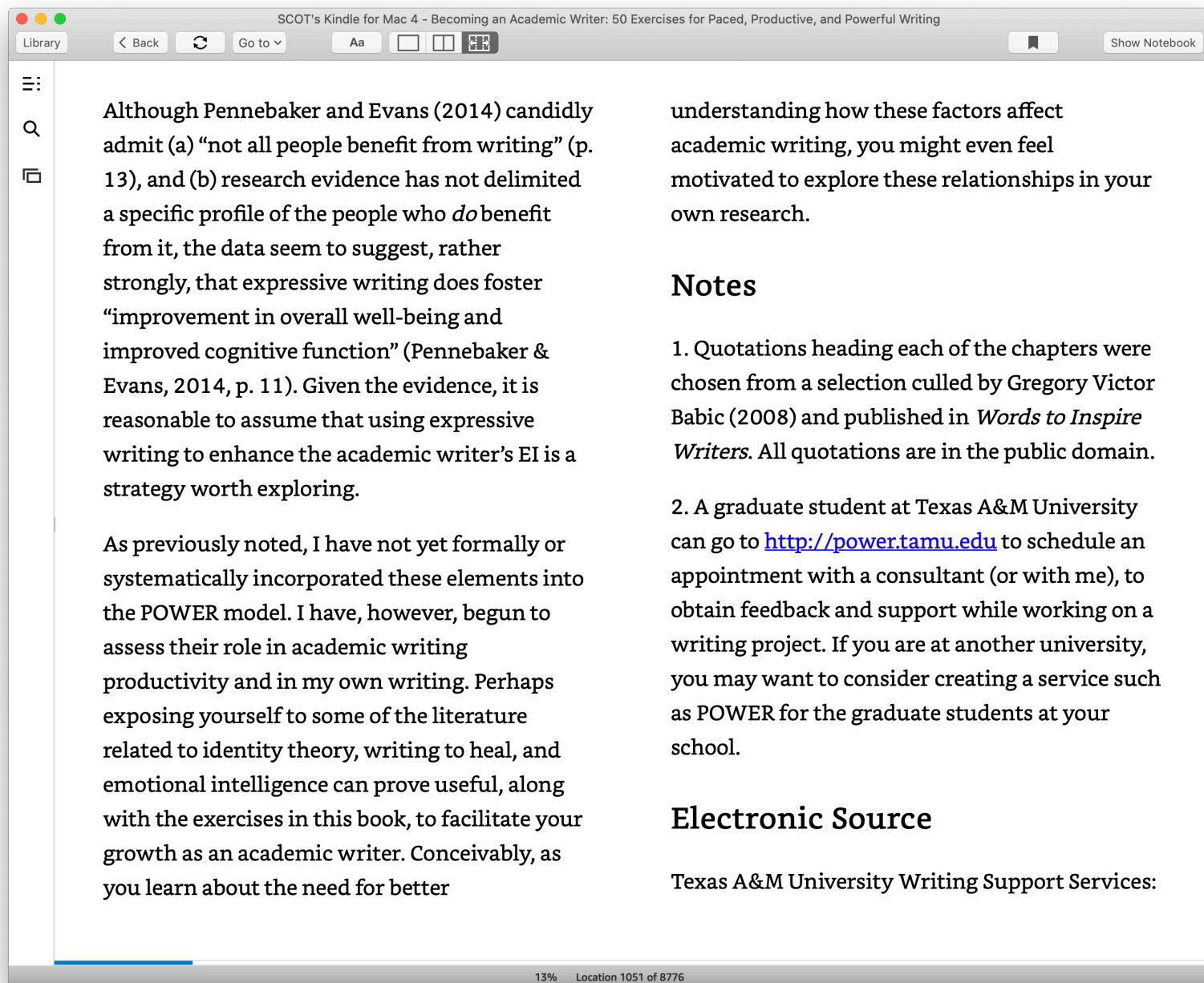


writing achievement, after students are exposed to a brief literature-based intervention. Their study, however, focused on testing a simple strategy for enhancing expressions of emotions (and EI) in the written text. They were not concerned with exploring the intricate mechanisms of emotional intelligence and how it can hinder or facilitate the academic writer's productivity.

James W. Pennebaker's work on using writing to manage the emotional outcomes associated with traumatic events may well be one of the most renowned pockets of research on the impact of writing on the writer's emotions. While not addressing academic writing, per se (nor EI, specifically), Pennebaker's methods are helpful for academics who either struggle with their emotions/feelings about writing (e.g., experience writing anxiety or aversion), and/or wish to learn how to use writing to manage their own emotional health and well-being (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). In the book that has now become a classic, Pennebaker (and in the

more recent edition with coauthor John F. Evans) not only proposes a strategy for using writing to heal from traumatic emotional wounds; he also documents the research on expressive writing. According to Pennebaker and Evans (2014), researchers have consistently observed positive effects of expressive writing for various physiological/biological systems (including the immune system), for the management of chronic illnesses, as well as for stress management. The authors also summarize the evidence in favor of expressive writing enhancing academic performance:

Among beginning college students, expressive writing helps people adjust to their situation better. Consequently, at least three studies have found that students make higher grades in the semester after a writing study.... This may be because emotional writing boosts people's working memory. (p. 11)



Although Pennebaker and Evans (2014) candidly admit (a) “not all people benefit from writing” (p. 13), and (b) research evidence has not delimited a specific profile of the people who *do* benefit from it, the data seem to suggest, rather strongly, that expressive writing does foster “improvement in overall well-being and improved cognitive function” (Pennebaker & Evans, 2014, p. 11). Given the evidence, it is reasonable to assume that using expressive writing to enhance the academic writer’s EI is a strategy worth exploring.

As previously noted, I have not yet formally or systematically incorporated these elements into the POWER model. I have, however, begun to assess their role in academic writing productivity and in my own writing. Perhaps exposing yourself to some of the literature related to identity theory, writing to heal, and emotional intelligence can prove useful, along with the exercises in this book, to facilitate your growth as an academic writer. Conceivably, as you learn about the need for better

understanding how these factors affect academic writing, you might even feel motivated to explore these relationships in your own research.

Notes

1. Quotations heading each of the chapters were chosen from a selection culled by Gregory Victor Babic (2008) and published in *Words to Inspire Writers*. All quotations are in the public domain.
2. A graduate student at Texas A&M University can go to <http://power.tamu.edu> to schedule an appointment with a consultant (or with me), to obtain feedback and support while working on a writing project. If you are at another university, you may want to consider creating a service such as POWER for the graduate students at your school.

Electronic Source

Texas A&M University Writing Support Services:



<http://power.tamu.edu>

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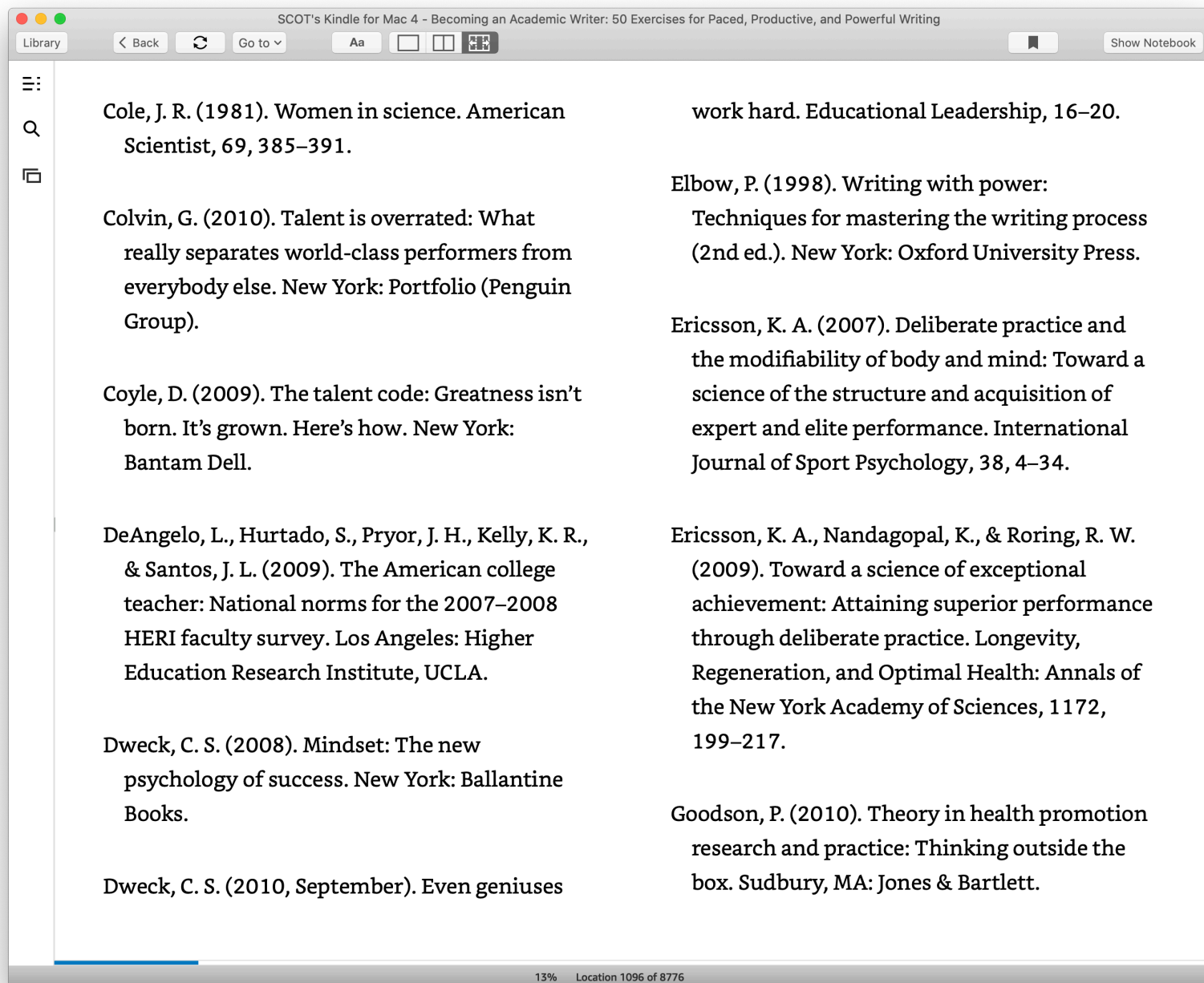
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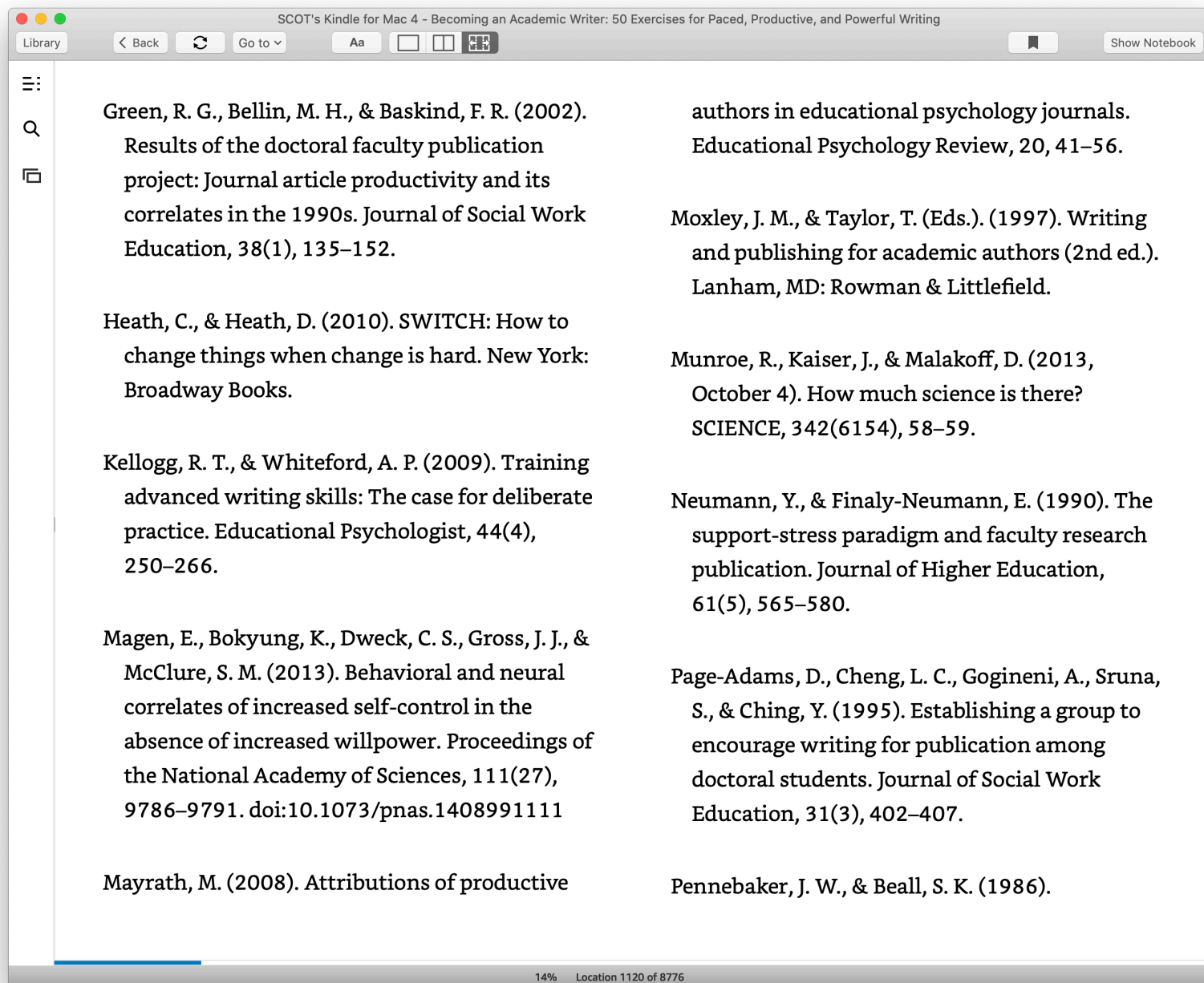
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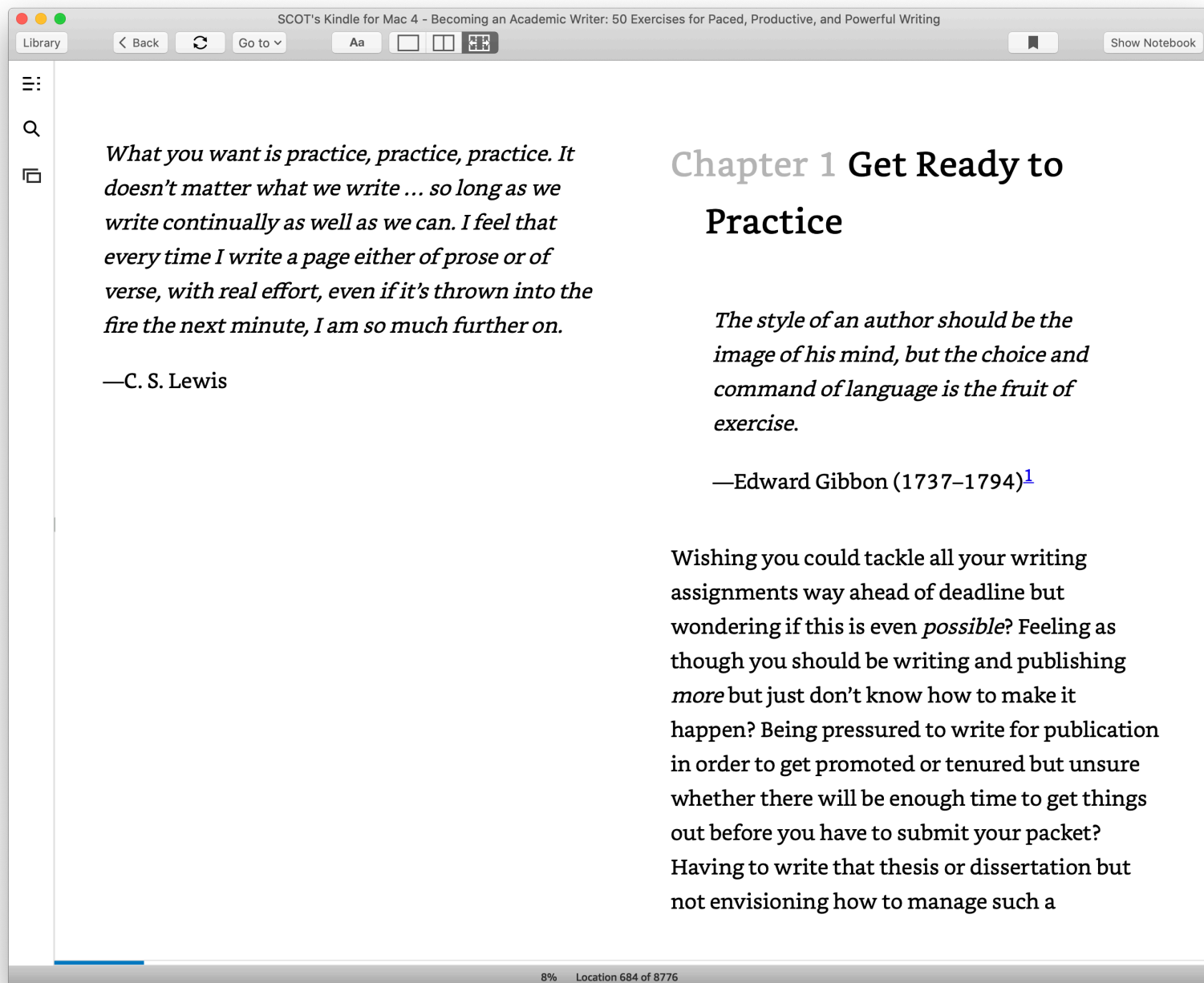






