

Writer's Toolkit



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First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

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I

Part One

Tools For Writers

1

Introduction

Every professional has tools specific to their trade.

Plumbers have wrenches, electricians have wire strippers, and doctors have stethoscopes. Even artists have brushes, paint, and canvas that help them create masterpieces. These tools are essential for them to perform their tasks efficiently and effectively.

But when it comes to writing, many writers don't consider the importance of having tools in their arsenal. They think all they need is a pen and paper or a laptop, and they can write anything they want. However, writing is a craft that requires precision, creativity, and discipline. It's not just about putting words on paper, but it's about crafting a story, engaging your readers, and getting your message across. And to do that, you need the right tools.

A writer's toolkit is a collection of tools, resources, and techniques that help them write better and be more productive. These tools can be mental, such as the writer's 'why', and her mindset, or physical, such as a good-quality pen, a comfortable chair, or a quiet writing space. Or they can be digital, such as writing software, grammar checkers, and online research tools.

Unfortunately, many writers don't take advantage of these tools, and

as a result, they struggle to write or produce mediocre work. But by incorporating the right tools into your writing process, you can improve your craft, streamline your workflow, and ultimately produce better writing.

So, what tools should you have in your toolkit?
Let's find out.

* * *

My Story

Four years ago, I quit my six-figure job to become a full-time writer.

I became a writer not because I was good at writing, but because I sucked at it.

Years ago, during a performance appraisal, my boss told me that my written English was the only thing standing between me and an executive position.

Rather than getting disheartened, I accepted the challenge and took up writing as a hobby. But rather than concentrating on business writing, I enrolled in a life story writing course and started writing stories from everyday life. For the next twenty-plus years, I learned a lot.

This book is the essence of all that worked for me to become a writer.

2

Your Why

Your first tool as a writer is your ‘why.’

Writing is hard. You cannot sustain it without a ‘why.’

And it has to be a right ‘why.’

If your ‘why’ is to make money, or gain fame, you might as well give it up. Because you will not receive either of those. But if you have the right ‘why,’ both money and fame will be the byproducts. By that time, you will not care for either of those.

Let’s have a look at some whys.

1. Write to find comfort.

Life is hard and written words provide relief.

Some of us discover very early in our lives that books can give solace when nothing else can. There comes a time when just reading can’t carry us through, and it is then we discover writing.

When Isabel Allende’s daughter died after being in a coma for several months, she couldn’t handle the grief. For months, she started in a vacuum, not knowing how to come out of this hole until her mother gave her a pen, a pad, and an ultimatum.

My daughter, Paula, died on December 6, 1992. On January 7, 1993, my mother said, "Tomorrow is January eight. If you don't write, you're going to die."

She gave me the 180 letters I'd written to her while Paula was in a coma, and then she went to Macy's. When my mother came back six hours later, I was in a pool of tears, but I'd written the first pages of [Paula](#). — Isabel Allende in [Why We Write?](#)

2. Write because it is who you are.

Everyone sees the world differently. Writers see the world in words. Many writers claim they can't survive if they don't write.

David Baldacci said, "*If writing were illegal, I'd be in prison. I can't not write. It is a compulsion.*" For me, too, writing has become a compulsion. I have to write each day. My day starts with writing and ends with writing. If I can't write any day, it feels like a wasted day.

What is it about writing that makes it — for some of us — as necessary as breathing? It is in the thousands of days of trying, failing, sitting, thinking, resisting, dreaming, raveling, unraveling that we are at our most engaged, alert, and alive. Time slips away. The body becomes irrelevant. We are as close to consciousness itself as we will ever be. This begins in the darkness. Beneath the frozen ground, buried deep below anything we can see, something may be taking root. Stay there, if you can. Don't resist. Don't force it, but don't run away.

Endure.

Be patient. The rewards cannot be measured. Not now. But whatever happens, any writer will tell you: This is the best part. — Dani Shapiro in [Still Writing](#)

3. Write to make a difference.

How many times have you heard people exclaiming that *this book changed my life*? You might have felt the same way. Not just books, but — articles, personal stories, observations, and insights — all have the power to make a difference in other people's lives.

I write memoirs because I have a passionate desire to be of even the tiniest bit of help. I like to write about the process of healing, of developing, of growing up, of becoming who we were born to be instead of who we always agreed to be. It's sort of a missionary thing, to describe one person's interior, and to say we're probably raised not to think this or say it, but actually all of us feel it and have gone through it, and we all struggle with it. I feel like it's a gift I have to offer to people to say, "This is what it's like for me, who you seem to like or trust.

We're all like this. We're all ruined. We're all loved. We all feel like victims, we all feel better than." — Anne Lamott in [Why We Write About Ourselves](#)

4. Write to be heard.

We want to tell our stories.

There is a perception that writers write to make money and to make a name for themselves. Nothing can be far from the truth.

We write because we want to be heard.

We write the things that we can't say.

We write to express feelings that are hard to express any other way.

We write to tell our stories. And of those whose stories must be told.

I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not

have a voice because they were so terrified because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't. — Audre Lorde, author poet.

5. Write so that you can live.

Writing is a way to cope with the atrocities of life.

The more life got harder, the more the heartache and pain became unbearable, the more we write.

It was some of my greatest, deepest writing. I reflected on life, relationships, and letting go. I honestly don't think I would have survived this last week if I had not been writing. I wrote for myself.

6. Write to make sense of this world.

Sometimes this world we live in makes little sense at all.

When ugly things happen, writing becomes a tool to make sense of it. To understand the world, we first need to understand ourselves. Then, we need to bare our souls to tell the story we want to tell.

Writing about trauma is more than simply documenting experience — it's about illuminating life on earth. It's about transforming tragedy into art, and hoping that somehow that piece of art may help someone else who's gone through something unbearable and who doesn't yet see that there truly is a light at the end of the dark tunnel. — Tracy Strauss

7. Write to find beauty.

Writing helps us to go beyond the surface.

You might have to move several tons of earth to find the nuggets. Writers are philosophers in the making, always trying to figure out the meaning of everyday happenings. Our role is to hold the magnifying glass and enlarge whatever we focus on.

Our job is to find hope where there is none, find meaning where there isn't any, and find beauty where ugliness surrounds us.

Why are we reading, if not in hope of beauty laid bare, life heightened, and its deepest mystery probed? ... Why are we reading if not in hope that the writer will magnify and dramatize our days, will illuminate and inspire us with wisdom, courage, and the possibility of meaning, and will press upon our minds the deepest mysteries, so we may feel again their majesty and power?

— Anne Dillard in [The Writing Life](#)

8. Write to give a gift of your words.

There is no better gift than the gift of written words.

A handwritten note, a letter, a journal, a book. When we write our stories with honesty and generosity about our lives, we give the world a gift. The only thing that survives after we are gone is our stories.

We who make stories know that we tell lies for living. But they are good lies that say true things, and we owe it to our readers to build them as best as we can. Because somewhere out there is someone who needs that story... And who with that story may have hope, or wisdom, or kindness, or conflict. And that is why we write. — Neil Gaiman

9. Write so that you can listen.

Writing is a way to listen better.

I have a weird habit. I write things people say to me. Those little snippets carry a different meaning on paper than they did verbally. Writing those words makes connections and brings out related stories—even the hidden meanings.

I write because it is while I'm writing that I feel most connected to why we're here. I write because silence is a heavyweight to carry. I write to remember. I write to heal. I write to let the air in. I write as a practice of listening. — Andrea Gibson

10. Write to create order out of chaos.

Writing makes us slow down and process our thoughts.

Our thoughts have a habit of going in circles. The act of writing them down helps us to straighten them. They will continue circling if you don't pick a pen and put them on paper. Suddenly, they are not so intimidating.

When I wasn't writing, I was reading. And when I wasn't writing or reading, I was staring out the window, lost in thought. Life was elsewhere — I was sure of it — and writing was what took me there. In my notebooks, I escaped an unhappy and lonely childhood. I tried to make sense of myself. I had no intention of becoming a writer. I didn't know that becoming a writer was possible. Still, writing was what saved me. It presented me with a window into the infinite. It allowed me to create order out of chaos. — Dani Shapiro in [Still Writing](#)

So, what is your why?

3

Mindset

The second tool in your toolkit is your mindset.

Mindset is vital to living a good life but it's imperative for becoming a good writer. So much of writing life is about fighting with yourself.

Learning how to write is hard.

Facing your self-doubt is hard.

Fighting your inner critic is hard.

Conquering imposter syndrome is hard.

But none of these things are that hard that they can't be overcome.

Here are some basic mindset tools that are fundamental to building a thriving writing career. Adopt them and nurture them over time, and you will be miles ahead of others.

They will give you a firm grounding for a thriving writing career.

I have all the time in the world.

Rather than having the mindset that you don't have time to write, have the mindset that you have all the time in the world to devote to your passion.

Amateurs complain they don't have time to write, professional writers

find time to write. They write in the 'cracks of life.' Toni Morrison wrote her book in fifteen minutes' blocks while raising a large family.

You don't need uninterrupted blocks of writing time. Fifteen minutes here and there is all you need. Before hopping in the shower, just after dinner, at lunchtime, while waiting in a queue.

Believe it or not, smaller blocks of writing time are better than larger ones. You can easily write 250 words in fifteen minutes. Once you get in the habit of looking for small writing windows, you will find several during the day.

There is nothing original in this world.

Rather than having the mindset of producing 'original' work and then lamenting when you are not able to, build the mindset of getting inspiration from others and enhancing their work.

Stop trying to create something out of nothing. Take influences from anywhere you can — other writers, old works, nature, real life, science, animals, or other art forms. The Sooner you free yourself from the pressure of creating something original, the sooner you will create.

Amateurs get frustrated with their work. They want it to be original. Professional writers know there is nothing original. Everything is built upon something else.

"Everything that needs to be said has already been said, but since no one was listening, everything must be said again."— André Gide

All ideas come from other ideas. Experienced writers get inspiration from other people's writing, real-life events, or from applying ideas from one field to another (from animals to humans, humans to aliens, science to psychology, and so on).

Writing is a verb.

Build the mindset of a ‘doer.’

The word ‘**writer**’ is tricky. It is both a **noun** and a **verb**. Amateur writers get stuck with the noun and forget the verb. The fact is that it is the ‘verb’ that makes the ‘noun’ possible. Professional writers concentrate on the verb, and their ‘noun’ materializes by itself.

I have the power to retire the judge.

The judge is the inner critic. He comes uninvited to critique your work and always finds faults in it. Even if others are raving about how good your work is, he will negate them and pinpoint the faults.

He has been working all his life, tirelessly giving judgments. But you are his employer. You can decide when to retire him. Buy him a gold watch and send him home to play with his grandchildren.

In the meantime, double and triple your writing efforts. If you are writing once a month, write once a week; if you are writing once a week, write once a day. The more often you write, the less daunting it becomes. Prolific writing is the only way to outperform the overworking inner critic.

