

Beating Writers Block

William M. Akers - ISA Conference Call - June 20, 2015 - yourscreenplaysucks.com

"I was teaching. I got divorced. I was a single parent raising my kid alone. Look out in the world, find a woman who is teaching, is single, raising a kid and writing books and book reviews. When you find that person, I want to drink her blood."

Lorrie Moore, on not getting any writing done

TV WRITER
When do we need this by?

PRODUCER
Tomorrow.

TV WRITER
No, when do we need this by?

PRODUCER
Tomorrow.

"I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. This makes it hard to plan the day."

E.B. White

Buy Freedom software for \$10. www.macfreedom.com It works for Macs and PCs. You can turn off your computer's wireless connection for X number of minutes. No Facebook! No email! It's the *greatest* thing!! Or, get SelfControl for free. <http://visitsteve.com/made/selfcontrol/> Only for Macs.

If you've *got* to fiddle around on the Internet instead of write, go to <http://manetas.com/pollock/> At least you'll have fun, but don't let your kids find it. You'll go broke buying color print cartridges.

A book to buy: *Art & Fear* by David Bayles and Ted Orland

Write every day. Period.

Write every day. Every. Single. Damn. Day.

Google: "YouTube Orson Welles USC Trial" to see the time Welles came to USC film school.

Google: Writer's Store Don't Break The Chain.

Last Word Exercise

"I just pointed my rifle at him ... and let him have the big one right through the third button on his shirt. If he ever figured to sew that particular button on again he was going to have to scrape it off his _____."

Louis L'Amour

Chicago happened slowly, like a _____.

Neal Gaiman
American Gods

I knew one thing: as soon as anyone said you didn't need a gun, you'd better take one along that _____.

Raymond Chandler

Two years after my mother died, my father fell in love with a glamorous blonde Ukrainian divorcee. He was eighty-four and she was thirty-six. She exploded into our lives like a fluffy pink _____

Marina Lewycka
A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian

She reached into her bag and slid a photograph across the desk, a five-by-three glazed still. It was a blonde. A blonde to make a _____ kick a hole in a _____.

Raymond Chandler
Farewell, My Lovely

Two 12 year old boys...

Rick Lemon gave us a lecture on survival techniques. He said that the best thing to do if you are suffering from hypothermia is to climb into a plastic bag with a _____ _____.

Sue Townsend
The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole

Don Roos's Kitchen Timer Method

"KITCHEN TIMER"

The principle of Kitchen Timer is that every writer deserves a definite and do-able way of being and feeling successful every day.

To do this, we learn to judge ourselves on behavior rather than content. (We leave content to our unconscious; experience will teach us to trust that.) We set up a goal for ourselves as writers which is easy, measurable, free of anxiety, and fail-proof, because everyone can sit, and an hour will always pass.

Here's how it works:

1. Buy a kitchen timer, one that goes to 60 minutes.
2. We decide on Monday how many hours of writing we will do Tuesday. When in doubt or under pressure or self-attack, we choose fewer hours rather than more. A good, strong beginning is one hour a day.

3. The Kitchen Timer Hour:

No phones. No listening to the machine to see who it is. We turn ringers off if possible. It is our life; we are entitled to one hour without interruption, particularly from loved ones. We ask for their support. "I was on an hour" is something they learn to understand. But they will not respect it unless we do first.

No music with words, unless it's a language we don't understand.

No internet, absolutely.

No reading.

No "desk re-design/landscaping", no pencil-sharpening.

4. Immediately upon beginning the hour, we open two documents: our journal, and the project we are working on. If we don't have a project we're actively working on, we just open our journal.
5. An hour consists of TIME SPENT keeping our writing appointment. We don't have to write at all, if we are happy to stare at the screen. Nor do we have to write a single word on our current project; we may spend the entire hour writing in our journal. Anything we write in our journal is fine; ideas for future projects, complaints about loved ones, even "I hate writing" typed four hundred times.

When we wish or if we wish, we pop over to the current project document and write for as long as we like. When we get tired or want a break, we pop back to the journal.

The point is, when disgust or fatigue with the current project arises, we don't take a break by getting up from our desk. We take a break by returning to the comforting arms of our journal, until that in turn bores us. Then we are ready to write on our project again, and so on. We use our boredom in this way.

IT IS ALWAYS OKAY TO WRITE EXCLUSIVELY IN OUR JOURNAL. In practice it will rarely occur that we spend the full hour in our journal, but it's fine, good, and right that we do when we feel like it. It is just as good a writing day as one spent entirely in our current project.

6. It is infinitely better to write fewer hours every day, than many hours one day and none the next. If we have a crowded weekend, we choose a half-hour as our time, put in that time, and go on with our day. We are always trying to minimize our resistance, and beginning an hour on Monday after two days off is a challenge.

7. When the hour is up, we stop, even if we're in the middle of a sentence. If we have scheduled another hour, we give ourselves a break before beginning again -- to read, eat, go on errands. We are not trying to create a cocoon we must stay in between hours; the "I'm sorry I can't see anyone or leave my house, I'm on a deadline" method. Rather, inside the hour is the inviolate time.

8. If we fail to make our hours for the day, we have probably scheduled too many. Four hours a day is an enormous amount of time spent in this manner, for example. If on Wednesday we planned to write three hours and didn't make it, we subtract the time we didn't write from our schedule for the next day. If we fail to make a one-hour commitment, we make a one-hour or a half-hour appointment for the next day. WE REALIZE WE CANNOT MAKE UP HOURS, and that continuing to fail to meet our commitment will result in the extinguishing of our voice.

9. When we have fulfilled our commitment, we make sure we credit ourselves for doing so. We have satisfied our obligation to ourselves, and the rest of the day is ours to do with as we wish.

10. A word about content: This may seem to be all about form, but the knowledge that we have satisfied our commitment to ourselves, the freedom from anxiety and resistance, and the stilling of that hectoring voice inside of us which used to yell at us that we weren't writing enough -- all this opens us up creatively. When we stop whipping ourselves, our voices rise up inside.

Good luck!