Chapter One—Main Points in One Page

1. The POWER Model (Promoting Outstanding Writing for Excellence in Research) combines certain behavioral *principles* with specific *practices* to help you master and become comfortable with your writing.
2. The POWER model and the exercises in this book build on the theoretical perspective offered by Peter Elbow, emphasizing the value of initially messy writing, the need for practice, and the importance of feedback.
3. Evidence from three areas of knowledge anchors the principles and strategies in this book: (a) research on faculty productivity, (b) the psychology literature regarding elite performers and talent development, and (c) the neuroscience literature focusing on the neurological dimension of extraordinary achievements, talent, and performance.
4. Research evidence points to *deep* or *deliberate practice* as one (if not *the* one) key element for developing extraordinary skills. Therefore, if we commit to *practice our academic writing*—and obtain continual feedback—our writing and productivity levels will improve.



What you want is practice, practice, practice. It doesn't matter what we write ... so long as we write continually as well as we can. I feel that every time I write a page either of prose or of verse, with real effort, even if it's thrown into the fire the next minute, I am so much further on.

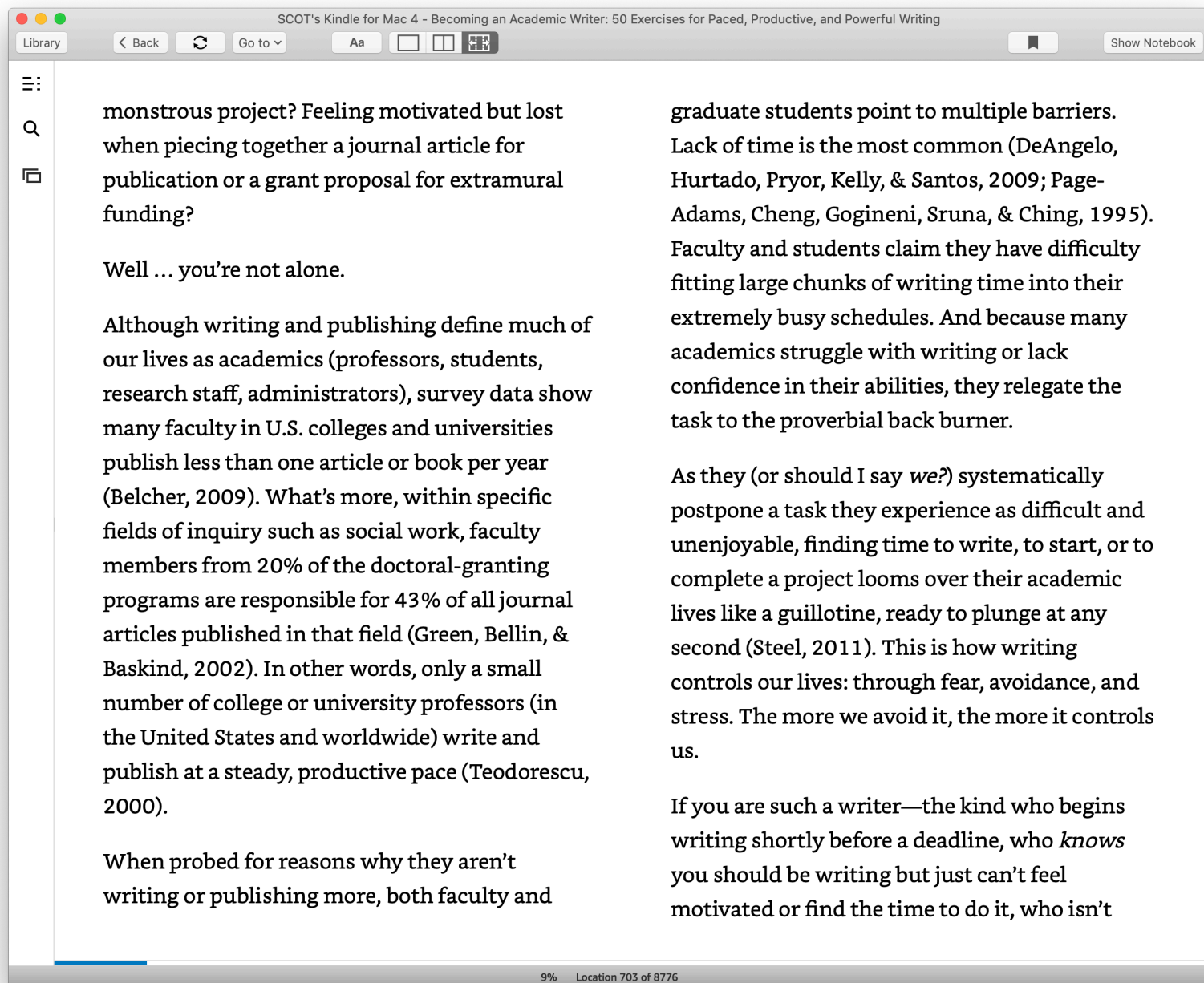
—C. S. Lewis

Chapter 1 Get Ready to Practice

The style of an author should be the image of his mind, but the choice and command of language is the fruit of exercise.

—Edward Gibbon (1737–1794)¹

Wishing you could tackle all your writing assignments way ahead of deadline but wondering if this is even *possible*? Feeling as though you should be writing and publishing *more* but just don't know how to make it happen? Being pressured to write for publication in order to get promoted or tenured but unsure whether there will be enough time to get things out before you have to submit your packet? Having to write that thesis or dissertation but not envisioning how to manage such a



monstrous project? Feeling motivated but lost when piecing together a journal article for publication or a grant proposal for extramural funding?

Well ... you're not alone.

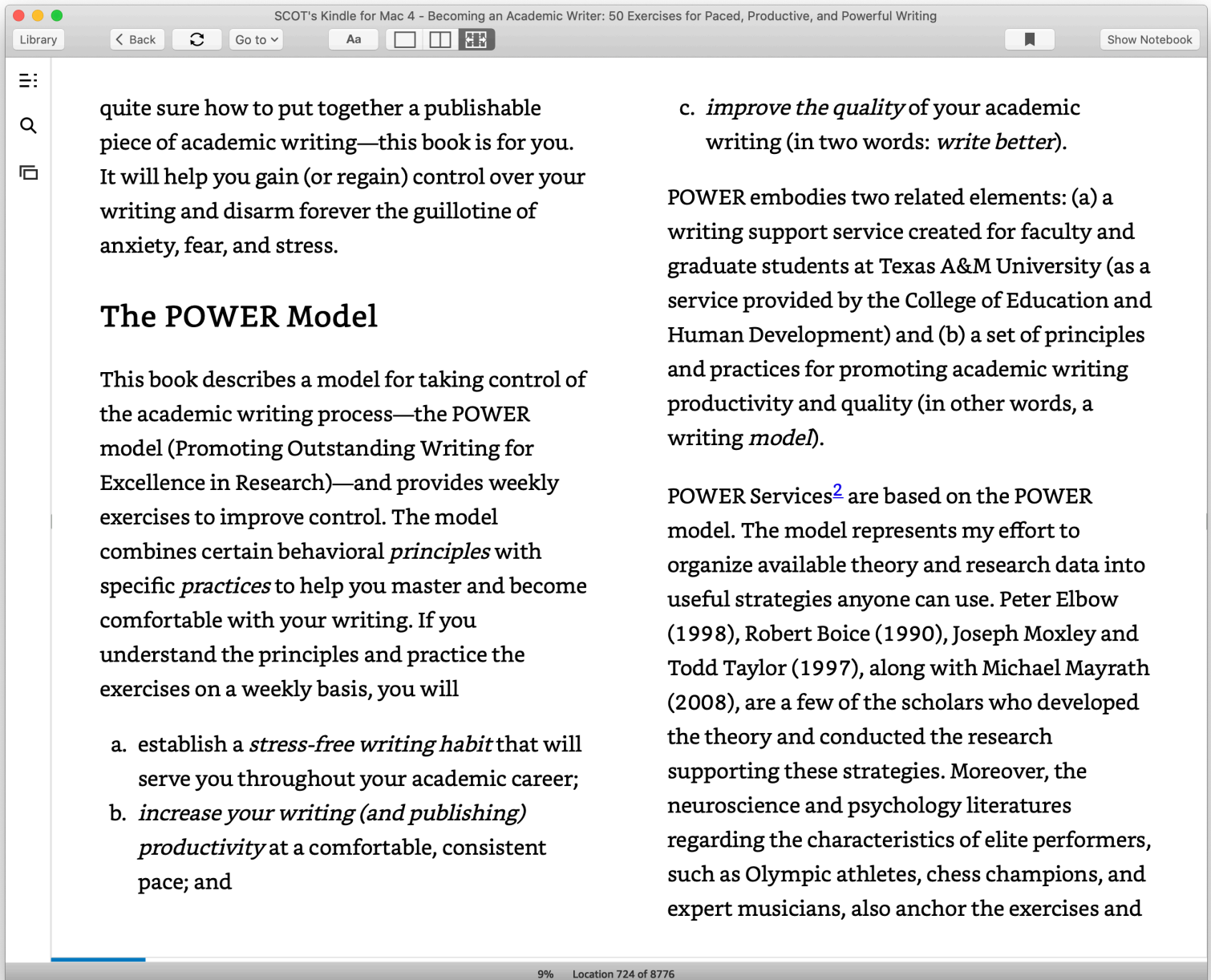
Although writing and publishing define much of our lives as academics (professors, students, research staff, administrators), survey data show many faculty in U.S. colleges and universities publish less than one article or book per year (Belcher, 2009). What's more, within specific fields of inquiry such as social work, faculty members from 20% of the doctoral-granting programs are responsible for 43% of all journal articles published in that field (Green, Bellin, & Baskind, 2002). In other words, only a small number of college or university professors (in the United States and worldwide) write and publish at a steady, productive pace (Teodorescu, 2000).

When probed for reasons why they aren't writing or publishing more, both faculty and

graduate students point to multiple barriers. Lack of time is the most common (DeAngelo, Hurtado, Pryor, Kelly, & Santos, 2009; Page-Adams, Cheng, Gogineni, Srana, & Ching, 1995). Faculty and students claim they have difficulty fitting large chunks of writing time into their extremely busy schedules. And because many academics struggle with writing or lack confidence in their abilities, they relegate the task to the proverbial back burner.

As they (or should I say *we*?) systematically postpone a task they experience as difficult and unenjoyable, finding time to write, to start, or to complete a project looms over their academic lives like a guillotine, ready to plunge at any second (Steel, 2011). This is how writing controls our lives: through fear, avoidance, and stress. The more we avoid it, the more it controls us.

If you are such a writer—the kind who begins writing shortly before a deadline, who *knows* you should be writing but just can't feel motivated or find the time to do it, who isn't



quite sure how to put together a publishable piece of academic writing—this book is for you. It will help you gain (or regain) control over your writing and disarm forever the guillotine of anxiety, fear, and stress.