Self-doubt is my friend.

Why, of all the other vocations in the world, do writers suffer from self-doubt the most?

It is not because we toil at our craft any less than other artists. No writer, it doesn’t matter how many books he has written, has ever reported fully getting rid of it. It is because self-doubt is our friend.

I have spent a good many years — too many, I think — being ashamed about what I write. I kept hearing Miss Hisler asking why I wanted to waste my talent, why I wanted to waste my time, why I wanted to write junk. I think I was forty before I realised that almost every writer of fiction and poetry who has ever published a line has been accused by someone of wasting his or her God-given talent. – Stephen King in [On Writing](#)

Professional writers learn to live with self-doubt. They embrace it and work with it.

Bad writers tend to have the self-confidence, while the good ones tend to have self-doubt. – Charles Bukowski

I am the writer and the publisher of my work.

Amateur writers whine, while professional writers self-publish.

They don't wait in a publisher's queue, which could take twelve to eighteen months to release a book.

They write fast and publish fast.

They decide how long the book is going to be. They decide when they are going to publish it. They inform their readers when they can buy the next book in the series will be available.

Professional writers are not attached to their books. They know books are products. A stream of income. They write the best book they can publish it, and then move on to the next one.

There is a market for my books.

Amateur writers worry that there are thousands of books on the same topic. *Why would readers pick mine?*

Professional writers know their book is unique because it has their voice, their stories, and their experiences.

There are countless books on writing. Yet more and more come into the market each day and they are all unique.

It is like ten chefs cooking the same dish with the same ingredients following the same recipe. Even then, each chef's dish will taste different.

Build a mindset that there is a market for writing, your articles, your books, for your articles your

Having a dream to write and to become a prolific writer is just a mindset shift.

Shift your mindset and become the writer you want to be.

4

Habits

Writing is demanding, messy, and disorderly. It will demand a lot of your time and energy. The only way to succeed at it is to build habits.

Here are some habits that can be effective tools in your toolkit.

1. Write every day.

If there is one quality writers should pursue more than any other, it is to write every day.

Even when nobody is reading your work, even when you don't know what to write, even when you know your work is not up to the mark, if you keep on writing, you will get better.

More than anything else, quantity leads to quality. Daily writing will make you better.

Persistence is not just a self-help cliché. Persistence is not just- *keep going till you hit the finish line*. Persistence is to keep failing until you fail no more.

2. Don't try to be original.

If you try to write an original article or a story, you will never get started. There are thousands of articles out there on the same topic. They still get read.

Yours will be different because it will have your voice, your emphasis, and your story. That alone will make it original. Stop looking for something new, something unique. Instead, work on your style. It is not **what** story you tell; it is **how** you tell it that makes it unique. Many mediocre writers have become successful because of their style.

Tim Urban of the [Wait But Why](#) blog is another mediocre writer who is immensely successful. His uniqueness lies in the in-depth articles he writes on general topics. He didn't know how to draw, so he drew stick figures to illustrate his point. His ability to make strong connections between the visuals and text makes his topics even more interesting to his audience.

3. Don't compare yourself with other writers.

What kills aspiring writers prematurely is their tendency to compare their work with others. They know they fall short, and it discourages them from where they can't write anymore.

Writing is a personal thing. It is like talking, only on paper. Some people are brilliant conversationalists, while others have to learn the craft. Rather than comparing your work with others, compare it with your previous year's work. If it is better, you are improving. You might still not be at the level you want to be, but you will get there.

4. Experiment.

Write haiku. Tell a story using just dialogue. Write non-fiction using techniques of fiction. Try different forms of writing. Writing is creative, and creativity is making connections between other seemingly unrelated things.

In Franz Kafka's best-known work, [*Metamorphosis*](#), the main character wakes up one morning and finds himself inexplicably transformed into an enormous insect. Can you write the story of an insect who turns into a human? Or a computer? Or a tree?

Or would you prefer to write interactive stories where the reader can decide in which direction the main character will go and how the story will end differently based on the choices the reader makes? [Michael La Ronn](#), a relatively unknown science fiction and fantasy writer (of over 50 novels) wrote his first novel as an interactive novel when no one had heard of interactive stories.

5. Make mistakes.

Mistakes are the best way to learn. We can see what we didn't see before by making mistakes. Mistakes also show us new possibilities. Making mistakes is not a sign of ignorance or inefficiency; instead, it is a sign of being courageous. We can attribute many discoveries to mistakes.

6. Have fun.

It is hard to pursue any activity which is not fun. If you have fun, you can learn effortlessly and achieve much more. Have fun with your writing. Make a game out of it.

Entertain and be entertained.

5

Journal

The impulse to write is natural to many people, yet the public forms of writing can be inhibiting or even crushing.

But writing a journal opens up possibilities.

Your journal is one place you can write anything. In any form and shape. You can draw, make lists, copy quotes, and write the nasty things someone said to you.

In your journal, you can sack your internal judge and explore your mood, emotions, views, feelings, and even anger and anxiety. When you can write without the fear of being judged, your journal became a place of discovery, learning, emotional relief, and insights.

Journal writing is a supreme way to record your life's journey; where you are at a point in life, where you want to be, what are your aspirations, and how life derails you.

Many times, we feel we have made no progress, and our life has been at a standstill. A journal can help you realize how far you have come.

A journal is not only a significant source of inner development but also a tool to become a fluent writer.

Before I started a journal, my writing was clunky. I would struggle to put my thoughts and ideas into words. Journal writing helped me

understand and crystallize my ideas and write them with clarity. My journal became a tool to capture nuggets I could use in my articles and books.

Your journal can be your most important tool as a writer. It's your camera, a place to record raw material for future fiction, poems, or articles: details of daily life, overheard dialogue, descriptions of landscapes, rooms, faces, weather, behavior. It can be as personal or as important as you want it to be. There are no rules for keeping a journal. – Barbara Abercrombie

Your journal is a place to discover your voice.

It is a training field to appreciate beauty, describe scenes and settings, record dialogues, and 'write about the moment.'

It is a playground to explore writing prompts, exercises in writing books, and your thoughts about the topics that interest you.

It is the safety box to collect quotes, compose poems, and write letters to yourself.

Don't censor yourself in your journal.

Fill it with your incomplete thoughts, your inner life, and your first feelings.

Include pictures or clippings that spark your imagination, poems, and song lyrics that move you.

Write letters in it you never mail.

Use this tool well.

6

Bliss Station

“Follow your bliss,” says Joseph Campbell in [The Power of Myth](#).

If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a track that has been waiting for you all the while. And you live the life you ought to live.

To figure out one’s bliss requires a “sacred space” — a space for uninterrupted reflection and unrushed creative work.

Your bliss station.

Your bliss station is the place where you can retreat from the world and do what you want to do—read, write, draw, cut some pictures, and make as much mess as you want without having to clean it.

Everybody should build a “bliss station” in which to root oneself:

“You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day, where you don’t know what was in the newspapers that morning, you don’t know who your friends are, you don’t know what you owe anybody, you don’t know what anybody owes to you. This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be. This is the place of creative incubation. At first, you may find that nothing happens there. But if you have a sacred place and use it, something eventually will happen.” — Joseph

Campbell

7

Energy

“I shouldn’t have left the article writing to the last hour of the day—every time I do that, I regret it. I was tired, struggling to concentrate, and writing was the last thing my brain wanted to do. I waited all day for this quietness, finished all the household chores to write this article, and here I was, just wanting to curl up in bed with a book.

I was not sleepy. I stayed up for another two hours watching a movie. I am a night owl. This is because I am supposed to work best at night. Yet my brain was categorically saying no to writing.

Why was it so?

I can do editing, diary, and journal writing at night, but I struggle when it comes to writing fresh content.

Is there another factor in play other than the time of the day?

There is, and it is called, energy.

In psychology, **energy** is defined as an ability or willingness to engage in cognitive work. Just like physical work needs an optimum energy level, so does mental work. Our brain needs a lot of fuel (oxygen and glucose) to carry out mental work. And when these fuel levels get depleted, we

experience mental fatigue.

The most common symptoms of mental fatigue include mental blocks, lack of motivation, irritability, and stress eating.

The energy levels are at their peak in the mornings for many people. As they go through the day and tackle various tasks, their energy source depletes. Even mindless tasks consume energy.

Others might experience peaks at mid-mornings, afternoons, evenings, or even midnight.

Night owls might stay awake late at night, but they will tackle high-energy tasks only if their energy is also at its peak at night.

We don't need to practice time management; we need to learn energy management.

Not every hour of the day is the same in terms of energy level. We have three energy levels — peak, middle, and low.

All those tasks that require high energy input should be done when our energy levels are at their peak. So some of us do it first thing in the morning; for others, it is in the middle of the afternoon.

Writing is high energy-consuming activity. Leaving it for the time when my energy levels were low was why I was feeling blocked. I could finish the article within an hour the next day.

When is our energy level at its peak?

Scientist says it's roughly 2–4 hours after we wake up. Our brain has gone through all the previous day's information and filed it appropriately. It has plenty of fuel (oxygen and glucose), and it is ready to do the work that requires lots of concentration.

That is the reason most writers write in the morning.

So what time of the day is best for writing?

When your energy levels are at their peak.

ENERGY

And it is different for different people.

Create a schedule to maximize those hours and make sure not to waste them on tasks that can be done when middle or low energy levels.

8

Morning Pages

Morning pages is a writing exercise introduced by Julia Cameron in her phenomenal book *The Artist's Way*. Of all the writing exercises I have attempted over the years, this one is the most useful and hence is a formidable tool in your toolkit.

The morning pages are three pages of daily writing, written in longhand as a stream of consciousness, writing first thing upon arising.

Almost every part of the instructions is non-negotiable.

- You got to write daily.
- You got to write by hand.
- You got to write first thing in the morning.

You can make a cup of tea or coffee if you can't function without it, but that's about it. Don't put away the dishes or make the bed. You got to write while your mind is still in an alpha state.

Write using a keyboard if that is what you are more comfortable with, but there is something about writing with hands that opens the dark vaults of your mind and brings out all that is troubling you.

“There are two pivotal tools in creative recovery — morning pages and the artist date. A lasting creative awakening requires the consistent use of both.

There is no wrong way to do Morning Pages— they are not high art. They are not even “writing.” They are about anything and everything that crosses your mind— and they are for your eyes only.

Morning Pages provoke, clarify, comfort, cajole, prioritize and synchronize the day at hand. Do not over-think Morning Pages: just put three pages of anything on the page...and then do three more pages tomorrow.” — Julia Cameron

I have been writing morning pages for twenty years now. That single habit has made me a better writer than anything else.

