

10 Ways to Cultivate a Writing Routine

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1. Say yes, not maybe. “I’ll write for 10 minutes before bed” (and doing it) is better than “Maybe I’ll write this week.” Pick whatever time of day, or whichever day of the week, you can carve out.

2. If email absorbs your time, use it. Do a writing exercise and send it a writing buddy or to yourself. Have your character write and send an email to you or to another character.

3. If you get lost in research, backtrack. Some of us can’t be on a computer or smartphone without losing ourselves in the Web (sometimes disguised as “research”). If this is you:

a) Write by hand.

b) Or, type up your writing when you don’t feel like writing. While typing, you will almost automatically start rewriting. Yes! That counts as writing.

4. Write by hand anyhow (it’s more portable), and go back to step 3B.

5. Measure your output. What gets measured gets done, as my corporate friends say. Set a timer and write for X minutes. Or resolve to do X number of words today/this week/this month. (Word count in Microsoft Word: Alt-T-W)

6. Chunk it down. I have written whole nonfiction books (after doing research), and rewritten a full-length play, by saying “I have 8 chapters (or scenes). I want to finish in 4 months. That’s 16 weeks. OK. I can do a chapter or scene in 2 weeks.”

7. Turn down a social invitation. “Sorry, I have another appointment.” The appointment is with yourself.

8. Be inspired by one of these quotes:

“Creativity unexpressed turns to poison.” – Deborah Bluestein

“Only put off until tomorrow what you are willing to die having left undone.” – Pablo Picasso

“It’s essential to create when the spirit is dying. It doesn’t matter what.” – Sandra Cisneros

9. Write it first! Edit it later! Respect craft, but don’t get hung up on it at the expense of spirit.

10. Find or start a supportive writing group (one that isn’t hung up on craft at the expense of spirit). Commit to it. Don’t beat yourself up if you write only in the group. *You’re writing!*

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Writing can shake you up, energize you, and heal you—sometimes all in the same day, and certainly over the course of years. Even when you don’t write, you are observing. At the same time, your writing is patiently awaiting your return. It may act grumpy when you finally get back, but it is always secretly glad to see you again.