The POWER Model

This book describes a model for taking control of the academic writing process—the POWER model (Promoting Outstanding Writing for Excellence in Research)—and provides weekly exercises to improve control. The model combines certain behavioral *principles* with specific *practices* to help you master and become comfortable with your writing. If you understand the principles and practice the exercises on a weekly basis, you will

- a. establish a *stress-free writing habit* that will serve you throughout your academic career;
- b. *increase your writing (and publishing) productivity* at a comfortable, consistent pace; and

- c. *improve the quality* of your academic writing (in two words: *write better*).

POWER embodies two related elements: (a) a writing support service created for faculty and graduate students at Texas A&M University (as a service provided by the College of Education and Human Development) and (b) a set of principles and practices for promoting academic writing productivity and quality (in other words, a writing *model*).

POWER Services² are based on the POWER model. The model represents my effort to organize available theory and research data into useful strategies anyone can use. Peter Elbow (1998), Robert Boice (1990), Joseph Moxley and Todd Taylor (1997), along with Michael Mayrath (2008), are a few of the scholars who developed the theory and conducted the research supporting these strategies. Moreover, the neuroscience and psychology literatures regarding the characteristics of elite performers, such as Olympic athletes, chess champions, and expert musicians, also anchor the exercises and



quite sure how to put together a publishable piece of academic writing—this book is for you. It will help you gain (or regain) control over your writing and disarm forever the guillotine of anxiety, fear, and stress.

The POWER Model

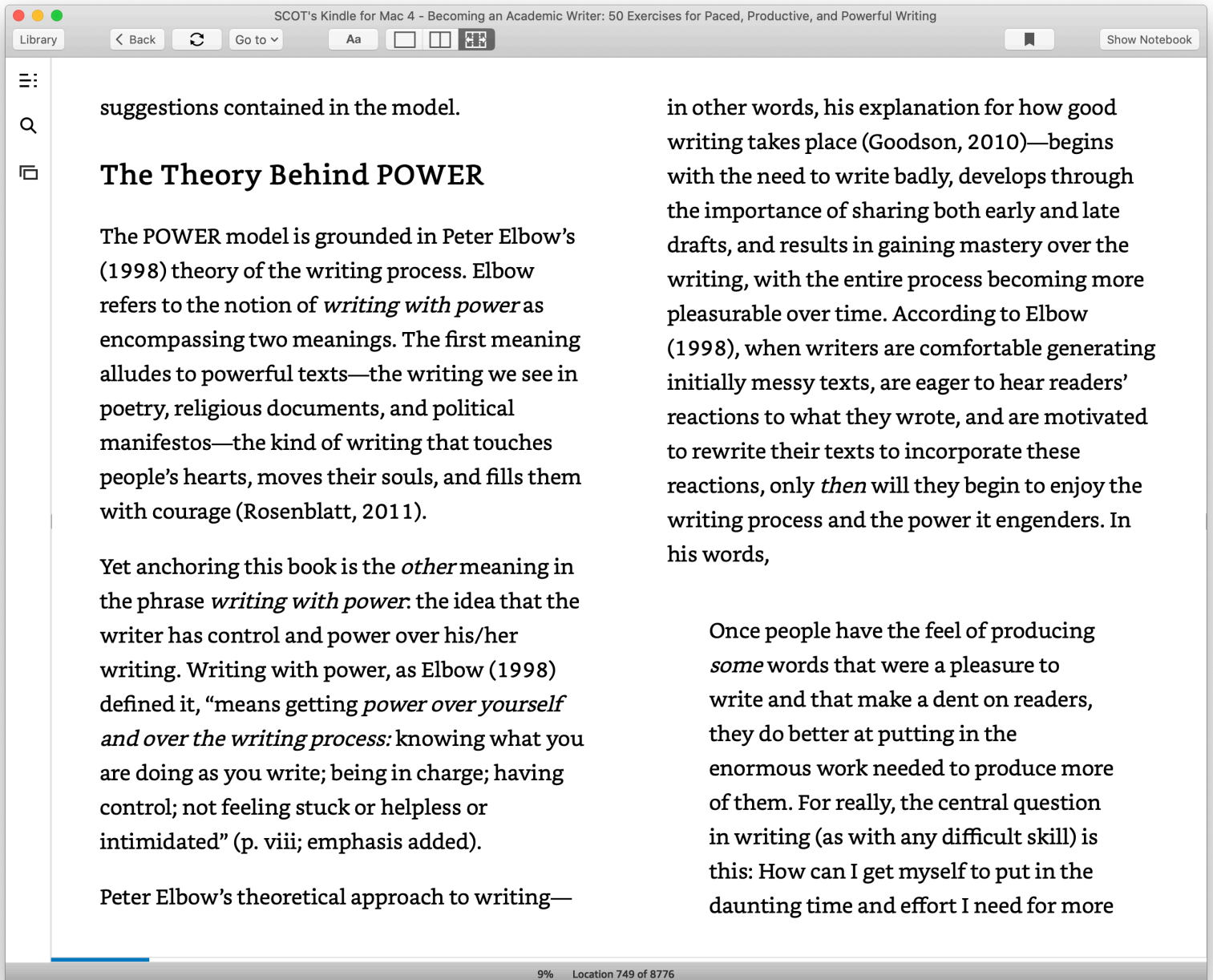
This book describes a model for taking control of the academic writing process—the POWER model (Promoting Outstanding Writing for Excellence in Research)—and provides weekly exercises to improve control. The model combines certain behavioral *principles* with specific *practices* to help you master and become comfortable with your writing. If you understand the principles and practice the exercises on a weekly basis, you will

- a. establish a *stress-free writing habit* that will serve you throughout your academic career;
- b. *increase your writing (and publishing) productivity* at a comfortable, consistent pace; and

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The Theory Behind POWER

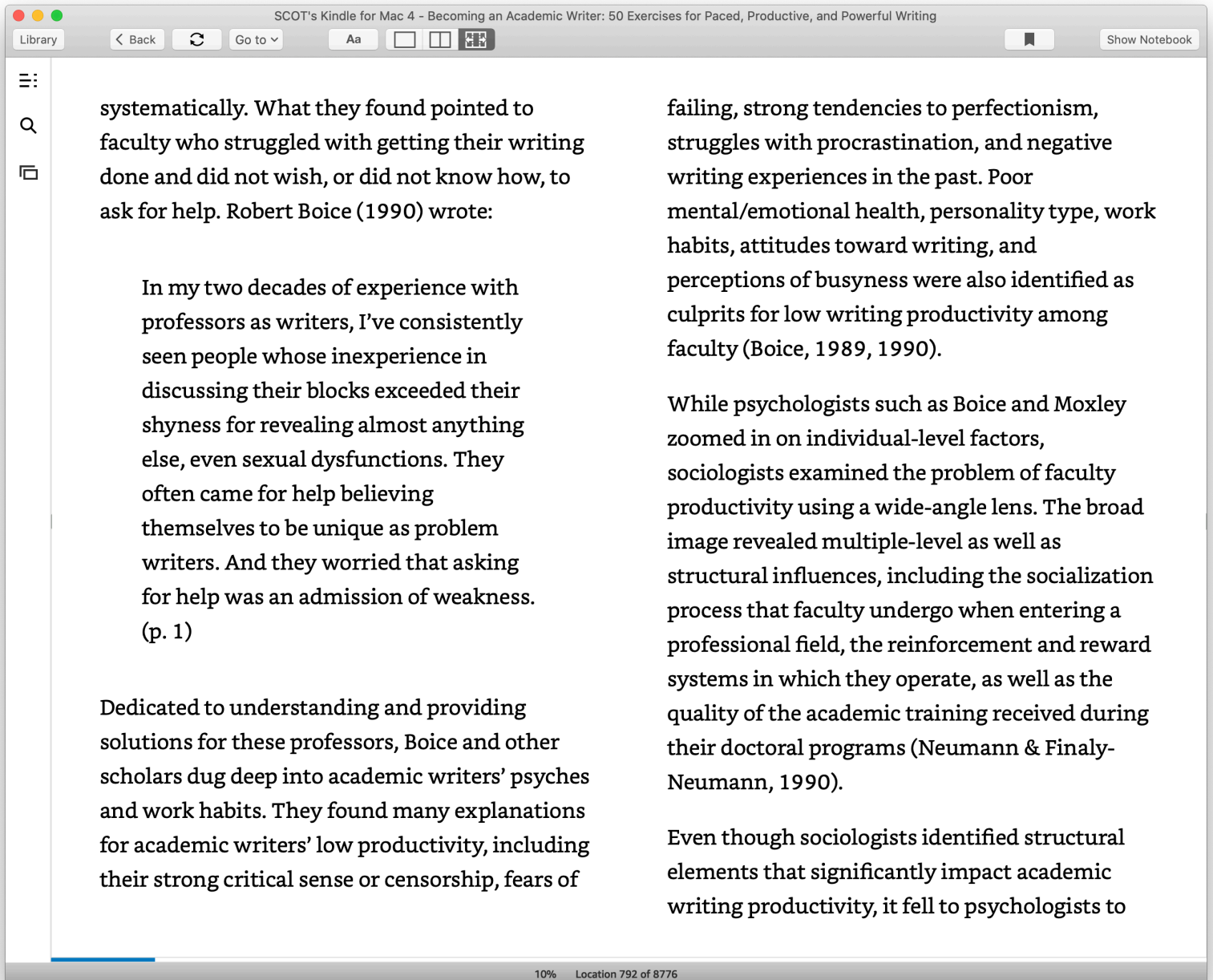
The POWER model is grounded in Peter Elbow's (1998) theory of the writing process. Elbow refers to the notion of *writing with power* as encompassing two meanings. The first meaning alludes to powerful texts—the writing we see in poetry, religious documents, and political manifestos—the kind of writing that touches people's hearts, moves their souls, and fills them with courage (Rosenblatt, 2011).

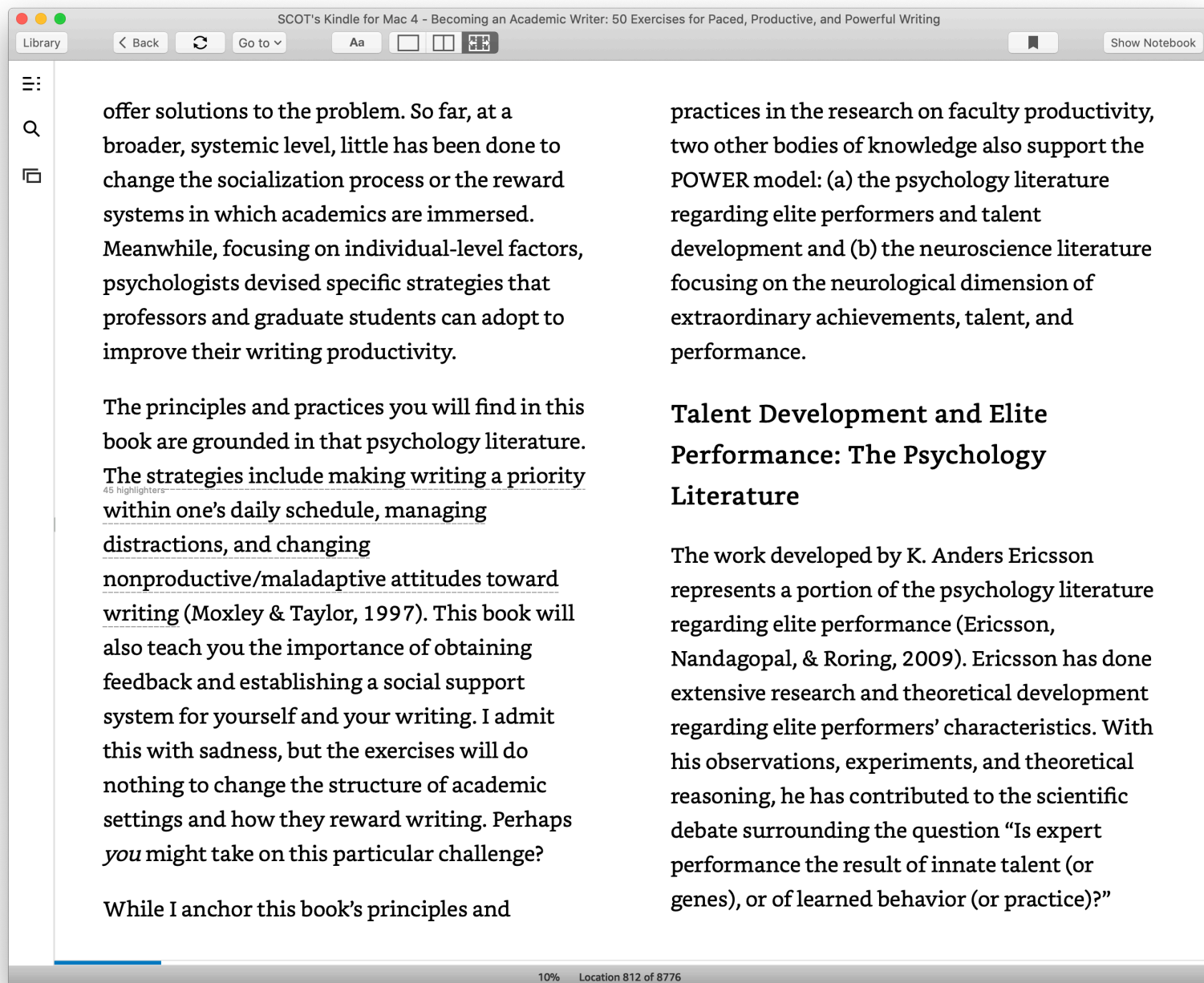
Yet anchoring this book is the *other* meaning in the phrase *writing with power*: the idea that the writer has control and power over his/her writing. Writing with power, as Elbow (1998) defined it, "means getting *power over yourself and over the writing process*: knowing what you are doing as you write; being in charge; having control; not feeling stuck or helpless or intimidated" (p. viii; emphasis added).