The pages clarify my thinking. They don't even feel like real writing. It is as if I am having conversations with myself. They help me sort through daily frustrations and lead to deeper thoughts and insights. But hidden between the unless thoughts, to-do lists, and daily frustrations are deeper thoughts and impulses that form the material for my writing later in the day.

Morning pages make us intimate with ourselves, and in turn, we become more compassionate with others.

We become more comfortable in our own skin and can withstand other people's scrutiny. Our relationships improve.

Our expression improves. We learn to voice our feelings and thoughts. We unblock our creativity.

Workcations

Just before the pandemic in 2020, Holly Worton decided to write 12 books in 12 months, along with another writer, Michelle Kulp.

They both did.

But there was a big difference in their approach. Whereas Michelle white-knuckled it each month, Holly went strategically.

Her secret tool — workcations.

In her book [*Workcations for Writers*](#), she writes about how she used vacations to write her books.

A workcation is a laser-focused getaway where you focus on ONE writing project so you can get more done in less time.

It's incredible how much writing you can do when you have uninterrupted time with zero distractions.

Our days are full of interruptions.

Have you ever realized how interrupted your typical day is? For example, an average person checks their cell phone 96 times a day, which equates to once every ten minutes, and responds to email every 6 minutes. No wonder we've lost our ability to focus and do deep work.

A workcation is a two-day (or longer) retreat that you can use to complete projects and get things done — like writing books.

WORKCATIONS

“Something miraculous happens when you are away from your everyday surroundings.”

- Holly Worton.

The workcation is about being hyperfocused and getting things done — alone.

It can help you get over procrastination.

Typically, when we are *procrastinating* on something, it's because we most likely need long, uninterrupted, undistracted blocks of time to truly focus on that project.

Whatever you can't seem to complete a writing project but need to get it done, workcations might be the solution.

In a nutshell, this is what you need to do:

- Book yourself in a hotel or an Airbnb for two nights.
- Take a timer with you.
- Write for 25 minutes.
- Take a 5 min break
- Repeat for 2 hrs.
- Have breakfast.
- Repeat for 2 hrs.
- Have lunch.
- Repeat for 2 hrs.
- Have dinner.
- Repeat for 2 hrs.
- Sleep.

Repeat the whole routine the next day.

Second Brain

Writing doesn't begin when we sit down and put one paragraph after another. It starts much earlier as we read articles or books, listen to podcasts, or have conversations.

Ideas come flooding, insights come from nowhere, and experiences become insightful. But if we don't have a system to record them, they are all going to disappear in thin air.

How many brilliant ideas have you had and forgotten?

How many insights have you failed to take action on?

How much useful advice have you slowly forgotten as the years have passed?

We feel constant pressure to learn, improve ourselves, and make progress. We spend countless hours reading, listening, and watching informational content every year. And yet, when you need it, you can't recall.

It is because our brain is for *having* ideas, not storing them.

If you want to learn and remember something long-term, write it down.

If you want to understand an idea, translate it into your own words. If you have to do this writing anyway, why not use it to build up resources

for future publications?

These notes build up as a byproduct of the reading we're already doing, anyway.

It is called building a 'second brain.'

Your 'second brain' systematically stores ideas, inspirations, insights, and learning that you gained during the day.

* * *

Niklas Luhmann, a 20th-century German sociologist, was the first person to successfully build the 'second brain.' He was a prolific note-taker, writer, and academic.

Early in his academic career, Luhmann realized that a note was only as valuable as its context, its network of associations, relationships, and connections to other information.

He developed a simple system based on paper index cards, which he called his 'slip box.'

Over his 30-year career, Luhmann published 58 books and hundreds of articles using that system.

Notes shouldn't be for a single project or book but for a lifetime of reading and researching.

A simple filing system can grow to become an equal thinking partner in your work.

Your system should comprise four things.

- **Ease and robustness.** If the system is tedious or time-consuming, you will not do it.
- **Connectivity.** The system can connect similar ideas and insights.
- **Retrievability.** Supported by powerful search engines, it should be able to retrieve whatever you need with minimum effort.
- **Portability.** Ideas can strike anytime. Your systems should be able

to travel with you everywhere.

“A good idea is not of any use if you can’t find it.” — Logan Hefstel

Now there are many systems available that can do it:

I prefer [Roam Research](#); others swear by [Notion](#), [Evernote](#), and [Obsidian](#).

Find the system that suits you and use it prolifically.

Writing is not only for proclaiming fully formed opinions but for developing opinions worth sharing.

Taking notes improves one’s thinking because it forces you to engage with what you’re reading on a deeper level. Just because you read more doesn’t automatically mean you have more or better ideas. It’s like learning to swim—you have to learn by doing it, not by merely reading about it.

Nobody ever starts from scratch.

Curiosity

Curiosity might get a cat killed, but it nurtures human creativity. Curiosity is a tool you can use to ignite creativity. Creative people are always curious. Curiosity leads subtly to the unknown and ultimately leads to answers.

You don't need to do anything spectacular. Just take one lead and start asking questions. Your question could be as simple as this: **“Now, what do I want to know about this?”**

Then look for the answer. The answer may not excite you to run out naked shouting “Eureka,” but it might hold your attention for a moment. At that moment, it might lead you to something else. Then curiosity will ask you to spend a few more moments and find the answer to another question that has popped into your head.

Is there anything you are curious about?

No matter how mundane or how small? Follow that.

Start with that tiny speck of curiosity and let it lead you wherever it goes.

You will be surprised to find yourself in amazing and unexpected places, for the forces of curiosity might be gentle, but it is resistance-free.

WRITER'S TOOLKIT

Inquisitiveness is natural to humans, and there is nothing more satisfying than following our hearts.

Learning Plans

Every professional invests in the continuation and enhancement of their skills. Doctors, accountants, teachers, insurance agents, attorneys, and every other professional spend a ridiculous amount of time and money training each year to stay on top of their professions.

Shouldn't writers be staying on top of their profession?

We should.

And we can by making Learning Plans.

A Learning Plan is a secret weapon that you can apply to anything you want to learn by yourself.

- Make a list of all the things you want to learn about writing.
- Break each item on the list into bite-size pieces to make it easier for you to learn.
- Each day, pick something from the list and learn it either by reading about it, watching videos, or practicing independently.
- Don't stop until you are confident enough to cross it off your list.

You will be surprised how quickly you will learn once you break a topic into bite-size pieces and concentrate on one bite at a time.

WRITER'S TOOLKIT

Your Learning Plan is your 'French knife' in your toolbox.
Don't make earning plans; make Learning Plans.

Idea Notebook

Ideas are like bubbles, they vanish as quickly as they form.

Creatives throughout history, built mechanisms to capture them and follow them until they become something tangible or die a natural death.

An Idea Notebooks are one such tool.

The Idea Notebook is nothing new

Leonardo da Vinci kept idea notebooks so did Charles Darwin. They provide a glimpse of their genius and inspiration. They used notebooks to capture observations, to work out their theories, to practice and improve their art, and to develop their ideas.

Artists use sketchbooks to play with sketches.

Musicians use notebooks to conceive and compose music.

Writers too should have Idea Notebooks to capture ideas, words, observations, and emotions.

Successful writers are fastidious about recording ideas throughout the day.

Mark Twain carried a pocket notebook with him for his ideas.

Thomas Jefferson jotted down notes about everything from the growth of plants and flowers to observations about daily life.

George Lucas keeps a notebook with him when he's shooting a film.

Once Roald Dahl, found himself stuck in traffic. Suddenly, a breakthrough idea for a story he was working on came to him. Having no notepad or pen, he grew afraid he'd forget his idea before getting home. So, Dahl got out of the car, and with his finger, he wrote the word 'chocolate' into the dirt on his vehicle. This idea later became *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

You don't have to just write in the Idea Notebook. You can sketch, paint, make collages, do word art, or stick pieces of paper in it.

Your ideas don't have to be fully formed to go into the notebook. They could be half-baked or just a hint of a new thought. It is in your idea notebook that you bake them.

Some parts of your scratchings may end up in an article or a book.

Some may only spur new ideas.

Some you may reject.

Some you may keep for later.

Your Idea Notebook is an incubator for your creativity.

Sometimes, ideas may come together like constellations in unexpected combinations.

Start an Idea Notebook and Commit to writing 5 -10 ideas in it every day. Keep it with you all the time, because you never know when an idea is going to strike.

Stamina

If someone in your niche is more successful than you, it's probably because he or she has worked harder at it than you do.

Sure, maybe she is inherently a more talented writer than you, had more opportunities than you, and is more adept at networking than you; but consistency will always beat talent. Over time those advantage counts for less and less. Therefore the world is full of highly talented, lucky, network-savvy, failed mediocres.

Talent wins initially; consistency will win the long race.

Consistency comes with stamina.

Stamina is misunderstood, however.

Stamina is not the ability to sustain a prolonged effort as the definition of it.

Stamina is not even endurance. It is not the ability to withstand unpleasant or difficult endeavors without giving way.

Stamina is the ability to stay longest in the arena.

It is to prepare yourself, mentally and physically, so that you can stay in the game as long as it takes.

Having stamina means knowing that you have a long road ahead of you. Your job is to figure out how best to manage it.

The tortoise had more stamina than the hare because the tortoise was consistent.

For writing, more than anything else, you will need stamina.

Stamina is only possible if it's managed well.

People think all they need to do is endure one crazy, intense, job-free creative burst, and their dreams will come true. They are wrong.

You don't have to write ten hours a day to build that stamina.

You don't even need an hour.

Just fifteen minutes a day will do.

Toni Morrison wrote her books at fifteen minutes intervals. That is all she had with a family to raise and a living to make.

Fifteen minutes a day is insanely easy to find.

Even an hour or two is manageable.

You can make that in fifteen minutes intervals. Fifteen minutes before going to work, fifteen minutes at lunchtime, fifteen minutes before dinner, and maybe an hour after dinner. Cut out that TV and you will find all the time you need for your writing.

Guard that time with all your passion. Use it in the best possible way. Not to give output, but to build stamina.

Because your stamina is your tool. You are going to need it.

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Speed

Get fast before getting good.

There will be plenty of time to get good later.

A ceramics teacher announced on the opening day that he was dividing the class into two groups. “All those on the left side of the studio,” he said, “would be graded solely on the quantity of work they produced, all those on the right solely on its quality.”

On the final day a curious fact emerged: the works of highest quality were all produced by the group being graded for quantity.

While the “quantity” group was busily churning out piles of work — and learning from their mistakes — the “quality” group had sat theorizing about perfection, and in the end had little more to show for their efforts than grandiose theories and a pile of dead clay.

— David Bayles and Ted Orland, Art & Fear

Initially, we can't become good, even if we want to.

When we write, we are like toddlers learning to walk. A toddler can't walk fast even if he wants to. So he concentrates on putting one foot over another. Once he learns that, he runs. He doesn't worry about getting

his feet on the ground properly; he just dashes ahead, even at the cost of falling on his bum.

