

You never know when and where inspiration will strike. Last week I was enjoying an Indigo Girls concert at the Englert Theater when a lyric I've heard dozens of times spoke to me in a new way: "The hardest to learn was the least complicated."

That line collided with some thoughts I've been having lately about "slow science" and the need to give ourselves the time to focus on curiosity rather than productivity.

Science is a creative, intellectual endeavor that enables us to understand the world. But we have to stop and listen. We can't always be in a mad rush for the next set of data.

Why is it so hard to learn that sitting still with our thoughts has value, even if it can't be measured on a CV? It's truly the least complicated thing we can do.

"Slow science" doesn't mean doing all the same things at a slower pace. It's really about "creating conditions that allow vital aspects of research to flourish: space to ask new questions, to uncover and reconsider assumptions, to doubt," as Jan Willem Duyvendak, director of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, explained in a [2019 speech](#).

It's clearly not a new idea or a fad, but it's an idea that is hard to implement when so much of our world is focused on measurement and output.

I wonder whether the paradigm shift in publishing with bioRxiv and other pre-print options might be a key to supporting slow science. By putting our unpublished work out for evaluation, we open a dialogue about next steps and can consider many possible angles rather than charging full speed ahead on one path.

For trainees, taking the time to learn how to think about problems and ask insightful questions should carry as much value as learning techniques at the bench. You might need the technique to answer the question, but the techniques don't matter if they aren't driving toward insight. As educators, we need to be thinking about alternative ways of assessing these skills.

Maybe it all boils down to three words that have stuck with me from the pioneering neuroscientist Eve Marder of Brandeis University closing a conference session on computational neuroscience a few years ago: "Stop. And think."

Ted