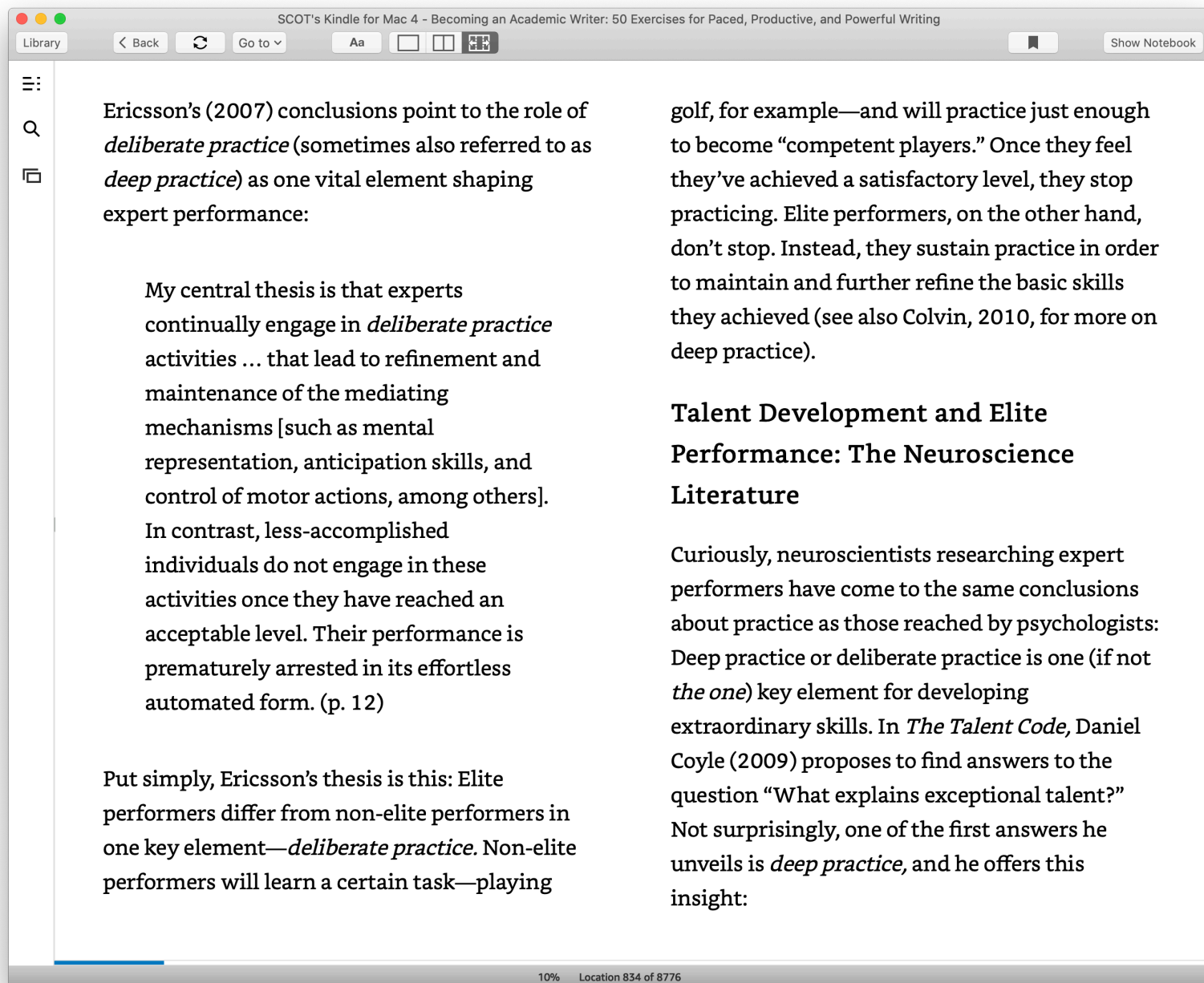
Peter Elbow's theoretical approach to writing—

in other words, his explanation for how good writing takes place (Goodson, 2010)—begins with the need to write badly, develops through the importance of sharing both early and late drafts, and results in gaining mastery over the writing, with the entire process becoming more pleasurable over time. According to Elbow (1998), when writers are comfortable generating initially messy texts, are eager to hear readers' reactions to what they wrote, and are motivated to rewrite their texts to incorporate these reactions, only *then* will they begin to enjoy the writing process and the power it engenders. In his words,

Once people have the feel of producing *some* words that were a pleasure to write and that make a dent on readers, they do better at putting in the enormous work needed to produce more of them. For really, the central question in writing (as with any difficult skill) is this: How can I get myself to put in the daunting time and effort I need for more







Ericsson's (2007) conclusions point to the role of *deliberate practice* (sometimes also referred to as *deep practice*) as one vital element shaping expert performance:

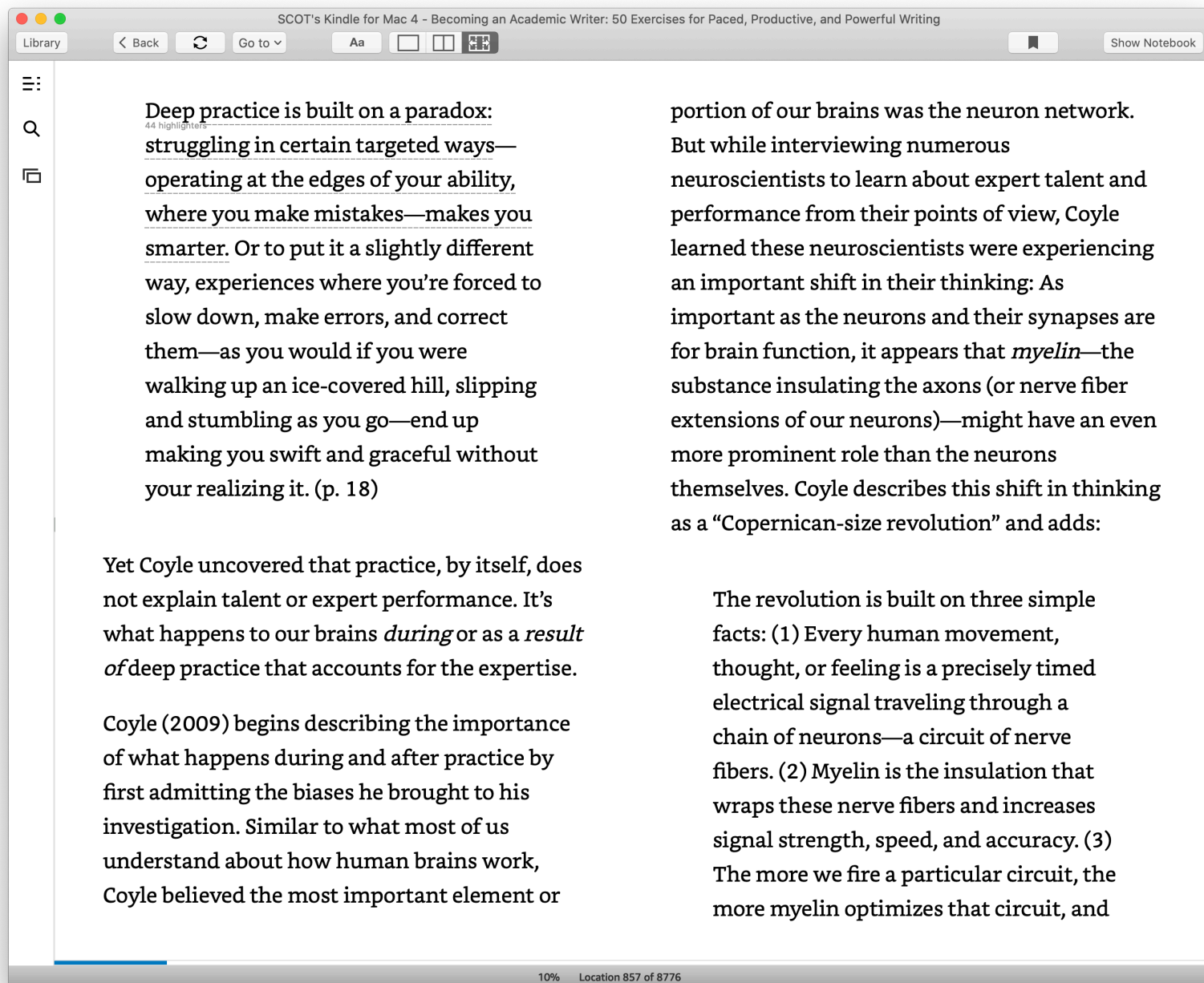
My central thesis is that experts continually engage in *deliberate practice* activities ... that lead to refinement and maintenance of the mediating mechanisms [such as mental representation, anticipation skills, and control of motor actions, among others]. In contrast, less-accomplished individuals do not engage in these activities once they have reached an acceptable level. Their performance is prematurely arrested in its effortless automated form. (p. 12)

Put simply, Ericsson's thesis is this: Elite performers differ from non-elite performers in one key element—*deliberate practice*. Non-elite performers will learn a certain task—playing

golf, for example—and will practice just enough to become “competent players.” Once they feel they’ve achieved a satisfactory level, they stop practicing. Elite performers, on the other hand, don’t stop. Instead, they sustain practice in order to maintain and further refine the basic skills they achieved (see also Colvin, 2010, for more on deep practice).

Talent Development and Elite Performance: The Neuroscience Literature

Curiously, neuroscientists researching expert performers have come to the same conclusions about practice as those reached by psychologists: Deep practice or deliberate practice is one (if not *the one*) key element for developing extraordinary skills. In *The Talent Code*, Daniel Coyle (2009) proposes to find answers to the question “What explains exceptional talent?” Not surprisingly, one of the first answers he unveils is *deep practice*, and he offers this insight:



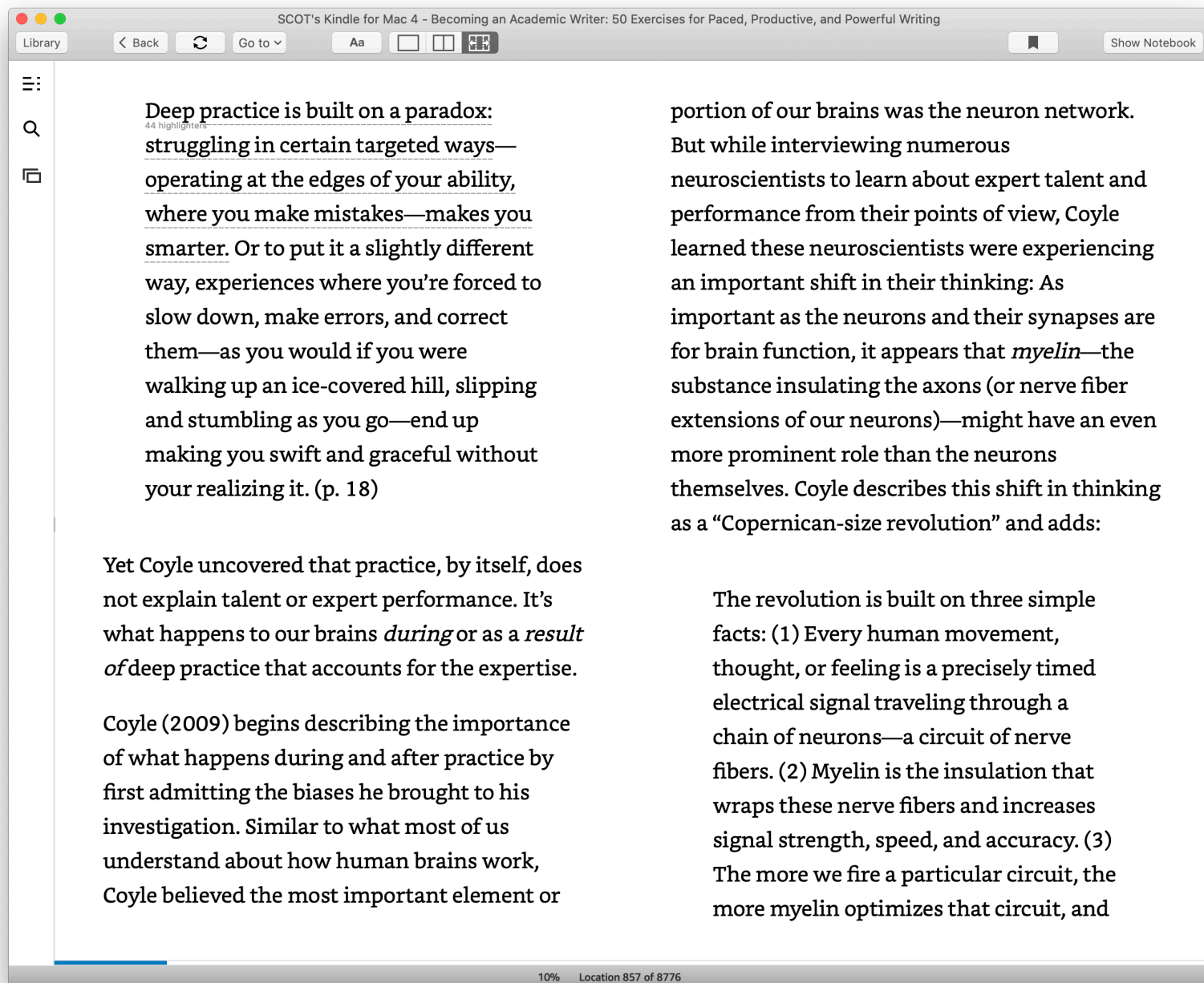
Deep practice is built on a paradox:
struggling in certain targeted ways—
operating at the edges of your ability,
where you make mistakes—makes you
smarter. Or to put it a slightly different
way, experiences where you're forced to
slow down, make errors, and correct
them—as you would if you were
walking up an ice-covered hill, slipping
and stumbling as you go—end up
making you swift and graceful without
your realizing it. (p. 18)

Yet Coyle uncovered that practice, by itself, does not explain talent or expert performance. It's what happens to our brains *during* or as a *result of* deep practice that accounts for the expertise.