As a toddler, your goal should be to get faster before getting better.

And before getting faster, get consistent.

Perfectionism

There are two ways of getting things done.

The first is to be slow and methodical. The second is to beat the clock.

Many of us like the idea of perfection, toiling away at our work to reach a seemingly impossible goal.

Will your work be any better if you take twice as much time?

If you consider yourself a perfectionist, chances are, you wear it as a badge of honor. You think you should produce your best work at all times.

Perfectionism is the enemy of getting things done.

Imperfectionism on the other hand, is a tool in your arsenal.

You don't have to deliberately deliver imperfect work but you have to stop perfecting it.

Have you ever tried to write a book in one month?

The idea was absurd and nearly impossible when Chris Baty and his friends thought of it in 1999. But they did it anyway. Six out of twenty participants completed the challenge, including Chris Baty.

They succeeded because they could not write the world's best book or

even their own best book.

They succeeded because they went out to beat the clock. They wrote 50,000 words in one month. Each day they raced the time, writing 1667 words.

Next year they launched the project on the internet. 140 people took part, 29 won the challenge. In 2019, more than half a million people took part, over 60,000 won the challenge.

How come?

Because they put perfection aside and went on to beat the clock.

Speed beats perfection every time.

*Perfectionism is not the same thing as striving to be your best. -
Brené Brown*

Want to shake off perfectionism but find it too hard?

It is understandable.

The mistake we make is that we want to make a massive jump.

The key to breaking out of your comfort zone is to stretch yourself ever so slightly.

That massive jump may not be possible. Instead, take a smaller one — just a slight stretch goal. Set yourself the time in which you'll complete the job.

Your work may not be as perfect as you hoped, but it gives you a chance to finish it and improve it later.

Reading

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote profound words in his journals. Some of them are well-known others are not. Here are some of his less-known words that have the power to jolt aspiring writers.

He wrote:

“Meek young men grow up in libraries believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote those books.”

What he is saying is profound on two levels.

On one level, he is encouraging aspiring writers to go to the libraries and read the works of great men. On another level, he is whipping us for taking their word as gospel.

An avid reader himself, Emerson read a lot. But more importantly, he questioned a lot. He was a ferocious writer. He was known to take long walks and write everything he felt, observed, and inferred during his walks.

Robert D. Richardson, who has written the biography of Emerson and

of several other prominent writers, wrote a masterpiece, *First We Read, Then We Write*, which explains Richardson's modus operandi.

He first reads everything his subjects had read, in the sequence in which they read it, tracing their intellectual development.

It is that reading, that takes him inside the mind of his subjects.

Reading is a must for writers.

Better readers become better writers.

Reading helps develop critical thinking. You shouldn't just read for pleasure but also to broaden your horizons.

Read books rather than just articles. Read books outside your genre. Old books which have withstood the test of time are better than new bestsellers, which come and go.

Reading will inspire new ideas. By making reading a part of your routine, you can continually expose yourself to new ideas to get your creative juices flowing.

Read like a writer. The art of reading like a writer doesn't come instantly. You need to work at it. Read with a pen and notebook. Underline what intrigues you. Whenever you come across a new idea, stop, and make a note, either in your notebook or on the side of the book itself, so that you can transfer it to your notes-taking system later.

Reading exposes you to a variety of writing styles.

Writers are shaped by other writers.

The books we read and the writers we follow influence us and impact our writing style. The writers who shape us are almost like unofficial mentors.

By reading widely and closely, voracious readers can learn at the feet of the English language's most talented writers.

Reading in different various genres exposes you to different styles of writing. Learn how you can incorporate them into your writing. For example, many non-fiction books borrow fiction techniques of storytelling. They have a hero's journey and narrative structure and dialogues, which make them an interesting read.

Reading literature can help you write better scientific books. Charles Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species* and Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* has literary tones.

Reading allows you to study grammar in context.

Ever tried to read a grammar book? It is boring.

But read a well-written and well-edited book, and you will get lessons in grammar that are easy to learn and a joy to watch in action.

Think of reading a novel or short story as a hack that lets you study grammar without having to work through a textbook.

Good books clearly communicate their messages, and to clearly communicate, you must have a good knowledge of grammar.

When reading books, pay attention to the grammar, and notice how professional authors use punctuation, sentence structure, active and passive voice, action verbs, and any other grammar questions you are struggling to understand.

Reading helps you expand your vocabulary.

While reading, build our vocabulary. Whenever you come across a new word, jot it down, check its meaning, and try to use it in your writing on the same day. You will never forget it that way.

According to lexicographer and dictionary expert Susie Dent, "[an average person's active vocabulary](#) is around 20,000 words, whereas a writer's vocabulary is expected to be 30,000. Shakespeare [used 31,534](#)

different words in his works.

Read voraciously and read with purpose. Recognize what other authors do best and learn from them. All you have to do is study their work.

“If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time or the tools to write. Simple as that.” – Stephen King.

Prose

Success as a writer isn't in getting published, but in making your sentences sing and your paragraphs sane.

It's in discovering ideas in yourself that you never thought were there. That's where the greatness lies.

The greatness doesn't lie in getting a great review in some newspaper or magazine. Or receiving lots of claps. They are nice, but greatness has to do with the feeling you have in yourself that you've created something important and the sense of accomplishment you feel while creating it.

Every paragraph you write, every sentence you construct, in a way, is your creation — by design, by meditation, by argument, by wondering, by analysis.

It is your artwork to convey whatever you want to say.

Every paragraph is part of the story you are telling.

Every sentence is a piece of a puzzle.

If you concentrate on the sentences and paragraphs, and make them so beautiful that your own soul gets immersed in their beauty, then no outer reward is going to matter.

Writing itself is a payoff for all the work we do.

Good writing holds its reader's hand and leads her through the unfurling of itself, pointing back to the last step and forward to the next, showing her the map, reminding her of the destination. Good writing is a coherent journey back to the place where it began. It's a circle. It's a wall whose logic is implicit in every stone. In good writing, a reader finds it hard to get lost. — Mark Tredinnick in [The Little Red Writing Book](#)

Are your paragraphs doing that?

Holding your reader's hands and leading them back and through, out of the maze, effortlessly.

They don't have to lead them straight out. There has to be some drama, some mystery, and a bit of uncertainty. In the hands of a talented writer, readers enjoy all that.

Because in the hands of a good writer, they feel safe. They know when it is all over, they will be happy that they took the journey.

“Make your prose as you might make a drystone wall. You are not bonding the pieces; they just have to fit. How will you chisel each stone, how will you turn it and set it down so that it sits comfortably with its neighbors and carries the wall forward?” — Mark Tredinnick

Whenever I feel too distressed with my writing, I pull out Mark Tredinnick's [The Little Red Writing Book](#) and start reading randomly. This is what he writes on the last page.

I wrote this book because I long, and I don't think I am alone, to read more sentences so well made, so perfectly uttered, they make one weep — in their form and rhyme, in their topography and

PROSE

amplitude and the truthful spaces onto which the open. Let plots take care of themselves; it's time more writers spent more care shaping astonishing sentences. Elegant, shapely, heartbreaking — in the way a mountain range or a horse, a woman's form, a child's voice, the posture of a tree, the taste of a wine can be.

Most of us worry too much about getting published than writing elegant, clear, and lovely prose that sings.

It is no small feat, hard to begin, and even harder to sustain. It is no good to be content with one or two good sentences.

“A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art, should carry its justification in every line.” — Conrad

The struggle to improve our prose is the struggle to improve ourselves. Immerse yourself in that struggle and you will get your reward.

Style

In 1980, [Kurt Vonnegut](#), a great American storyteller, and a teacher wrote the article “*How to Write with Style*,” which was published in the *Times*. In that article, he made seven suggestions on the literary style that every new writer should frame and put on her desk.

Here they are in a nutshell:

1. Find a subject to care about.

“Find a subject you care about and which you in your heart feel others should care about, too. It is this genuine caring, and not your games with language, which will be the most compelling and seductive element in your style.”

Your writing shines when you write about something you care about; whether it is a novel or a love letter to the girl next door or a petition to the mayor about a pothole in front of your house.

One of Vonnegut’s favorite pieces of writing was an open letter his daughter Nanette wrote to a stranger who was so mad at the service he received from a waitress that he complained to the management in

writing. In her letter, Nanette made a plea to be kind and humane to young wait staff and don't break their spirit if they happen to find it difficult to juggle correct balance and timing.

2. Do Not Rumble.

And he said he would not ramble about it.

3. Keep it simple.

Writing that is convoluted and sprinkled with big words are elevated and more intelligent.

Remember that two great masters of language, William Shakespeare and James Joyce, wrote sentences that were almost childlike when their subjects were most profound.

“*To be or not to be?*” asks Shakespeare’s Hamlet. The longest word is three letters long, Vonnegut points out.

But Vonnegut’s favorite sentence is in James Joyce’s short story “Eveline.”

“*She was tired.*” At that point in the story, wrote Vonnegut, no other words could break the heart of a reader as those three words do.

The simplicity of the language is not only reputable but perhaps even sacred. The Bible opens with a sentence well within the writing skills of a lively fourteen-year-old: “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. – Kurt Vonnegut

4. Have the guts to cut.

It takes guts to cut the words you have spent hours writing and polishing. Yet you have to develop the courage to do just that.

But the problem is more significant than having the courage to cut.

It is “not knowing” what to cut, and Vonnegut knew that. He wrote, “The most damning revelation you can make about yourself is that you do not know what is interesting and what is not.” His advice:

It may be that you, too, are capable of making necklaces for Cleopatra, so to speak. But your eloquence should be the servant to the ideas in your head. Your rule might be this: If a sentence, no matter how excellent, doesn't illuminate your subject in some new and useful way, scratch it out. – Kurt Vonnegut

5. Sound like yourself.

When writing, most of us make an extra effort not to write the way we speak. Yet this is exactly what we need to do.

Many writers waste too much time finding their voice, without knowing they already have it. It is the voice in which they speak every single day. Even if English is your second language, write what is your natural way.

All varieties of speech are beautiful, just as the varies for butterflies are beautiful. No matter what your first language, you should treasure it all your life. If it happens to not be standard English, and if it shows itself when you write standard English, the result is usually delightful, like a very pretty girl with one eye that is green and one that is blue. – Kurt Vonnegut

6. Say what you mean to say.

Have you ever started writing something and found that it went in a completely different direction? Many modern writers writing to SEO guidelines find themselves in this conundrum.

The primary goal of good writing is to say precisely what the author meant to say.

My teacher wished me to write accurately, always selecting the most effective words, and relating the words to one another unambiguously, rigidly, like the parts fo the machine. The teachers did not want to turn me into an Englishman after all. They hoped that I would become understandable — and therefore understood... If I broke all the rules of punctuation, had words mean whatever I wanted them to mean, and strung them together higgledy-piggledy, I would simply not be understood. – Kurt Vonnegut

If you have something worth saying, you too should avoid Picasso-style or jazz-style writing and write to be understood.

