

## How Can You Increase Your Productivity?

1. Do you want to be more productive?
2. Do you have delivery goals?
3. Are you wasting time on unimportant things (including needless writing)?
4. What works for you will be unique for you.

## What is productivity?

- Words/hour?
- Frequency of finished product? i.e. 1 novel or 4 short stories published each year.
- Simply accomplishing something meaningful in the time allotted?

**My definition:** Getting from point A (story concept) to point B (story ready for market) in the least amount of time.

Most people think of productivity in terms of how much time they have for writing. i.e. 2 hours each morning. While important, this is only 1 measure. There is at least 1 more: quality.

In seeking productivity, what you want is **quality time**.

Using this definition, if you only write 1 hour a week, what do you accomplish in that hour? If you write 2 hours a day, what do you accomplish in those 2 hours?

## What keeps you from being productive?

1. Family, work, other obligations.
  - a. Determine time outside these obligations that are yours for writing. Get agreements from everyone to respect those times. Eg. 9-11 pm each day. All day Saturday.
2. Still no time?
  - a. It is difficult to do anything without time. You have to make it. If you cannot create more than a few hours a month, stick to short fiction—poetry, flash fiction, short stories.
  - b. With limited time, it is best to consolidate if you're writing longer fiction. i.e. One weekend a month (30 hours) is better

than 1 hour a day, where you can't keep your head in the game.

3. Computer interruptions: e-mail, Facebook, gaming, ...
  - a. Disable these during writing time. If needed, use a computer that doesn't have them.
4. Writer's Block
  - a. Identify the cause: no ideas, lost interest, not ready to write, can't write non-linear, etc.
  - b. Address causes and change behavior
    - i. Generate ideas through research. Read related non-fiction.
    - ii. If you have writer's block mid-story, it usually means you began writing too soon. You don't know the story well enough to transfer it from brain to page. Spend more time brainstorming and taking notes before starting. Know:
      1. The main characters
      2. The protagonist's problem
      3. Major points of conflict
      4. How the story ends
    - iii. If stuck in a scene, skip ahead and come back later. The more you write, the better you'll understand the story; you'll be better equipped to fill in holes later.
    - iv. Long fiction too daunting? Start with short fiction or vignettes.
5. Inner Editor, perfectionism
  - a. Do not edit while in creative stages. Leave errors on the page.
  - b. Limit research while writing creatively. Leave marks and fill in later.
  - c. Accept that 1<sup>st</sup> draft is a discovery process, not a completion process.
6. Self-confidence, other psychological hurdles.
  - a. Realize that writing a story is zero-risk. You have an idea. Work it out on the page. It may become nothing. It may become a cathartic exercise. Or it may become something you want to share. Any way to look at it, you can't lose.
  - b. Many people with long term writer's block break through by going on a retreat. The ability to get into a story and stay there a few days breaks down barriers.
7. Wrong (for you) writing tools?

- a. If writing software, such as Scrivener, are helpful, use them. If you spend more time tinkering with tools than writing, don't. I use WORD 2010 and a text file for lean notes.
8. Finding your place (reading back recent work before you can start)
  - a. Try to start / stop on scene boundaries; scenes should be relatively standalone. Rereading what you did last time in order to find your place is just time lost.
  - b. Some people find that stopping 2 paragraphs into a new scene works best.

### **Productivity Rules:**

1. Be enthusiastic about your project. If you are not, change projects.
2. Prepare a project before you start writing. Brainstorm, create notes, do research.
3. The first thing you write should be the back cover description. This keeps you focussed.
4. The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing you write should be an outline, even if you are a pantsier. This gives you direction.
5. When writing 1<sup>st</sup> draft material, lock your inner editor in the closet. Be 100% creative while discovering the story. DO NOT EDIT!
6. For the 1<sup>st</sup> draft ms, do not worry about what's missing. It does not have to be complete. It will not be perfect. Focus on getting whatever you know or discover about your story and characters onto the page. Feel free to deviate from the outline; it is there to help, not limit creativity.
7. For revision drafts, be both artist and editor. Correct what needs correcting, but also be creative, especially when adding or enhancing scenes.
8. Reduce the number of revision drafts by editing from high to low. Worry about your story arc – beginning – middle – end – before dealing with line edits and typos. Don't polish something you'll later change or throw away.
9. Take a break between later (editing) revisions to distance yourself.
10. Revise until you are happy with the manuscript, but know when to stop. Don't beat a dead horse. That last revision where you just move commas around is not productive.
11. Let your alpha readers, beta readers, and editor find your elusive mistakes. They have fresh eyes and will find what you miss. But also know when to stick to your vision when they ask for changes.

12. Freshen your own eyes by letting the finished manuscript rest, preferably on an agent's or publisher's desk. If it comes back to you months later, spend a day (or 2) giving it another polish before sending it out again.

### **Productivity Tips:**

1. Write Lots. The more you write, the easier it comes, the more polished your 1<sup>st</sup> draft.
2. Read Lots. The more you read, the more you will learn what you wish to emulate or avoid.
3. Keep an idea file (text or Word) so you don't forget ideas you'd like to incorporate in current or future projects. Review the file regularly.
4. Create a comfortable writing environment—quiet, comfy chair, good lighting, apps that work for you, 2 computer screens.
5. Spend writing time, writing. Minimize related activities such as tracking word counts and fussing with maps, character charts, etc.
6. Set goals. Eg. Line up specific projects for writing retreats, deadlines to complete drafts, etc.
7. If needed, be accountable to someone (i.e. other writers)
8. Find your voice; once you have it, you will write faster.

### **My Method:**

What works best for me is binge writing. Most days I don't write. When I do, it is for a minimum of ½ day. Full day is better. Several days is best.

### **Conclusion**

All of us enjoy writing. We enjoy it even more when we feel our time and efforts are productive. Ultimately, though, we have to do what makes us happy. If scrounging for writing time leaves us feeling stressed or guilty, we need to figure out how to make better use of less time. If brainstorming before writing is a non-starter, we have to accept that we may throw away more words than we keep of those initial drafts. If it just isn't in us to write down a series of plot points in an outline before writing that first draft, then we should at write as we go to help us organize our material later.

Bottom line: Look for ways to make your writing time count. When you leave your writing chair, feel that you have made progress. Writing time should be quality time.