Coyle (2009) begins describing the importance of what happens during and after practice by first admitting the biases he brought to his investigation. Similar to what most of us understand about how human brains work, Coyle believed the most important element or

portion of our brains was the neuron network. But while interviewing numerous neuroscientists to learn about expert talent and performance from their points of view, Coyle learned these neuroscientists were experiencing an important shift in their thinking: As important as the neurons and their synapses are for brain function, it appears that *myelin*—the substance insulating the axons (or nerve fiber extensions of our neurons)—might have an even more prominent role than the neurons themselves. Coyle describes this shift in thinking as a “Copernican-size revolution” and adds:

The revolution is built on three simple facts: (1) Every human movement, thought, or feeling is a precisely timed electrical signal traveling through a chain of neurons—a circuit of nerve fibers. (2) Myelin is the insulation that wraps these nerve fibers and increases signal strength, speed, and accuracy. (3) The more we fire a particular circuit, the more myelin optimizes that circuit, and



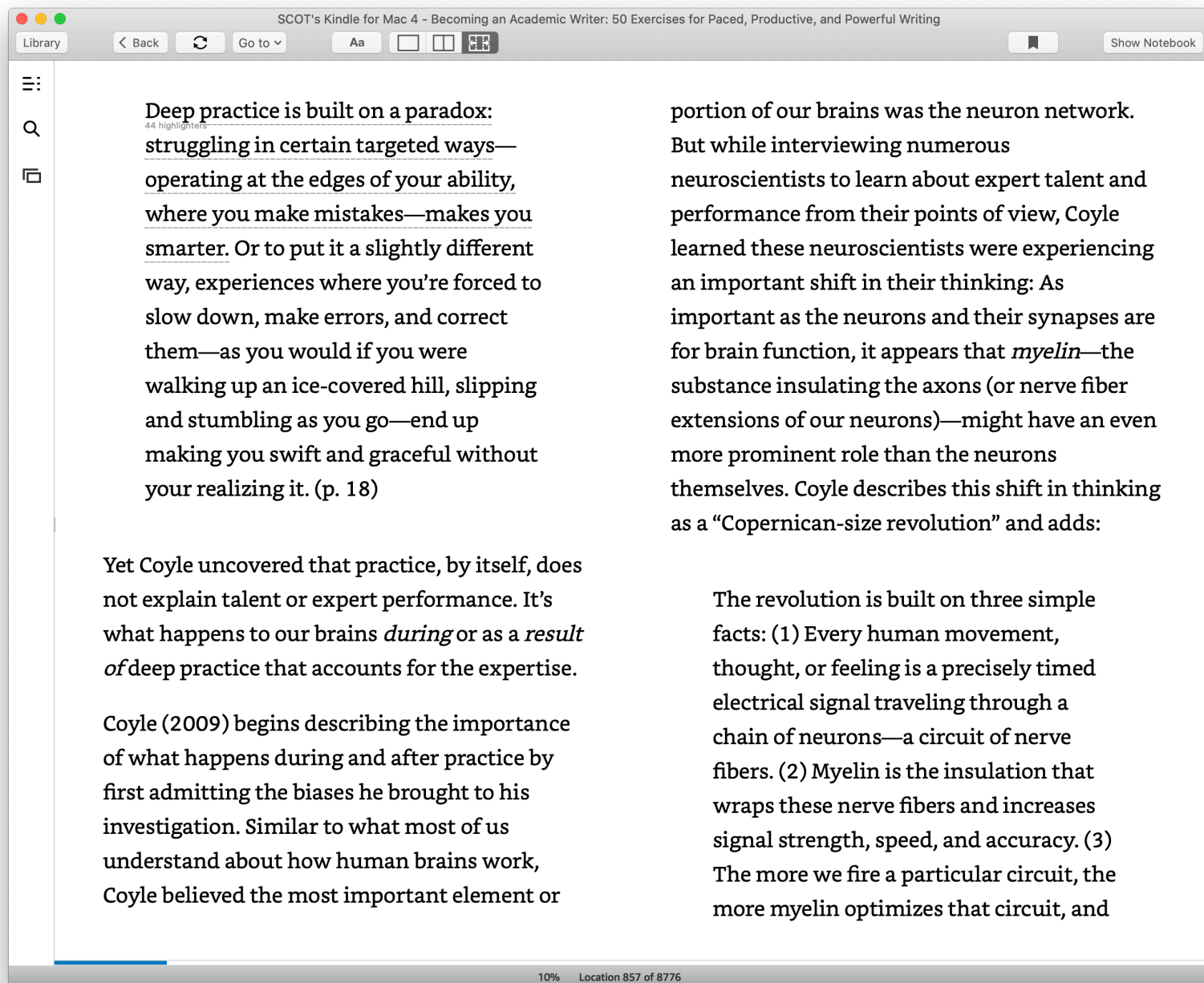
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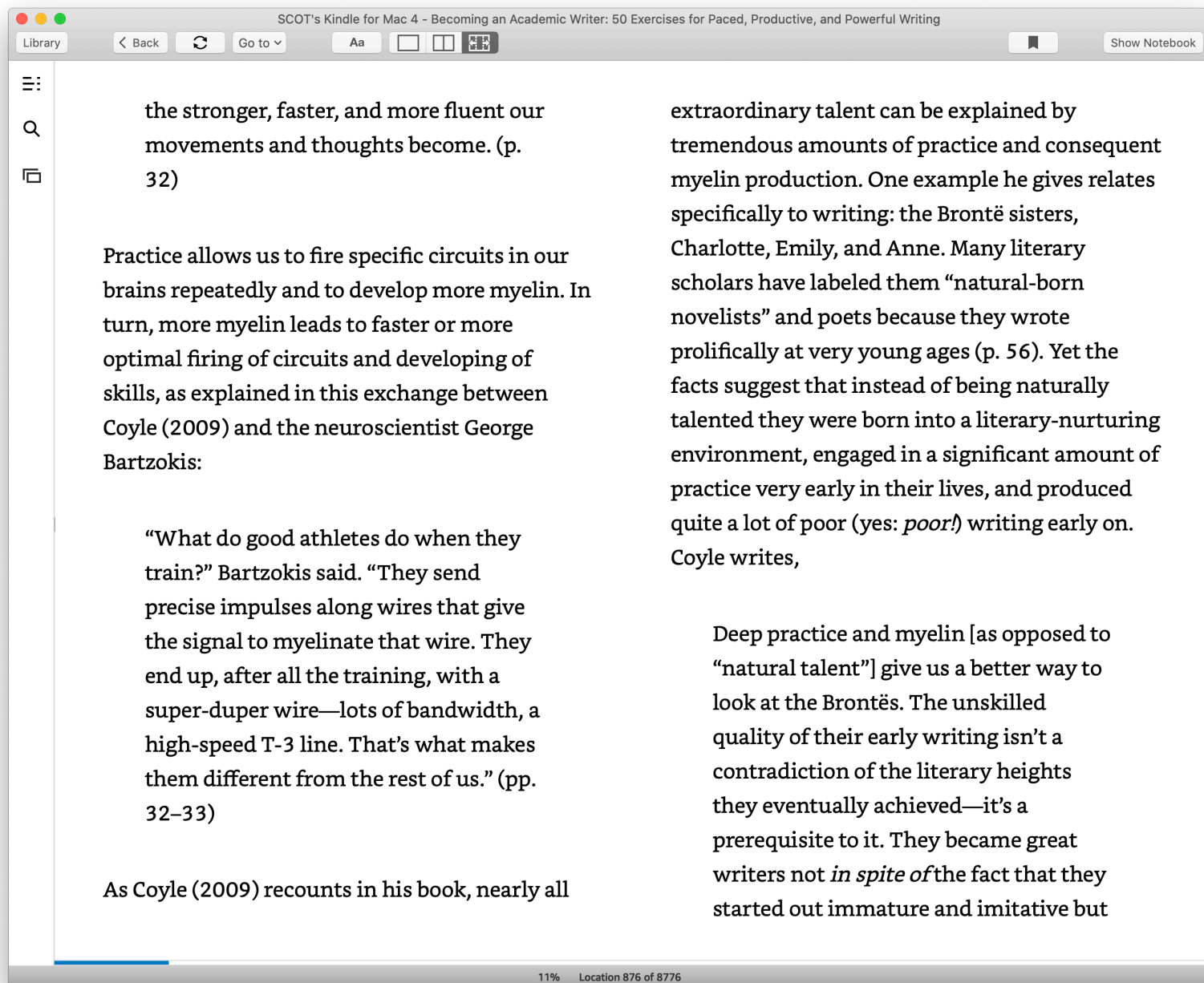
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the stronger, faster, and more fluent our movements and thoughts become. (p. 32)

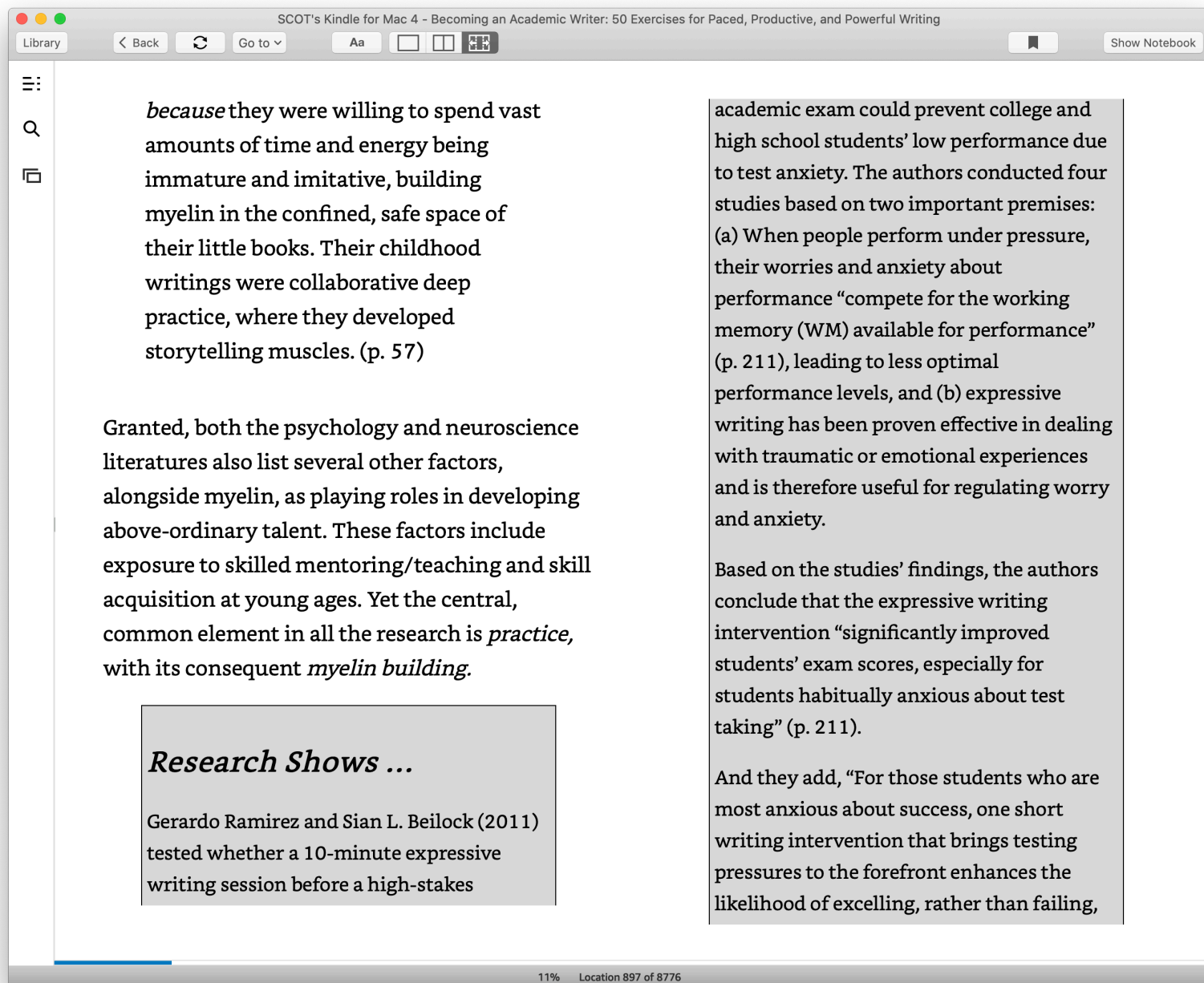
Practice allows us to fire specific circuits in our brains repeatedly and to develop more myelin. In turn, more myelin leads to faster or more optimal firing of circuits and developing of skills, as explained in this exchange between Coyle (2009) and the neuroscientist George Bartzokis:

“What do good athletes do when they train?” Bartzokis said. “They send precise impulses along wires that give the signal to myelinate that wire. They end up, after all the training, with a super-duper wire—lots of bandwidth, a high-speed T-3 line. That’s what makes them different from the rest of us.” (pp. 32–33)

As Coyle (2009) recounts in his book, nearly all

extraordinary talent can be explained by tremendous amounts of practice and consequent myelin production. One example he gives relates specifically to writing: the Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne. Many literary scholars have labeled them “natural-born novelists” and poets because they wrote prolifically at very young ages (p. 56). Yet the facts suggest that instead of being naturally talented they were born into a literary-nurturing environment, engaged in a significant amount of practice very early in their lives, and produced quite a lot of poor (yes: *poor!*) writing early on. Coyle writes,

Deep practice and myelin [as opposed to “natural talent”] give us a better way to look at the Brontës. The unskilled quality of their early writing isn’t a contradiction of the literary heights they eventually achieved—it’s a prerequisite to it. They became great writers not *in spite of* the fact that they started out immature and imitative but



because they were willing to spend vast amounts of time and energy being immature and imitative, building myelin in the confined, safe space of their little books. Their childhood writings were collaborative deep practice, where they developed storytelling muscles. (p. 57)

Granted, both the psychology and neuroscience literatures also list several other factors, alongside myelin, as playing roles in developing above-ordinary talent. These factors include exposure to skilled mentoring/teaching and skill acquisition at young ages. Yet the central, common element in all the research is *practice*, with its consequent *myelin building*.