7. Pity the readers.

Readers have to identify thousands of little marks on paper and make sense of them immediately. They have to read, an art so difficult that most people don't really master it even after having studied it all through grade school and high-school — twelve long years. – Kurt Vonnegut

Sympathize with your readers. Be patient with them. Be ever willing to simplify and clarify.

Takeaway

We writers are so focused on ourselves that we forget the readers.

Yet most writers are the readers too.

As readers, we consume a lot of information in a day. We spend a lot of mental energy selecting what we want to pursue and what we want to discard.

If your writing is convoluted, difficult to read, or rambling, the reader will discard it.

Stickiness

Why the hell am I putting myself through this?

Lamented one of my writing buddies.

Who cares about my story? What difference does it make if I write this story? Or any story, for that matter? I am such a crappy writer, anyway.

I could feel her pain. I have asked myself the same questions several times.

So many times, I wanted to give writing up.

Writing is an ordeal even for the best of us.

What if we give it up?

Sure the world will not come to a standstill. No one will miss us because we haven't been 'discovered' yet. Hardly anyone reads our blog articles, and our short stories and novels are still buried in our computers. If we stop writing now, the world will be spared of the rubbish we create, and we will be spared the daily agony and can get on with our lives just like 'normal' people.

Except for one thing.

We will never find out what would have happened had we stuck with it.

The problem with giving up is that it is such a knee-jerk response. When things get difficult, our first instinct is our physiological mechanism to protect us from danger and undue hardship.

We forget that our inbuilt physiology gives us three choices — freeze, flee, or fight even at a time of grave danger. Most of the time, we choose to **freeze** or **flee**.

We rarely opt for the **fight**. We think the enemy is too big and too strong, and the best chance we have of survival is to **flee** from it.

What happens when you stick it out?

You learn to solve it.

You start getting better at it.

Your learning accumulates.

You start gaining confidence.

At some point, the penny always drops. It's almost like one of those slot machines. You're not getting anywhere in a hurry, and then suddenly, you have this gush of coins. But unlike a slot machine that primarily works against you, '**sticking it out**' is almost predictable in its reward system.

Stay with something for about a couple of hours every day, find a system to learn, and suddenly you will nail it.

II

Part Two

Helpful Hints

5 Essential Tools For Writers

A pen and notebook were all you needed to write for a long time.

When typewriters were invented, they were considered the only tool a writer needed to write professionally.

When computers replaced the typewriters, writers were over the moon and reached heaven. Now they could make corrections on the go, write books directly on the keyboard and print several copies of their manuscript with the press of a button.

But that is where their investment in tools ended.

Unlike other professionals, we writers don't like to invest money in tools. We want to do without than fork out a few hundred dollars or a regular subscription to produce our best work.

The key to successful writing has the right tools. Imagine a painter. Would he buy the cheap stuff to produce his masterpiece, or would he buy the artist-quality brushes and paint?

We might buy more gardening tools each year that we use a few times a year than the writing tools we need every day.

As a writer and an artisan of the highest quality, you must find your tools. And you must master them.

There are five essential tools for writers.

1. Writing Apps

A writing app is the most important tool you will use all the time. I love Medium's clean interface. Even though it has limited editing functionality, it still allows me to do all I need to do to write articles.

I also like Substack and use it to send my newsletter. It has recently added many more features to its interface.

For writing books, I used [Reedsy's Free Editor](#). It provides not only a clean interface but also formats and creates professional ePub (for publication) and print-ready files in seconds.

Other than these, there are many other apps that are useful for specific purposes.

Scrivener

If you are writing fiction, Scrivener is a popular application that allows the plotting, outlining, and formatting of a novel. It also provides templates for writing essays, recipe collections, screenplays, and comic books, making it a versatile application.

Ulysses

Whether you're writing a blog post or a full-length novel, the seed of an idea doesn't get too far without the ability to organize that idea into a cohesive piece of writing. That's exactly what Ulysses allows you to do: organize your thoughts into well-written work.

Ulysses boasts a slightly more clean interface than Scrivener, so if ease of use is high on your priority list, Ulysses might be a better option for you.

In addition, Ulysses offers a very helpful WordPress and Medium integration, which bloggers love.

Reedsy Book Editor

[Reedsy Book Editor](#) is a free, online word processor that formats your book as you write. See your drafts automatically turn into a professional-looking, ready-to-publish manuscript — and allow this glimpse of your work as the final product to spur your motivation to write.

If you want a writing tool that takes care of formatting and conversion for you, [Reedsy Book Editor](#) is it. And it is free.

Draft

If you need a tap on the shoulder to remind you to write your daily quota of words, then [Draft](#) is your tool. It will send you daily email reminders about your daily word count goals. So, if you want to build the habit of writing every day, [Draft](#) is the application for you.

It functions like Google Docs, allowing you to track change, collaborate via suggested edits, and make comments on the doc.

And it is FREE.

LibreOffice

[LibreOffice](#) is an open-source application for people who want to use Microsoft without paying a premium price. LibreOffice is free.

And it's compatible with all the regular file types people are used to, such as .doc, .docx, .xls, .xlsx, .ppt, and .pptx files.

If you like a classic word processor and a free one, try it.

Mellel

[Mellel](#) is for Mac users who want more than Mac's inbuilt Pages app offers. From their website, "Mellel is the leading word processor for Mac. Powerful, flexible, and reliable, it will help you write your book, academic paper, or doctoral thesis — from outlining your ideas to a finished manuscript."

Mellel is not free (and it's only for Mac). It has more book-specific tools than traditional word processing — such as outlining and bibliography-making.

2. Editing Tools

Next to a proper writing app, a good editing tool is essential for writers. There are two good ones in the market. — Grammarly and [ProWritingAid](#).

Grammarly

Grammarly is subscription-based and does spellcheck, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure. It is a spellchecker and real-time assistance to improve your content's clarity, cohesiveness, fluency, and vocabulary. Its most significant benefit is that it will plug in wherever you are writing.

ProWritingAid

[ProWritingAid](#) will proofread and spellcheck your material for you, no matter where you're writing. It will also offer suggestions to improve your overall language — outside of just grammatical technicalities. You can buy it with a one-off payment.

The difference is that ProWriting Aid is tailored more towards fiction writers, while Grammarly is a slightly better fit for articles and essay writers.

Hemingway

Some writers swear by the [Hemingway](#) app. They claim that the application makes their writing concise and clear. It has several handy features, like a word counter and an automatic readability score. But its real use lies in making suggestions to your prose. It will highlight a complex sentence that's hard to read and instances of passive voice, qualifiers, and adverbs.

Cliché Finder

If you want to avoid clichés like the plague, you can add [Cliché Finder](#) to your toolbox. And for free. It combs through your writing in search of clichés and then highlights them.

3. Notes-Taking Tools

Taking notes and filing those in such a way that they are easily accessible when needed is a primary requirement of a writer. Good notes taking applications make the process seamless. Many writers struggle because they can't remember the story or the case study or the perfect quote when they need it. A notes app solves that problem. There are several in the market.

Evernote

[Evernote](#) is perhaps the most known of the lot. It lets you quickly jot down thoughts, record audio notes, and save online articles you're hoping to reference, and it will sync all of this information across all of your Evernote-installed devices. It has a free version with basic functionality and a paid version for premium users.

Notion

[Notion](#) is a project management and note-taking software. It is an all-in-one workspace for your notes, tasks, and databases. It's a tool you can use to organize your thoughts, projects, and information. Mainly used by companies, Notion is a product management tool that combines all collaborative and management applications in one. Many writers find it useful during collaborative writing projects.

Obsidian

[Obsidian](#) is a powerful knowledge base on top of a local folder of plain text Markdown files. Its strength lies in its simplicity and offline nature. You always have access to your files (markdown) and don't have to rely on the internet. Also, there is no security threat or data being lost or transferred to third parties.

Roam Research

[Roam Research](#) is easy to use as a bulleted list and is powerful for finding, collecting, and connecting related ideas as a graph database. Roam Research is my favorite notes taking app. I like its daily diary and ability to connect thoughts.

Milanote

[Milanote](#) is an easy-to-use creative writing app to organize your research, ideas, characters, and outline in one place. Designed particularly for novelists, it is suitable for plotters who prefer a flexible workspace to organize ideas and see a bird's eye view of how your story outline is coming together.

4. Newsletters Apps

As a writer, you need to build your reader base and communicate with them regularly. Newsletter Apps help you do exactly that. There are several newsletter apps on the market, and all of them are fiddly and expensive.

MailChimp

[MailChimp](#) email marketing service for managing mailing lists and creating email marketing campaigns to send to customers. It was one of the first email marketing services and hence could grab a significant share of the market for many years. It is very fiddly and the most expensive of the lot. However, it offers much more in-depth analytics — especially with its Standard plan and above.

Convertkit

[Convertkit](#) is basically for creators and has better functionality and interface than MailChimp. But it is more expensive. Convertkit has excellent support and training for new users.

Mailerlite

[Mailerlite](#) is the most affordable of the three. It offers a simple reporting dashboard and usual metrics for email campaign activity, subscriber engagement, devices, popular links, click maps, and opens by location.

Substack

[Substack](#) is not a newsletter like the above three but a newsletter writing platform. It allows writers to communicate whatever they have written to their readers with the click of a button. It has a beautiful interface and is free to use as long as you send free newsletters. Once you charge for your newsletter, Substack starts taking a cut. It makes sense to use Substack to stay intact with your reader base.

5. Speech To Text

There was a time when Dragon Naturally Speaking was the only speech-to-text application. Now there are several. My favorite is [Otter.ai](#), which is an application to transcribe meetings. It has 98% accuracy, better than any other speech-to-text application. It has a free plan available, which is enough for your needs as a writer.

7 Types of Writers' Blocks And How To Overcome Them

I'm not too fond of the phrase writer's block.

It sounds like an enormous, immovable block of bricks on a writer's head, crushing her with its weight. Plus, thinking about a block only makes it grow bigger.

Instead, I like the leaky bucket analogy by my favorite author, Michael La Ronn. Imagine a bucket full of water, and it's leaking because there are several holes in it. How do you fix a leaky bucket? You plug the gaps.

Now pretend that your mind is the bucket. Our mind is always brimming with ideas and inspiration, but if it has holes, it will leak, and you will lose your ideas and inspiration. And that is when you get blocked.

Stop thinking of writer's block as a magical force preventing you from writing. Instead, think of plugging holes in a leaky bucket.

Think of how to plug the holes to avoid losing your ideas and inspiration.

There are seven kinds of holes in your writing bucket.

1. Fear

It doesn't matter who you are; fear affects every writer.

We're afraid of making ourselves vulnerable, making mistakes, fearful of what readers will think, afraid our book will not sell, and so much more.

That fear can drip into our writing. It paralyzes us. We think, "*What's the point of writing,*" or "*No one will like our book,*" or "*I'm just an imposter posing as a writer.*"

Many writers let this fear get to their heads. They quit writing because of it. Don't join the list of those unknown writers.

I wish I could give you a recipe for eliminating your fear, but it doesn't exist. Instead, you need to learn to function with fear.

If you can handle your fear, you'll find that writer's block won't visit you nearly as frequently because you'll start building confidence in your work — and yourself.

Permit yourself to feel the fear, but do it anyway.

2. Circumstances

Whether or not we like to admit, circumstances play a big part in our lives.

Sometimes we get sick. Sometimes work takes precedence over writing. Other times, we have important obligations that we have to take care of. All these break our carefully created writing routines.

That's normal.

One secret of professional writers is that they keep at it rain or shine. Of course, they may not write every single day. They, too, get all the above interruptions and many more. But they keep getting back to their writing.

Don't beat yourself up when life strikes. I kept writing during years of

sick parents, growing children, and extremely demanding work. True, I couldn't write as much as I wanted to. When circumstances changed, I gave writing all the time I could. But family and life always come first.

Deal with the things you need to deal with. Set a timeline to restart, and when it's time, pick up where you left off. That's all you can do.

*All you can do is all you can do, and all you can do is enough. —
Arthur L. Williams*

3. Inner critic

Whether you call it perfectionism, lack of confidence, or imposter syndrome, the fear of bad writing is probably the most common type of writer's block.

When we think our writing isn't good enough, it is our inner critics speaking. When the inner critic takes charge, getting started or continuing becomes hard, sometimes even impossible.

Many writing coaches suggest you silence the inner critic by continuing to write. But silencing your inner critic isn't always that easy.

But you can fool your inner critic.

How?

By giving yourself permission to write badly. When I was writing my first book, I kept my inner critic at bay by telling it that I was writing the worst book ever.

Here's what Seth Godin [suggests](#) about this type of writer's block:

(...) it's comforting to think that we are blocked, that we're just not in the right mood to deal with something. But people who say they have writer's block actually have a fear of bad writing, so they're not willing to do any writing at all. What I say to somebody who has writer's block is, "Show me all your bad writing. Go sit down

and write badly as much as you can, because sooner or later, some good stuff is going to slip through.” (...) Indeed, the job of someone who’s creating is to create, not to be perfect.

Anne Lamott tries to drill into new writers through her book *Bird by Bird* that your first draft will be shitty.

All good writers write them. This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts. People tend to look at successful writers, writers who are getting their books published and maybe even doing well financially, and think that they sit down at their desks every morning feeling like a million dollars, feeling great about who they are and how much talent they have and what a great story they have to tell; that they take in a few deep breaths, push back their sleeves, roll their necks a few time to get all the cricks out and dive in, typing fully formed passages as fast as a court reporter. This is just a fantasy of the uninitiated. — Anne Lamott

Slavoj Žižek, a Slovenian philosopher, uses another smart tactic to get around the fear of bad writing. He tells himself he isn’t writing; he’s simply jotting down ideas:

I have a very complicated ritual about writing. It’s psychologically impossible for me to sit down [and do it], so I have to trick myself. I elaborate a very simple strategy which, at least with me, it works: I put down ideas. And I put them down, usually, already in a relatively elaborate way, like the line of thought already written in full sentences, and so on. So up to a certain point, I’m telling myself: No, I’m not yet writing; I’m just putting down ideas. Then, at a certain point, I tell myself: Everything is already there, now

I just have to edit it. So that's the idea, to split it into two. I put down notes, I edit it. Writing disappears.

Whether you give yourself permission to write badly or tell yourself you're only jotting down ideas; the key is to get the first draft on paper, no matter how bad that draft is.

“My writing is not good enough” leak can happen at any writing stage, even when you become an established successful writer. You wonder whether you can write something that good again. The antidote remains the same: write a bad first draft.

You may even challenge yourself to write the world's worst book.

4. Lack of ideas

Lack of ideas hole is a frustrating one. You feel you have no good ideas. You doubt your creativity and want to give up. But this hole is easy to plug.

When I started writing online, I didn't have many ideas. I was afraid I would run out of them soon.

But as I started writing, I kept coming up with more ideas.

Do you know why?

Because ideas breed ideas.

Ideas are everywhere; we need to learn to capture them.

Each article answers a question but raises many more, continuing the cycle.

If your bucket is leaking ideas, you need to plug it in. And also pour more ideas into it.

“The way to have good ideas is to get close to killing yourself. It's like weightlifting. When you lift slightly more than you can handle, you get stronger. In life, when the gun is to your head, you either

figure it out, or you die.”

— *Claudia Azula Altucher, Become An Idea Machine: Because Ideas Are The Currency Of The 21st Century*

Take a pen and paper and write ten ideas in two minutes.

Don't evaluate.

Just keep writing.

The first few will be easy, the middle ones will be a bit of a struggle, and the last 2 - 3 will be the hardest.

They will be the nuggets you are looking for.

Do this exercise every morning, and you will never run out of ideas.

When you lack ideas, your muse has not deserted you.

Instead, you've simply neglected to feed your creative soul.

5. Lack Of Distance

One of the biggest reasons for getting stuck is that you have been too close to your writing for too long.

I'm sure that you've experienced this leak. It is agonizing. Isn't it? You would do anything to plug it, right?

Do something that you probably wouldn't want to do: walk away.

At least for a little while.

Sometimes, all you need is some distance between yourself and your manuscript.

Do something else — go for a walk, cook a meal, or play with your children. If you can't find anything else, clean a closet.

When we get too deep into our work, we can lose perspective.

Fresh air does wonders to get your perspective back.

A nap or a good night's sleep also works. Tell your brain what problem you want to solve, then go to bed and see what happens in the morning.

6. Fuzzy Thinking

This hole is the most frustrating one. When you don't have clarity, you keep going in circles and don't make progress doesn't matter how much time you spend.

This is when you need more thought behind your ideas. Thinking is an important phase of the writing process. Ann Handley [calls it pre-writing](#):

*Thinking is pre-writing. And pre-writing is the key to writing. —
Ann Handley*

You can use three ways to plug this hole.

1. You can get away and let it percolate. Thoughts need time to mature and to make connections. After a few days, a solution appears out of nowhere
2. You can read more or do in-depth research. You are stuck because you don't have all the information. Reading or research might take you in a completely different direction, which is even better. You are not stuck anymore. You can write your way out of it.
3. You can do stream-of-consciousness writing. This kind of free writing is a great way to clarify thinking.

7. Lack of system

This might be the biggest of all holes. Writing becomes a daunting task, especially when trying to do everything in a single sitting.

To plug this hole, you need to put a system in place. A system is a set of procedures to do something efficiently and consistently.

Most new writers struggle with writing because they don't have a

system.

Writing is like gourmet cooking. Ask any chef, and they would tell you that making a dish is a three-step process — shopping, preparation, and cooking.

When a chef cooks a dish, he doesn't first go to the shops, buy the ingredients, come home, do the preparation, put the dish together, and place it in the oven.

He already has all the ingredients ready. He does the preparation beforehand. Then, when the time comes, he puts together the dish and places it in the oven.

Writing too has three distinct activities:

1. Coming up with ideas
2. Turning those ideas into drafts
3. Editing and publishing

You can't do them all in one step. You got to separate them, and you got to do each activity every single day. So if you can do that, you have a system.

Let's take the leaking bucket analogy a little further. Since your bucket was leaking, there's probably not much water left. Your bucket's water level may be so low that there are only a few drops of water in it.

But if you have a system in place, your bucket will always be full.

How?

Imagine you have three buckets instead of one, each with a label on it — IDEAS, DRAFTS, and EDITS.

Your job is to add something to each bucket every day.

It doesn't matter how much. You can add just one idea into the IDEAS bucket and only one paragraph in the DRAFTS bucket and EDIT something small.

You mustn't miss any of the buckets any single day. Soon you have a

system going. You will never run out of ideas, and you will have plenty of drafts ready to edit and publish.

Cutting writing projects into smaller tasks and then focusing on one task at a time plugs the biggest hole in your writing bucket.

Takeaway

Writer's block is a response to several minor problems. Address them, and you will overcome them each time they threaten to affect your productivity.

7 Habits of Highly Effective Writers

I am a mediocre writer. I have written nothing that stands out. When I walk past, no one says, “Whoa! Here goes the writer of this year’s bestseller.”

I have failed at more things than I have succeeded.

But I am still effective. I am still standing in the arena. Being mediocre is not being lazy or dumb. Mediocrity is understanding that not everyone can be at the top. A vast majority of people are in the middle of the bell curve, and many are by choice.

Mediocrity means I am giving time and attention to many other important things in my life than just writing. I might get better over the years. And even if I don’t, I still can be effective. I can learn to be a good marketer and sell my work in innovative ways. I might become an excellent teacher and leave my mark by teaching others. Or I might learn to be more productive and generate more in less time.

I feel no shame in being mediocre.

You too can excel in your mediocrity if you can cultivate these seven habits.

1. Be consistent.

If there is one quality mediocre writers should pursue more than any other, it is to write consistently.

Even when nobody is reading your work, even when you don't know what to write, even when you know your work is not up to the mark, if you keep on writing consistently, you will get better.

More than anything else, quantity leads to quality. Daily writing will make you better.

Persistence is not just a self-help cliché. Persistence is not just- *keep going till you hit the finish line*. Persistence is to keep failing until you fail no more.

2. Don't try to be original.

If you try to write an original article or a story, you will never get started. There are thousands of articles out there on the same topic. They still get read.

Yours will be different because it will have your voice, your emphasis, and your story. That alone will make it original. Stop looking for something new, something unique. Instead, work on your style. It is not **what** story you tell; it is **how** you tell it that makes it unique. Many mediocre writers have become successful because of their style. James Altucher is a mediocre writer; he himself says so. It is his tongue-in-cheek style that gives him an edge over other writers.

Tim Urban of the [Wait But Why](#) blog is another mediocre writer who is immensely successful. His uniqueness lies in the in-depth articles he writes on general topics. He didn't know how to draw, so he drew stick figures to illustrate his point. His ability to make strong connections between the visuals and text makes his topics even more interesting to his audience.

3. Don't compare with other writers.

What kills a mediocre writers prematurely is their tendency to compare their work with others. They know they fall short, and it discourages them from where they can't write anymore. I know that firsthand. It took me years to get over my tendency to compare myself with other writers.

Writing is a personal thing. It is just like talking, only on paper. Some people are brilliant conversationalists, while others have to learn the craft. Rather than comparing your work with others, compare it with your previous year's work. If it is better, you are improving. You might still not be at the level you want to be, but you will get there.