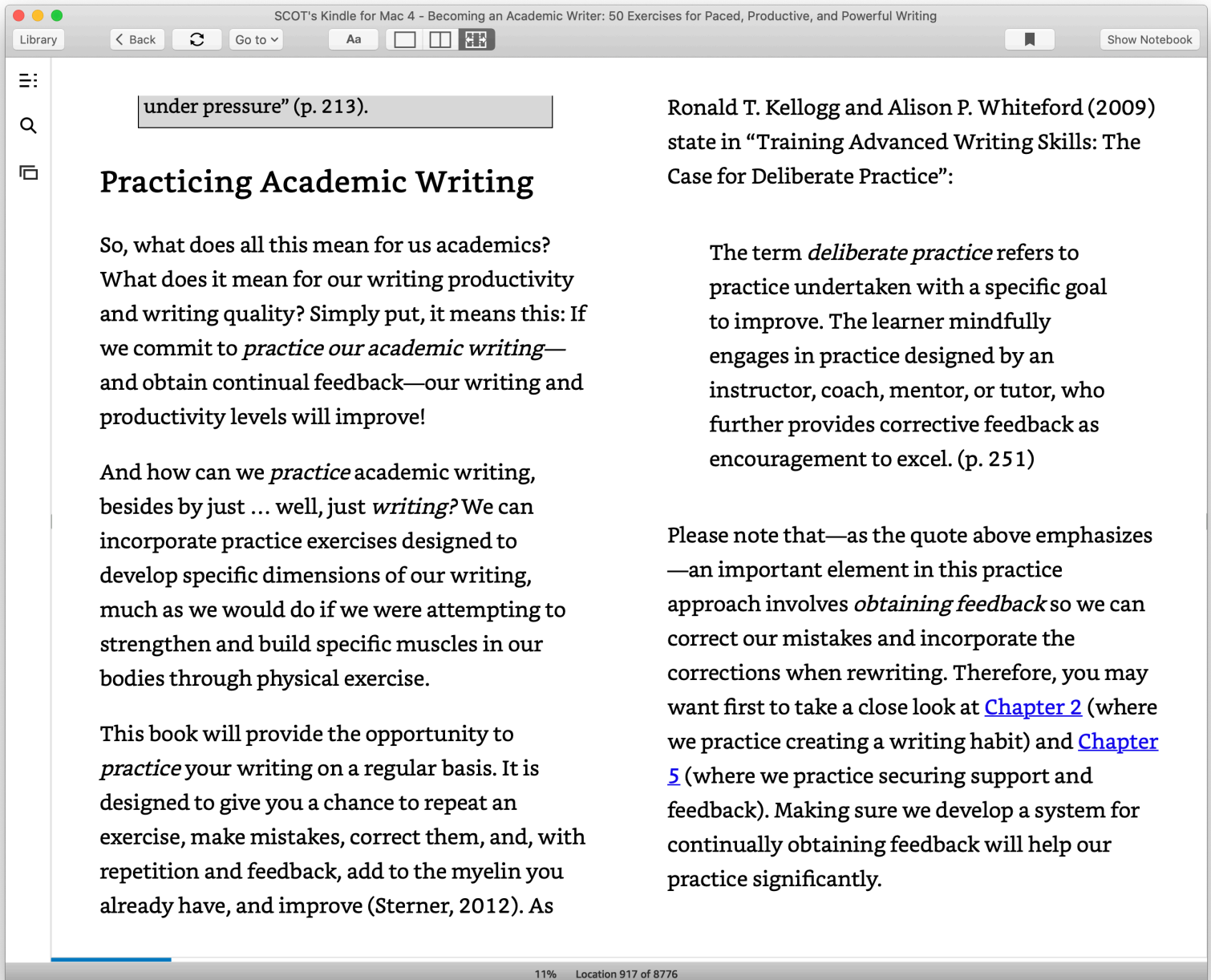
Research Shows ...

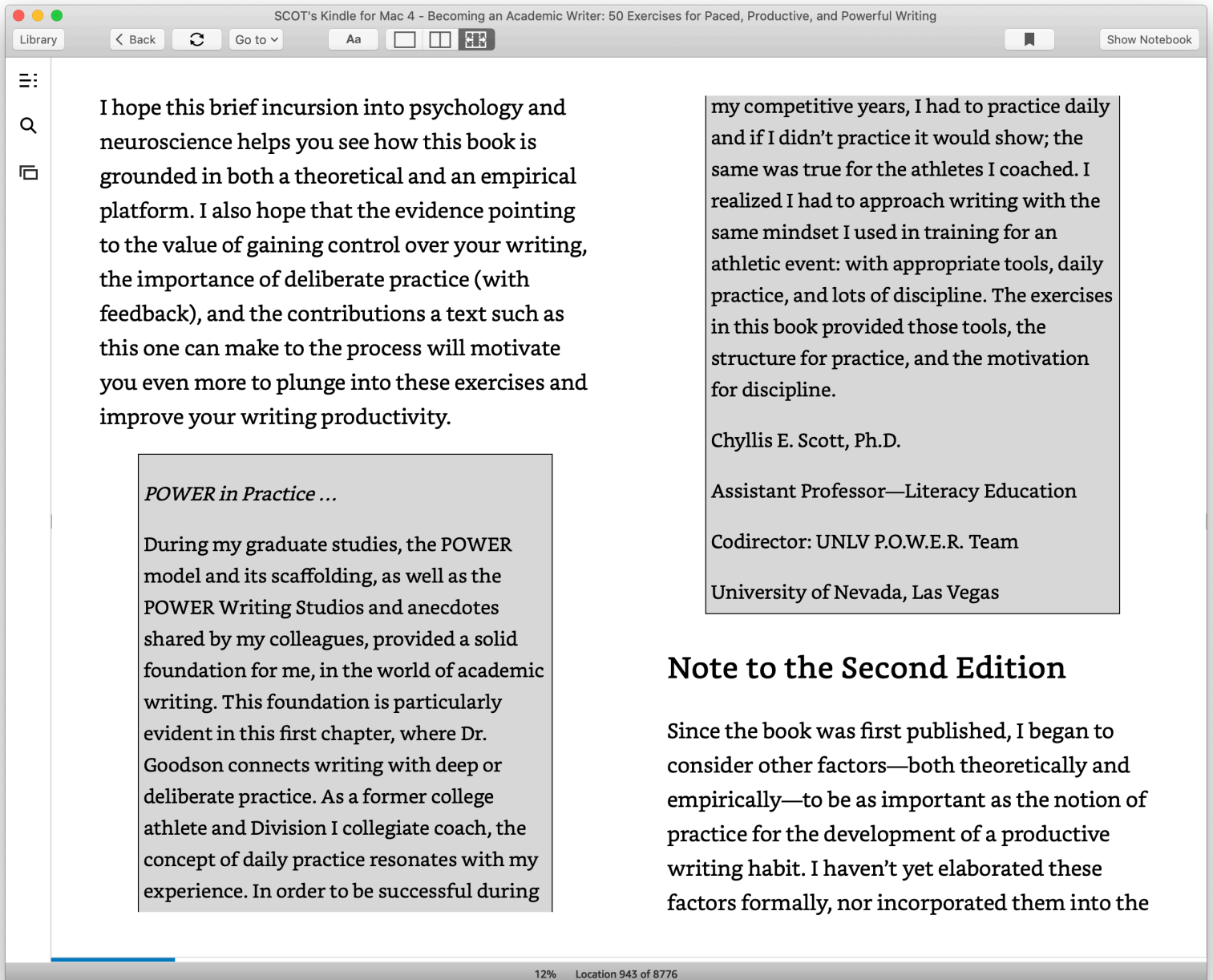
Gerardo Ramirez and Sian L. Beilock (2011) tested whether a 10-minute expressive writing session before a high-stakes

academic exam could prevent college and high school students' low performance due to test anxiety. The authors conducted four studies based on two important premises: (a) When people perform under pressure, their worries and anxiety about performance "compete for the working memory (WM) available for performance" (p. 211), leading to less optimal performance levels, and (b) expressive writing has been proven effective in dealing with traumatic or emotional experiences and is therefore useful for regulating worry and anxiety.

Based on the studies' findings, the authors conclude that the expressive writing intervention "significantly improved students' exam scores, especially for students habitually anxious about test taking" (p. 211).

And they add, "For those students who are most anxious about success, one short writing intervention that brings testing pressures to the forefront enhances the likelihood of excelling, rather than failing,





I hope this brief incursion into psychology and neuroscience helps you see how this book is grounded in both a theoretical and an empirical platform. I also hope that the evidence pointing to the value of gaining control over your writing, the importance of deliberate practice (with feedback), and the contributions a text such as this one can make to the process will motivate you even more to plunge into these exercises and improve your writing productivity.

POWER in Practice ...

During my graduate studies, the POWER model and its scaffolding, as well as the POWER Writing Studios and anecdotes shared by my colleagues, provided a solid foundation for me, in the world of academic writing. This foundation is particularly evident in this first chapter, where Dr. Goodson connects writing with deep or deliberate practice. As a former college athlete and Division I collegiate coach, the concept of daily practice resonates with my experience. In order to be successful during

my competitive years, I had to practice daily and if I didn't practice it would show; the same was true for the athletes I coached. I realized I had to approach writing with the same mindset I used in training for an athletic event: with appropriate tools, daily practice, and lots of discipline. The exercises in this book provided those tools, the structure for practice, and the motivation for discipline.

Chyllis E. Scott, Ph.D.

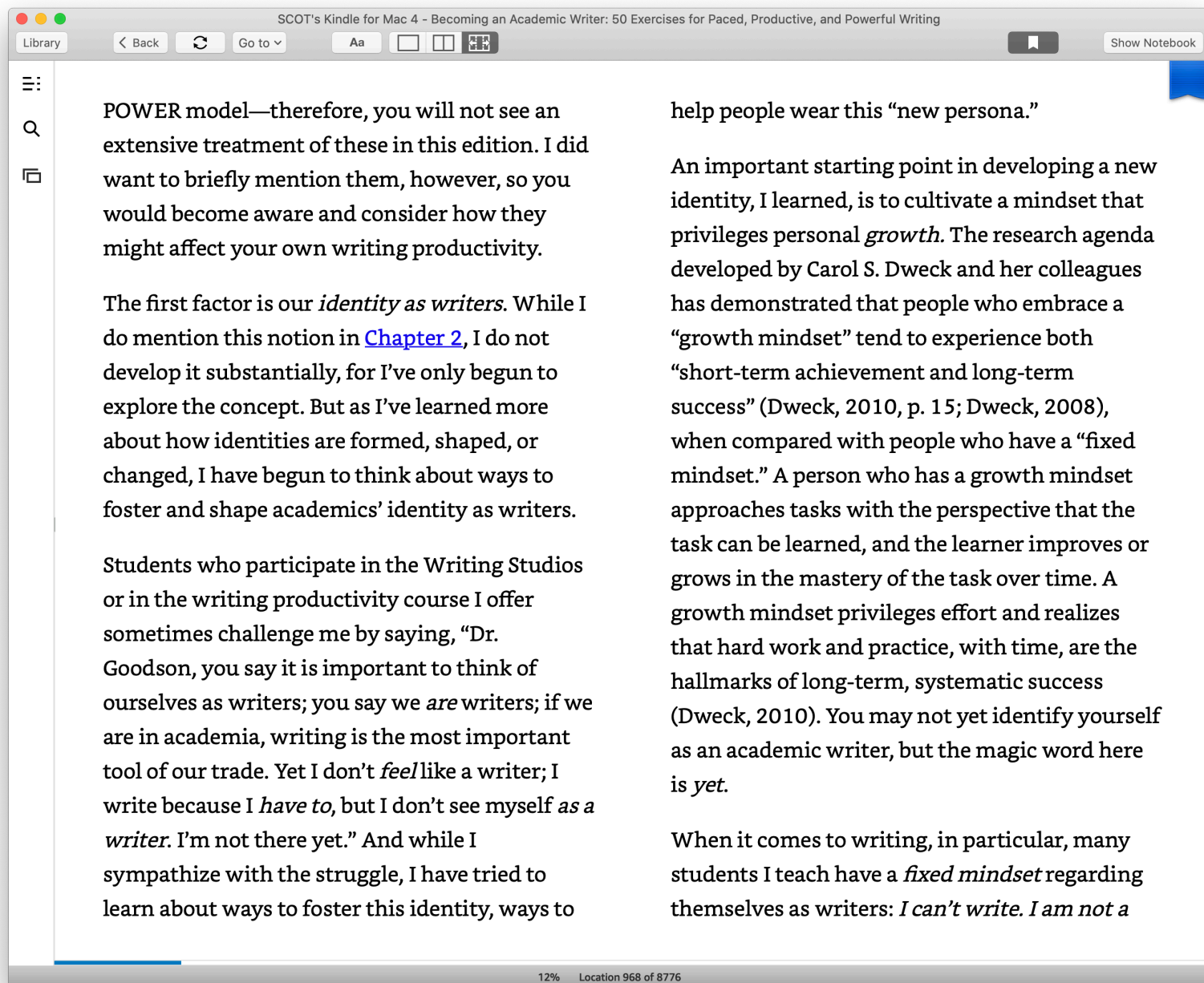
Assistant Professor—Literacy Education

Codirector: UNLV P.O.W.E.R. Team

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Note to the Second Edition

Since the book was first published, I began to consider other factors—both theoretically and empirically—to be as important as the notion of practice for the development of a productive writing habit. I haven't yet elaborated these factors formally, nor incorporated them into the



POWER model—therefore, you will not see an extensive treatment of these in this edition. I did want to briefly mention them, however, so you would become aware and consider how they might affect your own writing productivity.