4. Experiment.

Write haiku. Tell a story using just dialogue. Write non-fiction using techniques of fiction. Try different forms of writing. Writing is creative, and creativity is making connections between other seemingly unrelated things.

In Franz Kafka's best-known work, [*Metamorphosis*](#), the main character wakes up one morning and finds himself inexplicably transformed into a huge insect. Can you write the story of an insect who turns into a human? Or a computer? Or a tree?

Or would you prefer to write interactive stories where the reader can decide in which direction the main character will go and how the story will end differently based on the choices the reader makes? [Michael La Ronn](#), a relatively unknown Science fiction and fantasy writer (of over 50 novels) wrote his first novel as an interactive novel when no one had heard of interactive stories.

5. Make mistakes.

Mistakes are the best way to learn. We can see what we didn't see before by making mistakes. Mistakes also show us new possibilities. Making mistakes is not a sign of ignorance or inefficiency; instead, it is a sign of being courageous. We can attribute many discoveries to mistakes.

6. Learn from others.

Effective mediocre are not afraid of learning from others. It is because they do not connect their ego to their work. They dissect other writers' work to understand what works for them and try to imitate them. Imitation is the highest form of praise. It is also the most effective way to learn. But they don't just stop at imitating. They try to look for ways to improve what they have learned from others. Since they are not trying to prove themselves as masters or experts, they have the luxury of experimenting.

7. Have fun.

It is hard to pursue any activity which is not fun. If you have fun, you can learn effortlessly and achieve much more. A child soon becomes proficient with electronic devices and can work them with no training manual. Mediocre writers, like children, have fun with their writing. They know even Shakespeare didn't think he was writing literature that will be read and analyzed hundreds of years after he was gone. He was writing plays to entertain the masses.

Takeaway

Do you feel you are a mediocre writer too?

Does that make you feel ashamed?

Please don't.

Understand you belong in the middle of the bell curve, along with most of the others.

But you can stand out if you choose to adopt some (or all) of the above habits.

11 Tips To Take Your Writing To Another Level

I love writing. I hate having to write.

Each day is a struggle to meet my commitments, whether to write books, articles, or social media posts. Steven Pressfield, the author of the bestselling book [The War of Art](#), calls it *Resistance*. *Resistance* is a mythical force that acts against human creativity. It has one sole mission: to keep things as they are.

Whether you're a writer or an artist creating art from your imagination, you have to fight a daily battle with *Resistance*.

“On the field of the Self, stand a knight and a dragon. You are the knight, resistance is the dragon. The battle must be fought every day.” — Steven Pressfield, The War of Art

Creative work enriches our lives, but it comes at a price. Creating can throw up many insecurities and anxieties, leading to blocks and procrastination, hindering our creative flow.

When I was working fulltime, I used to write late at night. If you have a day job, you know what I mean. Trying to come up with an article after a 10-hour working day is enough to rob you of your sanity.

Things didn't get better when I became a full-time writer. Instead, they got worse. Now I had all this time, but my productivity took a dip. I witnessed Parkinson's Law in action — "work expands to fill the time available for its completion."

I was wasting too much time on research.

I was trying new ways and rejecting them when they didn't work.

I had no structure to my day.

I didn't have a system.

It took me two years of trying and cementing habits before I could become a productive writer.

1. Figure out what is holding you back

You will not perform at your best if you don't know what holds you back. Write down all the things stopping you from becoming the writer you want to become. Be honest with yourself. Mine were:

- I don't have time to write. And when I have time, I am not productive.
- I am not good enough.
- English is my second language; I can never write like a native English speaker.
- I don't have the skills to write a balanced article.
- My grammar is not good, and my vocabulary is limited.
- I spend too much time reading other people's articles and feel discouraged I can't write like them.
- I spend too much time in front of the computer and still have nothing to publish.

Once I knew what was holding me back, I could work on it by changing my mindset.

2. Start by changing your mindset.

We need to fit writing around the rest of our lives rather than our lives around our writing. When I understood that, my perspective changed.

Rather than resenting that I didn't have enough time, I started limiting my writing time and aimed to finish writing projects in the allocated time.

I also realized that I couldn't be productive by using short-term hacks. What I needed were long-term sustainable systems. So I started looking for methods that fit with my way of working.

I like to work on a single project in a day. I call it my Daily Focus Tasks. These tasks could write an article, working on a novel, creating a course, or creating illustrations for a picture book. I have made these Daily Focus Tasks my number 1 priority. I make sure I accomplish them every day. If I do nothing else but just the Daily Focus task, I would have 365 tasks done in a year. That will be quite something.

3. Develop rituals.

Rituals are the automatic but decisive pattern of behaviors. Several artists and creatives establish them to get them to the right frame of mind before working on their creative projects.

Many athletes have rituals they follow before they enter the arena. It could be as simple as saying the affirmations while running towards the field.

Steven Pressfield has a ritual to invoke the muse asking the divine to help inspire his work before writing each day.

Establishing rituals at the beginning of our creative efforts is a great way to avoid the possibility of turning back or giving up. By making the start of creating an automatic routine, you replace doubt and fear with comfort and routine.

I started a small ritual before embarking on my writing session. I rewrite my manifesto by hand in a notebook or a piece of paper (whatever is handy). It reminds me of why I am writing and my commitment to writing. It puts me in the right frame of mind.

My manifesto is:

- I shall write every day.
- I shall not compare myself with other writers.
- I shall improve with every new book and article.
- I shall have fun with my writing.

4. Get in the habit of writing daily.

Everyday writing is more important than you think. When Stephen King had an accident and couldn't write for several weeks, he found the words were not connecting right when he finally started writing again. His writing muscles had atrophied. He needed to exercise again to continue writing the bestselling thrillers he'd been writing for thirty years.

Productive writers can produce an insane amount of work because they commit to writing every day. Start developing your writing muscles. After a while, you will establish writing as a habit ingrained into your DNA.

5. Keep track of your time and find out where your time goes.

According to the 2019 [American Time Use Survey](#), an average employed person spends:

- 3.6 hours a day working
- 9.6 hours on personal care and sleeping
- 1.8 hours on household chores
- 1.2 hours on eating and drinking
- 0.5 hours on caring for others
- 0.8 hours on purchasing goods and services
- 5.1 hours on leisure activities and
- 1.4 hours on other activities.

Every day we get twenty-four hours to live our lives meaningfully. But once you account for all the obligations each of us has, there isn't much time left; a measly two and a half hours for most of us, to be exact.

Your time outside your day job is precious. Know where it goes and decide how you spend it.

A helpful tip is to break your day down into 100 points. Where are your points being invested? Some of these points are spent sleeping (33), and some are spent working (33). Figure out how much of the remaining points you can spend creating.

6. Bring work concepts into your creative life.

Your day job can teach you valuable lessons about turning up and getting the work done. You are given set tasks and targets to achieve in your day jobs. In most cases, you perform those tasks dutifully and get the work done.

How often do you do that with your writing?

Turn up to your writing like you turn up at your job. Treat it like a second job and put in an honest day's work. Start your day early and do your creative work first thing in the morning.

Starting your day an hour or two earlier is a fantastic way to get your writing done before your day starts. It feels really good to start your day with a blast of creativity. You will also take advantage of the creative benefits of a dream state first thing in the morning.

That is why so many writers start in the wee hours of the morning, much before their family wakes up.

Start thirty minutes adventures.

Everyone has at least thirty minutes for lunch; most have an hour. This is a perfect opportunity to outline an article, research your next novel, or anything else which would support your creative work.

Use the dead time well.

Most people spend at least 20 minutes commuting to work. Good use of this time is listening to audiobooks. If you take public transport, pen and paper are great to catch those unique ideas which come and go daily.

I listen to podcasts while walking and watch course videos while cooking. When I am watching TV, I usually have my sketchbook handy. Whenever there is an advertisement or a boring show, I reach out for my notebook and start sketching.

Have TV and social media off days.

We use TV to unwind and Social Media to stay in contact with family and friends. How about eliminating those two twice a week?

We sometimes invest so much time in some very average programs under the guise of unwinding. Try turning off the TV for a week and invest that time in writing. It's incredible how much you can get done. If you use this time to write two pages of a book every day, you will complete the first draft within six months.

Designate one day a week as a creative day.

You do not have two opposing lives in conflict; you have one life and the challenge to develop a healthy work/art balance.

Marisa Anne Cummings, an LA artist, declared Thursday as her creative day and started a website called [CreativeThursday](#) to publish her progress and artwork there. What began as an intention to be more creative one day a week in 2006 became a big business in a few years.

Try and focus on the positive aspects of your day job and use your creative nature to make your day more exciting and productive. Like most things in life, you get out what you put in.

If you want your day job to be more meaningful, put more energy into doing it well, engage in the challenges that arise, and improve your situation through the creative gifts you possess.

Try to avoid those negative thoughts which do not serve your situation. They will only develop into negative energy and resentment towards your day job.

If all else fails, find a new job! Maybe you could find something more in line with your art or support your creative direction by providing flexibility around hours.

Find meaning in your art and purpose in your day.

A day job may not provide meaning, but it provides the means. It allows you to engage with people and find inspiration through life experience.

Friedrich Nietzsche once said, "*He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.*" The same could be said for working a day job. Your art is your why, and your day is the how.

We feel better about ourselves when we positively contribute to something beyond ourselves. To feel genuinely motivated towards your day jobs, believe what you're doing matters somehow. The purpose is a source of fuel not just for higher performance but also for thinking more creatively about overcoming obstacles and generating new solutions during your days.

21 Rapid Writing Techniques

Writing is hard. Even for the accomplished writers.

Each one of us has our own writing process, which we have developed. Use it.

But if you need some boost to your process, here are some suggestions:

1. Write In Blocks of 15 minutes

Rather than writing for an hour or more, write in 15 to 20 minutes blocks. You can easily write 250 words in 15 minutes. You can write a day's quota of 250 words in one hour. That, too, is on the edges of the day.

2. Use Kick Start Technique

Write 200 words about anything. Your day, whatever is bothering you. Whatever is happening around you. That will kick-start your writing muscles.

3. Use Timer

Use a timer. A physical one. Every time. You will notice the difference. You will get in the habit of racing the timer and clock in more words than you usually do.

4. Dictate Your Book

Speaking is faster than writing. There are many tools out there that can record with pretty high accuracy. I use [Otter.ai](#). It is free and pretty accurate.

You can also do it on your phone. iPhones' Notes App is pretty good at taking notes. Create recordings for your book and have them transcribed. This is a quick way to get your book done.

5. Have Someone Interview You

Have someone who isn't familiar with your topic interview you about it. Come up with questions for them to ask you, record the answers, and then have them transcribed.

6. Write The First Paragraph

When writing a book, the hardest part is writing the first paragraph. Once it's written, though, the rest will flow. You can even write the first paragraph for each chapter and then go back and add the remaining content.