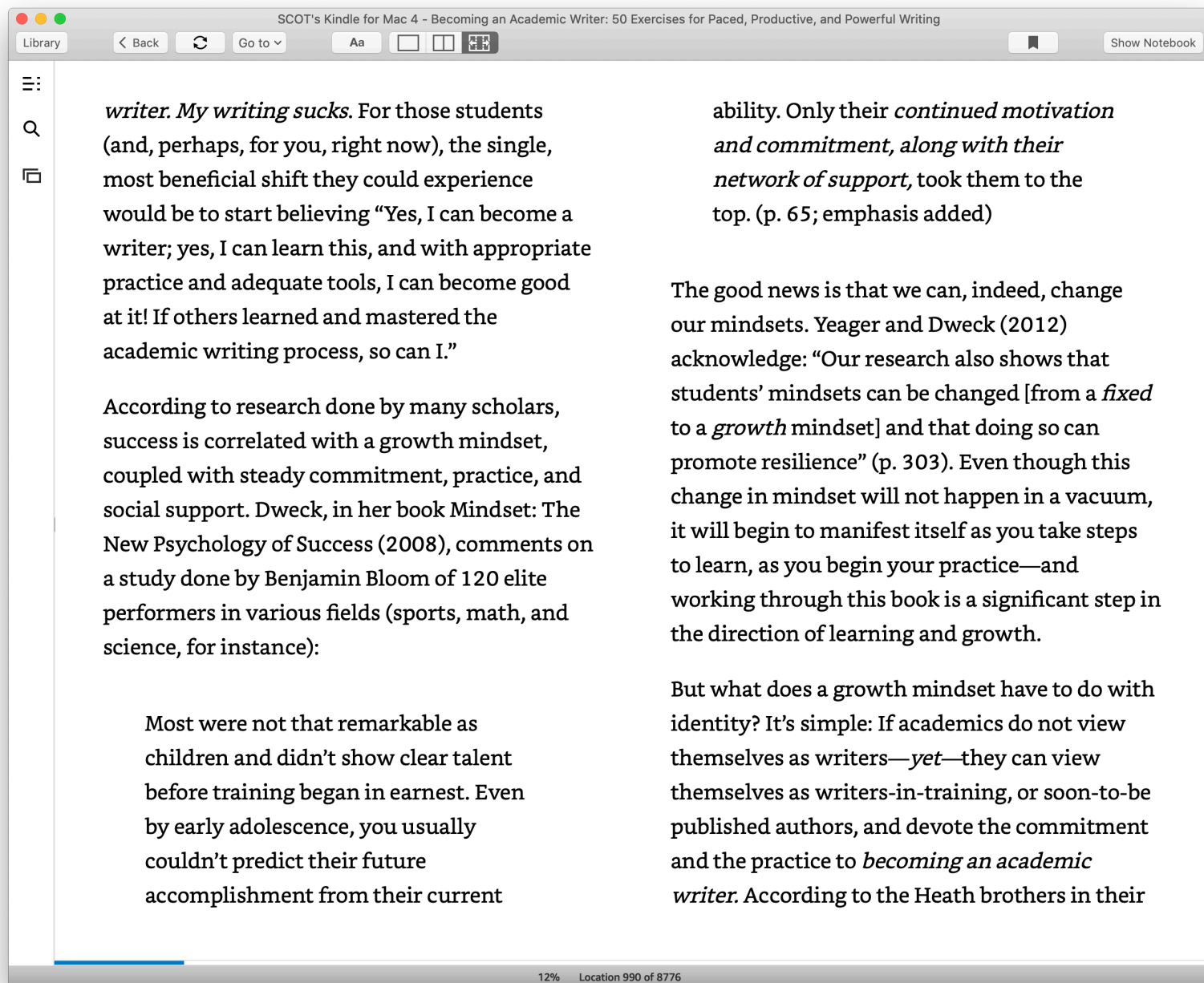
The first factor is our *identity as writers*. While I do mention this notion in [Chapter 2](#), I do not develop it substantially, for I've only begun to explore the concept. But as I've learned more about how identities are formed, shaped, or changed, I have begun to think about ways to foster and shape academics' identity as writers.

Students who participate in the Writing Studios or in the writing productivity course I offer sometimes challenge me by saying, "Dr. Goodson, you say it is important to think of ourselves as writers; you say we *are* writers; if we are in academia, writing is the most important tool of our trade. Yet I don't *feel* like a writer; I write because I *have to*, but I don't see myself *as a writer*. I'm not there yet." And while I sympathize with the struggle, I have tried to learn about ways to foster this identity, ways to

help people wear this "new persona."

An important starting point in developing a new identity, I learned, is to cultivate a mindset that privileges personal *growth*. The research agenda developed by Carol S. Dweck and her colleagues has demonstrated that people who embrace a "growth mindset" tend to experience both "short-term achievement and long-term success" (Dweck, 2010, p. 15; Dweck, 2008), when compared with people who have a "fixed mindset." A person who has a growth mindset approaches tasks with the perspective that the task can be learned, and the learner improves or grows in the mastery of the task over time. A growth mindset privileges effort and realizes that hard work and practice, with time, are the hallmarks of long-term, systematic success (Dweck, 2010). You may not yet identify yourself as an academic writer, but the magic word here is *yet*.

When it comes to writing, in particular, many students I teach have a *fixed mindset* regarding themselves as writers: *I can't write. I am not a*



writer. My writing sucks. For those students (and, perhaps, for you, right now), the single, most beneficial shift they could experience would be to start believing “Yes, I can become a writer; yes, I can learn this, and with appropriate practice and adequate tools, I can become good at it! If others learned and mastered the academic writing process, so can I.”

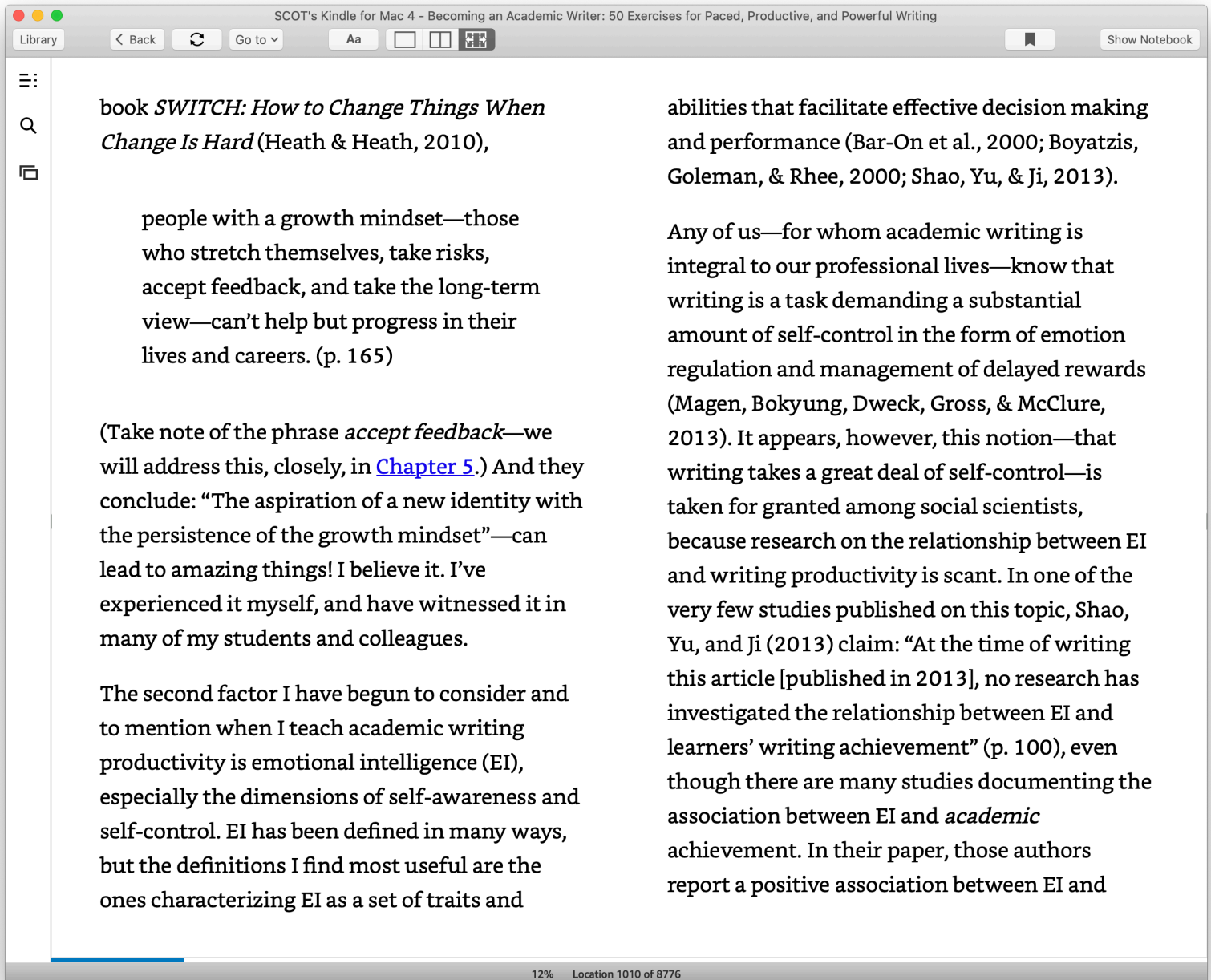
According to research done by many scholars, success is correlated with a growth mindset, coupled with steady commitment, practice, and social support. Dweck, in her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2008), comments on a study done by Benjamin Bloom of 120 elite performers in various fields (sports, math, and science, for instance):

Most were not that remarkable as children and didn’t show clear talent before training began in earnest. Even by early adolescence, you usually couldn’t predict their future accomplishment from their current

ability. Only their *continued motivation and commitment, along with their network of support*, took them to the top. (p. 65; emphasis added)

The good news is that we can, indeed, change our mindsets. Yeager and Dweck (2012) acknowledge: “Our research also shows that students’ mindsets can be changed [from a *fixed* to a *growth* mindset] and that doing so can promote resilience” (p. 303). Even though this change in mindset will not happen in a vacuum, it will begin to manifest itself as you take steps to learn, as you begin your practice—and working through this book is a significant step in the direction of learning and growth.

But what does a growth mindset have to do with identity? It’s simple: If academics do not view themselves as writers—*yet*—they can view themselves as writers-in-training, or soon-to-be published authors, and devote the commitment and the practice to *becoming an academic writer*. According to the Heath brothers in their



book *SWITCH: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* (Heath & Heath, 2010),

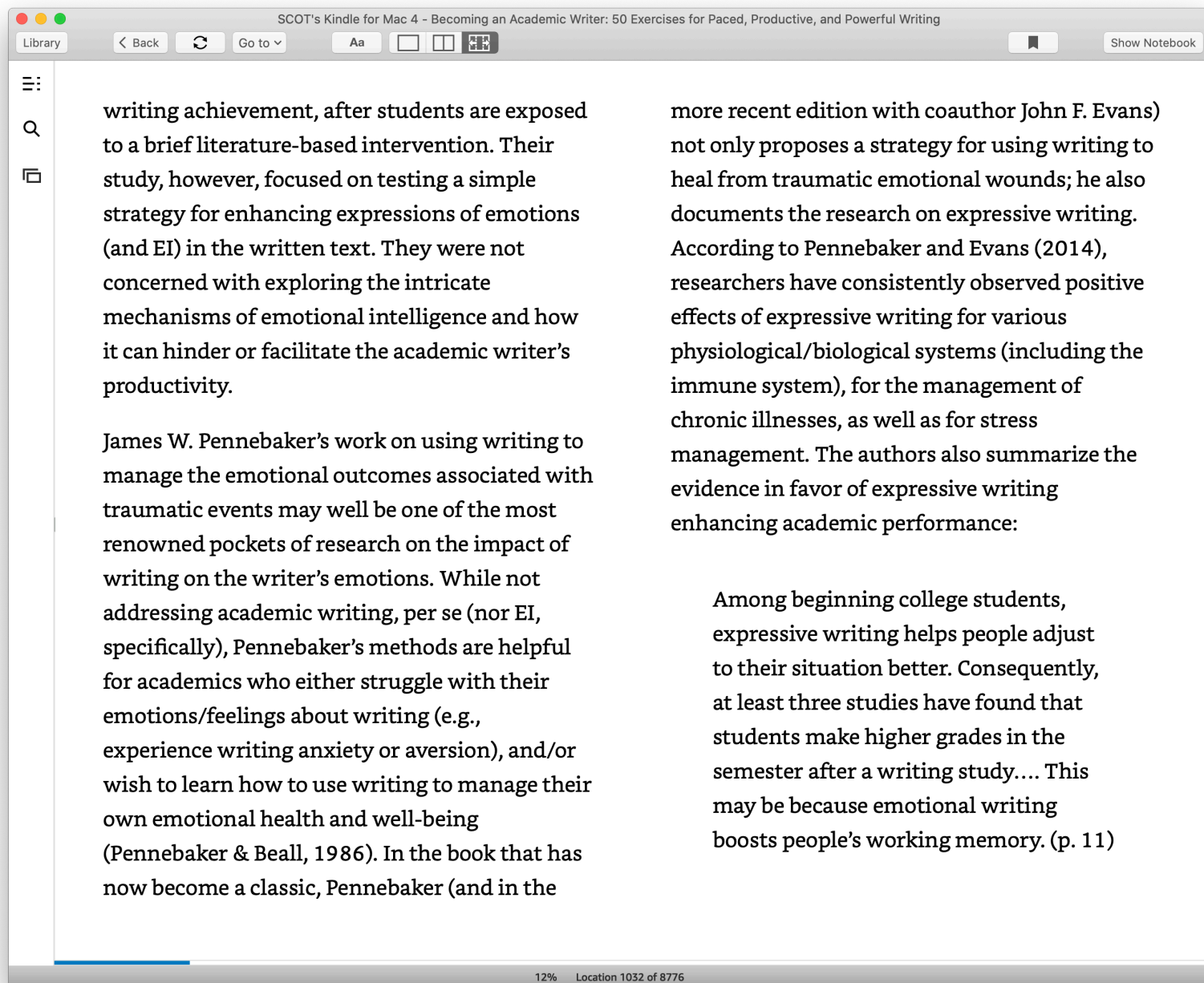
people with a growth mindset—those who stretch themselves, take risks, accept feedback, and take the long-term view—can't help but progress in their lives and careers. (p. 165)

(Take note of the phrase *accept feedback*—we will address this, closely, in [Chapter 5](#).) And they conclude: “The aspiration of a new identity with the persistence of the growth mindset”—can lead to amazing things! I believe it. I’ve experienced it myself, and have witnessed it in many of my students and colleagues.

The second factor I have begun to consider and to mention when I teach academic writing productivity is emotional intelligence (EI), especially the dimensions of self-awareness and self-control. EI has been defined in many ways, but the definitions I find most useful are the ones characterizing EI as a set of traits and

abilities that facilitate effective decision making and performance (Bar-On et al., 2000; Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000; Shao, Yu, & Ji, 2013).

Any of us—for whom academic writing is integral to our professional lives—know that writing is a task demanding a substantial amount of self-control in the form of emotion regulation and management of delayed rewards (Magen, Bokyoung, Dweck, Gross, & McClure, 2013). It appears, however, this notion—that writing takes a great deal of self-control—is taken for granted among social scientists, because research on the relationship between EI and writing productivity is scant. In one of the very few studies published on this topic, Shao, Yu, and Ji (2013) claim: “At the time of writing this article [published in 2013], no research has investigated the relationship between EI and learners’ writing achievement” (p. 100), even though there are many studies documenting the association between EI and *academic* achievement. In their paper, those authors report a positive association between EI and

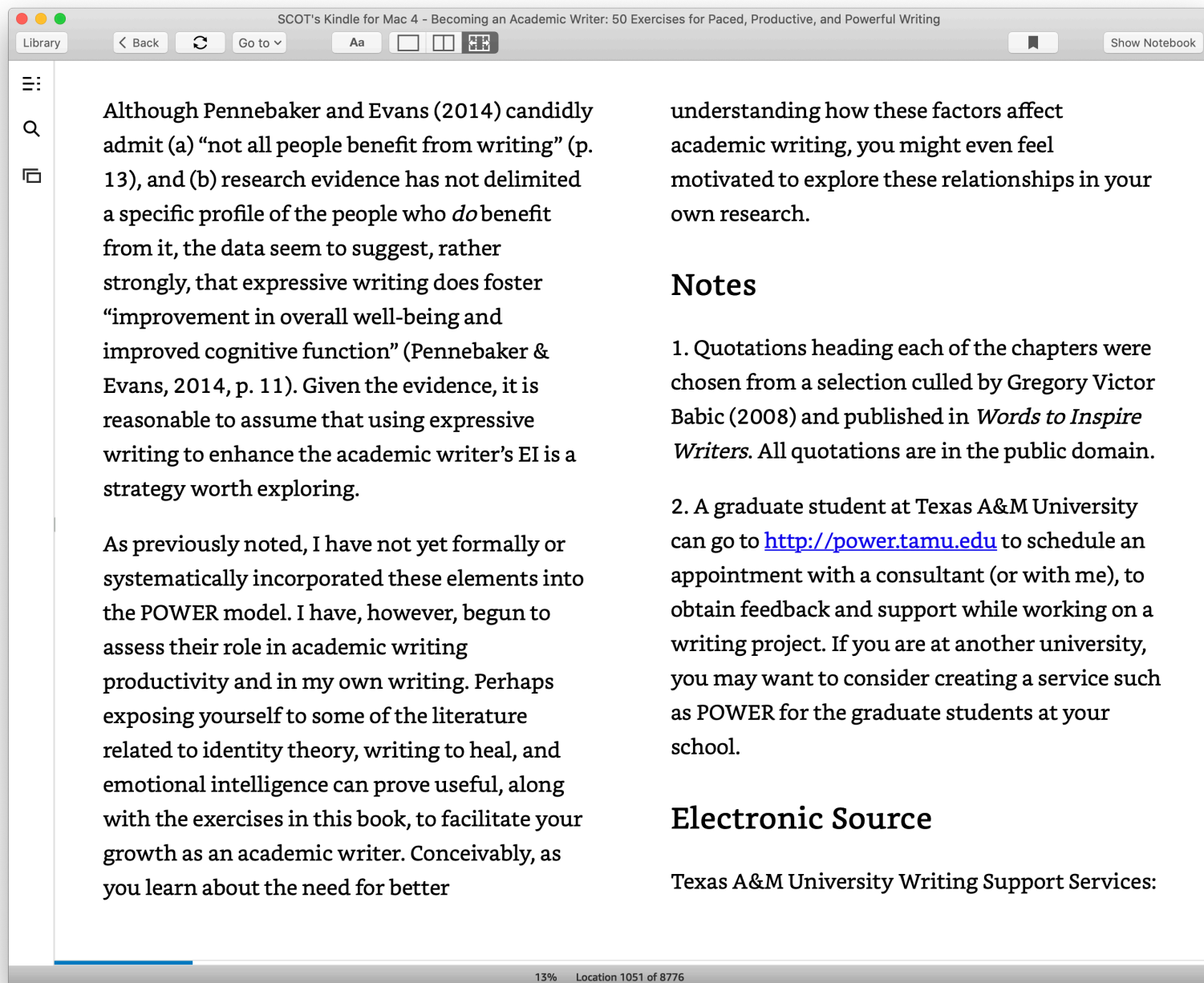


writing achievement, after students are exposed to a brief literature-based intervention. Their study, however, focused on testing a simple strategy for enhancing expressions of emotions (and EI) in the written text. They were not concerned with exploring the intricate mechanisms of emotional intelligence and how it can hinder or facilitate the academic writer's productivity.

James W. Pennebaker's work on using writing to manage the emotional outcomes associated with traumatic events may well be one of the most renowned pockets of research on the impact of writing on the writer's emotions. While not addressing academic writing, per se (nor EI, specifically), Pennebaker's methods are helpful for academics who either struggle with their emotions/feelings about writing (e.g., experience writing anxiety or aversion), and/or wish to learn how to use writing to manage their own emotional health and well-being (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). In the book that has now become a classic, Pennebaker (and in the

more recent edition with coauthor John F. Evans) not only proposes a strategy for using writing to heal from traumatic emotional wounds; he also documents the research on expressive writing. According to Pennebaker and Evans (2014), researchers have consistently observed positive effects of expressive writing for various physiological/biological systems (including the immune system), for the management of chronic illnesses, as well as for stress management. The authors also summarize the evidence in favor of expressive writing enhancing academic performance:

Among beginning college students, expressive writing helps people adjust to their situation better. Consequently, at least three studies have found that students make higher grades in the semester after a writing study.... This may be because emotional writing boosts people's working memory. (p. 11)



Although Pennebaker and Evans (2014) candidly admit (a) “not all people benefit from writing” (p. 13), and (b) research evidence has not delimited a specific profile of the people who *do* benefit from it, the data seem to suggest, rather strongly, that expressive writing does foster “improvement in overall well-being and improved cognitive function” (Pennebaker & Evans, 2014, p. 11). Given the evidence, it is reasonable to assume that using expressive writing to enhance the academic writer’s EI is a strategy worth exploring.

As previously noted, I have not yet formally or systematically incorporated these elements into the POWER model. I have, however, begun to assess their role in academic writing productivity and in my own writing. Perhaps exposing yourself to some of the literature related to identity theory, writing to heal, and emotional intelligence can prove useful, along with the exercises in this book, to facilitate your growth as an academic writer. Conceivably, as you learn about the need for better

understanding how these factors affect academic writing, you might even feel motivated to explore these relationships in your own research.

Notes

1. Quotations heading each of the chapters were chosen from a selection culled by Gregory Victor Babic (2008) and published in *Words to Inspire Writers*. All quotations are in the public domain.
2. A graduate student at Texas A&M University can go to <http://power.tamu.edu> to schedule an appointment with a consultant (or with me), to obtain feedback and support while working on a writing project. If you are at another university, you may want to consider creating a service such as POWER for the graduate students at your school.

Electronic Source

Texas A&M University Writing Support Services:



<http://power.tamu.edu>

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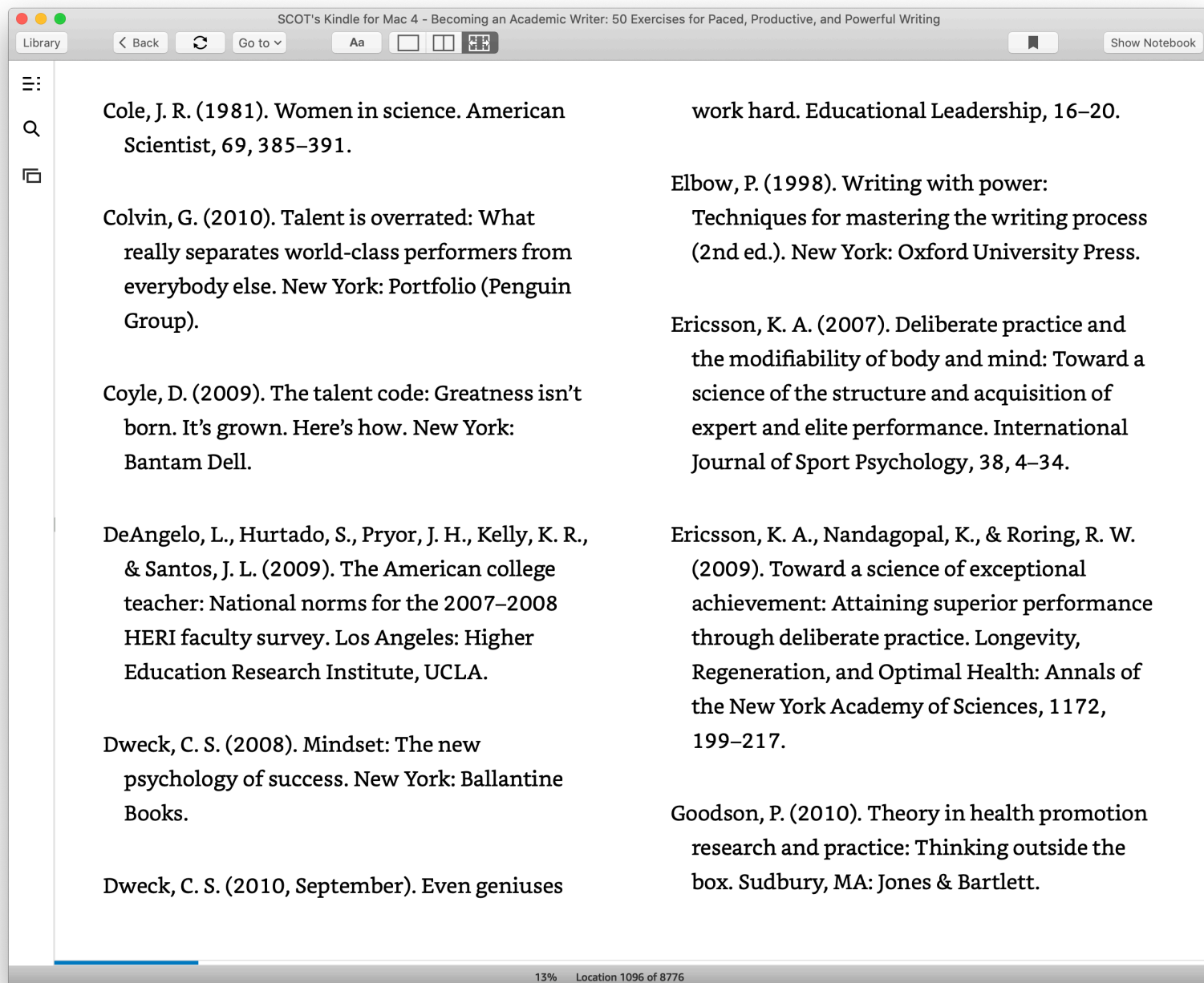
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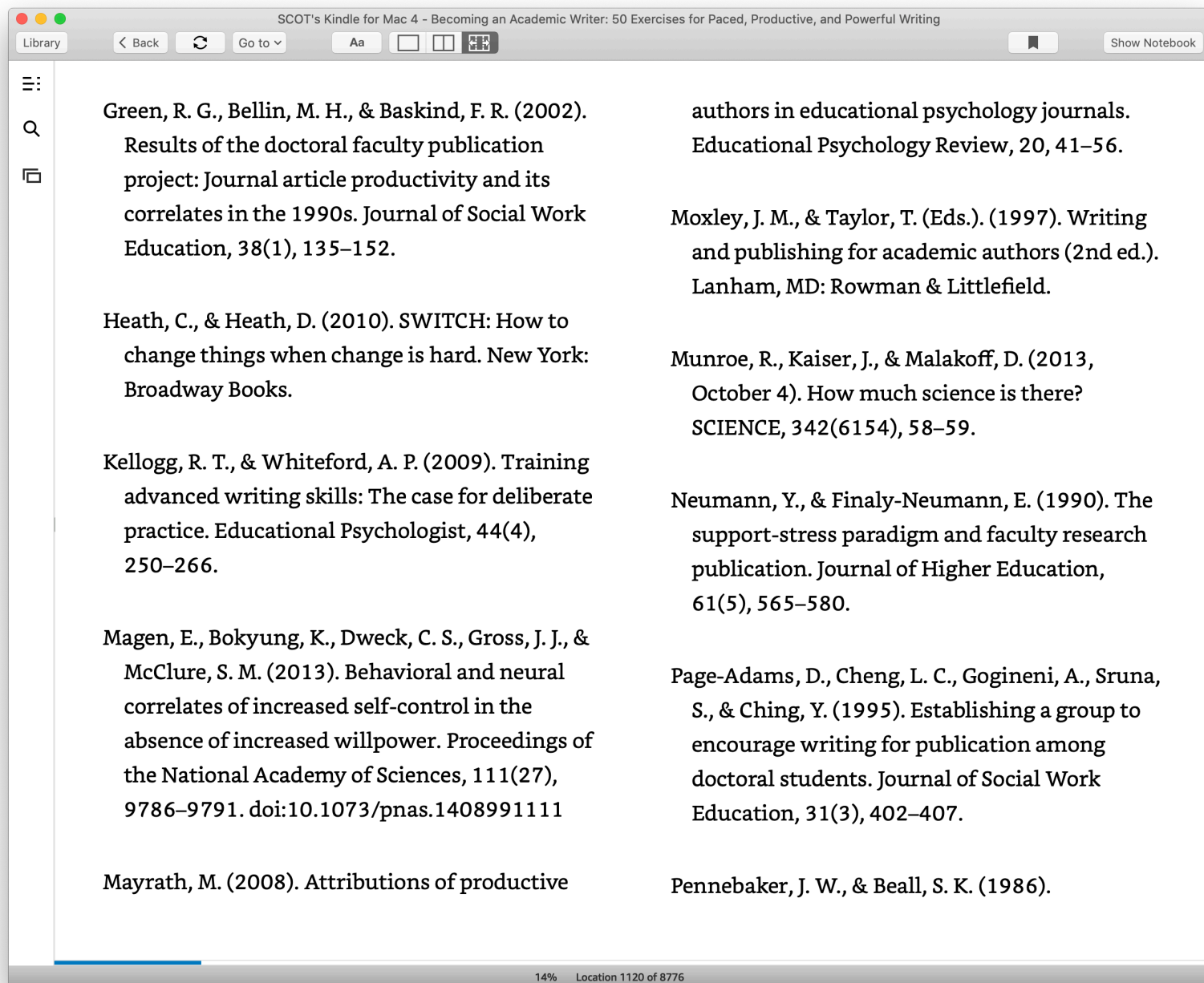
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Chapter One—Main Points in One Page

1. The POWER Model (Promoting Outstanding Writing for Excellence in Research) combines certain behavioral *principles* with specific *practices* to help you master and become comfortable with your writing.
2. The POWER model and the exercises in this book build on the theoretical perspective offered by Peter Elbow, emphasizing the value of initially messy writing, the need for practice, and the importance of feedback.
3. Evidence from three areas of knowledge anchors the principles and strategies in this book: (a) research on faculty productivity, (b) the psychology literature regarding elite performers and talent development, and (c) the neuroscience literature focusing on the neurological dimension of extraordinary achievements, talent, and performance.
4. Research evidence points to *deep* or *deliberate practice* as one (if not *the* one) key element for developing extraordinary skills. Therefore, if we commit to *practice our academic writing*—and obtain continual feedback—our writing and productivity levels will improve.