7. Write The Chapter Summary First

Many books write themselves once you start writing, so creating a chapter summary will help get the ideas out of your head and give you a place to start.

8. Write Somewhere Else Other Than Your Normal Environment

Because of distractions at home, you might get more writing done away from your home office. Go to a coffee shop, or your local bookstore, or sit outside, where you won't be distracted from writing.

9. Go on Workcation

Book yourself in a hotel or an Airbnb for a weekend and power-write your book. You will be amazed how much you can write when concentrating only on one thing.

Don't do it for more than two days. Productivity drops after two days. Read the book [*Workcation For Writers*](#) by Holly E Worton.

10. Write Out-of-Sequence

Many writers get too focused on the sequence of the chapters and write nothing. Don't be too concerned about the order of the chapters, because the primary goal is to get it out of your head. Instead, start with the chapters in which you feel the most energy around.

11. Write Where The Emotion Is

You should write about a topic you have powerful emotions about because it is important to connect with your readers' emotions. Write ideas that are high on your emotional scale.

You've probably heard the saying, "Make Your Mess Your Message." What messes can you write about?

12. Write The Stories First, Then Make Your Points

Everyone loves a good story. People easily remember stories more than a list of facts. There is power in the phrase, "Once upon a time..." So, write your stories first, and then add the points. Method:

1. Write a Story.
2. Make three points.
3. Rinse and repeat.

That's it.

13. Keep A Notebook With You All The Time

Once you decide on the book topic, you'll start getting ideas when walking, showering, drinking coffee or tea, eating a meal, etc. As these ideas come to you, write them in a journal (let your subconscious write your book for you). When we aren't trying to chase ideas, they will often come to us effortlessly.

14. Text Your Book To Yourself

Sometimes, we need to trick our brains to get things done.

Text your book via the “Notes” app on your smartphone instead of sitting in front of a computer staring at a blank page. When we text others, we get right to the point.

15. Write Your Book With Post-It Notes

I’ve used this method, and it’s amazing. You’ll need some Post-it Notes and something to stick them to a Pinboard or a whiteboard. Then, do a brain dump and write everything you can think of about your topic on each Post-it Note. Then, sort them out and group them around a theme to create the outline for your book.

16. Blog Your Book

All three of my books have come from blog articles I have written. I think I have a few more in the 400-plus articles I have written.

You can select pre-written articles, edit them, rearrange them, or add new content to them and turn them into a brand-new book.

Or you can write a blog post a day on a topic. Then, when you have 10-20 articles, compile them into a book. Even if you have published them, you can still turn them into a book. Not everyone has read your article, and even if they have, they need a reminder.

17. Turn Your Podcast Into A Book

If you have a podcast, transcribe each episode and use it for a book chapter, and voilà, you have a book.

18. Turn Your Social Media Posts Into A Book

If you are a regular writer on social media, you will have a lot of content that can be turned into a book. Find a common theme or improvise a title such as *101 Short Essays That Will Surprise, Amuse, And Prod You*.

19. Powerpoint Your Book

Many people love using PowerPoint to create content, so why not use it to write your book? Create a slide for each topic in your book, then fill it with bullet points and even images.

20. Start With A Powerful Quote

Many books start with a powerful quote at the beginning of each chapter. An easy way to get your book started is to collect 10-12 quotes related to your topic and write a chapter based on each of those quotes.

21. Write Your Book As FAQs

It is easier to answer questions. Collect a set of questions on a topic and then write answers to them. This is what Michael La Ronn did in his book [*The Indie Writer's Encyclopedia*](#).

Ultimate List of Writing Quotes

1

“Discipline in writing is important but sort of over-rated. The more important virtue for a writer, I believe, is self-forgiveness. Because your writing will always disappoint you. Your laziness will always disappoint you. You will make vows: “I’m going to write for an hour every day,” and then you won’t do it. You will think: “I suck, I’m such a failure. I’m washed-up.” Continuing to write after that heartache of disappointment doesn’t take the only discipline, but also self-forgiveness (which comes from a place of kind and encouraging, and motherly love).” — Elizabeth Gilbert

2

“There are two pivotal tools in creative recovery — morning pages and the artist date. A lasting creative awakening requires the consistent use of both. Morning Pages are three pages of longhand, stream of consciousness writing, done first thing in the morning.

There is no wrong way to do Morning Pages—they are not high art. They are not even ‘writing.’ They are about anything and everything that crosses your mind—and they are for your eyes only. Morning Pages provoke, clarify, comfort, cajole, prioritize and synchronize the day at hand. Do not over-think Morning Pages: just put three pages of anything on the page...and then do three more pages tomorrow.

The Artist Date is a once-weekly, festive, solo expedition to explore something that interests you.

The Artist Date need not be overtly ‘artistic’ — think mischief more than mastery. Artist Dates fire up the imagination. They spark whimsy. They encourage play. Since art is about the play of ideas, they feed our creative work by replenishing our inner well of images and inspiration. When choosing an Artist Date, it is good to ask yourself, ‘what sounds fun?’ — and then allow yourself to try it. — Julia Cameron

3

“Find a subject you care about and which you in your heart feel others should care about, too. It is this genuine caring, and not your games with language, which will be the most compelling and seductive element in your style.”– Kurt Vonnegut

4

“Write a million words—the absolute best you can write, then throw it all away and bravely turn your back on what you have written. At that point, you’re ready to begin.”— David Eddings

5

“All writers think they suck. When I was writing ‘Eat, Pray, Love’, I had just as strong a mantra of THIS SUCKS ringing through my head as anyone does when they write anything. But I had a clarion moment of truth during the process of that book. One day, when I was agonizing over how utterly bad my writing felt, I realized: ‘That’s actually not my problem.’ The point I realized was this — I never promised the universe that I would write brilliantly; I only promised the universe that I would write. So I put my head down and sweated through it, as per my vows.” — Elizabeth Gilbert

6

“Don’t try to be original. Be simple. Be good technically, and if there is something in you, it will come out.” — Henri Matisse

7

“We want you to take from us. We want you, at first, to steal from us, because you can’t steal. You will take what we give you and you will put it in your own voice, and that is how you will find your voice. And that is how you begin. And then one day someone will steal from you.” — Francis Ford Coppola

8

“Everything that needs to be said has already been said, but since no one was listening, everything must be said again.” — Andre Gide

9

*“Steal from anywhere that resonates with inspiration or fuels your imagination. Devour old films, new films, music, books, paintings, photographs, poems, dreams, random conversations, architecture, bridges, street signs, trees, clouds, bodies of water, light, and shadows, Select the only thing to steal from that speak directly to your soul. If you do this, your work (and theft) will be authentic.”
— Jim Jarmusch*

10

“I have always felt like this is so cruel to your work — to demand a regular paycheck from it, as if creativity were a government job or a trust fund. If you can manage to live comfortably off your inspiration forever, that’s fantastic. That’s everyone’s dream, right? But don’t let that dream turn into a nightmare. Financial demands can put so much pressure on the delicacies and vagaries of inspiration. You must be smart about providing for yourself.”
— Elizabeth Gilbert

11

“You can only write regularly if you’re willing to write badly... Accept bad writing as a way of priming the pump, a warm-up exercise that allows you to write well.” — Jennifer Egan

12

“Books are uniquely portable magic. If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.” — Stephen King

13

“Resistance will tell you anything to keep you from doing your work. It will perjure, fabricate, falsify; seduce, bully, cajole. Resistance is protean. It will assume any form if that’s what it takes to deceive you. It will reason with you like a lawyer or jam a nine-millimeter in your face like a stickup man. Resistance has no conscience. It will pledge anything to get a deal, then double-cross you as soon as your back is turned. If you take Resistance at its word, you deserve everything you get. Resistance is always lying and always full of shit.” — Steven Pressfield

14

“What ‘Keep Going’ did for me was it helped me establish a repetitive, repeatable daily system for producing work. Because what I was really missing in my life was some sort of method to making work all the time.” — Austin Kleon

15

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not

serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

— Marianne Williamson

16

"A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write; if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be." — Abraham Maslow

17

"Everything you want is on the other side of fear." — Jack Canfield

18

"How we spend our days is how we spend our lives." — Annie Dillard.

19

"That's all any of us are: amateurs. We don't live long enough to be anything else." — Charlie Chaplin

20

“On the spectrum of creative work, the difference between the mediocre and good is vast. Mediocrity is, however, still on the spectrum; you can move from mediocre to good in increments. The real gap is between doing nothing and doing something.” — Clay Shirky

21

“Nobody tells this to people who are beginners. I wish someone told me. All of us who do creative work, we get into it because we have good taste. But there is this gap. For the first couple years you make stuff, it’s just not that good. It’s trying to be good, it has potential, but it’s not. But your taste, the thing that got you into the game, is still killer. And your taste is why your work disappoints you. A lot of people never get past this phase, they quit. Most people I know who do interesting, creative work went through years of this. We know our work doesn’t have this special thing that we want it to have. We all go through this. And if you are just starting out or you are still in this phase, you gotta know its normal and the most important thing you can do is do a lot of work. Put yourself on a deadline so that every week you will finish one story. It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions. And I took longer to figure out how to do this than anyone I’ve ever met. It’s gonna take awhile. It’s normal to take awhile. You’ve just gotta fight your way through.” — Ira Glass

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YOU'VE JUST GOTTA FIGHT YOUR WAY THROUGH.

If you liked this book, you will also like "[Dare To Create](#)" by the same author. Click [here](#) to get your copy.



About the Author

I am a Gen X who has quit competitive life to lead a creative life. Two years ago, I said goodbye to a six-figure income and became a full-time writer. Besides writing, I draw cartoons and dabble with watercolors. This is my first published book, but certainly not the last. I write regularly on [Medium.com](#) and my [website](#). If you want to stay in contact with me, [sign up](#) to get an email from me every Friday.

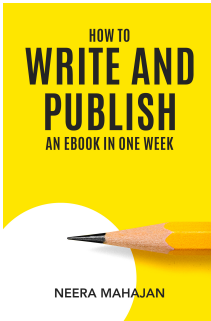
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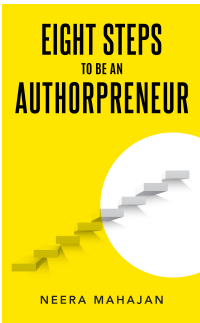
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Dare To Create

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Do you feel something inside you is dying?

This is the creative side of you demanding expression. Humans are born creative, and when our creativity doesn't get a way to express itself we feel stuck and frustrated.

If you have a desire to make your life count in a deeply fulfilling way, you ought to consider leading a 'creative life.'

You can't keep on postponing the call to creative work, thinking one day when the time is right you will do what you really want to do. Life is too short. Before you know it is going to be over. Are you prepared to die without even finding out what would have happened had you followed your dream?

Get it now and get going.

