

**Time to Write**  
**(So you want to be a writer?)**

**By**

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# So you want to be a writer?

Many people have entertained the idea of being a writer. They feel the passion to write. They have a best-seller idea. They want to share their specialist knowledge with the rest of the world. Yet years go by and nothing happens. Why? The reason is almost always the same: they can't find the time to write.

Whether you want to write fictions, magazine articles, plays, screen plays, non-fiction books, children's stories, film scripts, radio scripts or commercial writings, one thing is for certain: if you want to be successful writer, you must write.

There are only 24 hours in a day and most of us lead hectic lifestyles which leave little time for luxury like sitting down to write. Family and job usually come first, and by the time the dishes have been washed and the children put to bed, chances are you're exhausted yourself and the writing will just have to be postponed until another time.

But if writing is important to you, then you must be disciplined and decide how you want to divide your time. You'll have to analyse your lifestyle and cross a few things off your list to free up time for your personal goals.

And it's not as difficult as you may think.

# HOW TO MAKE TIME

## *If in doubt, cut it out*

Record your daily activities in details for a week. Look at the list and eliminate those activities which do not contribute positively to your life. One such obvious activity is watching television. If you must watch it, at least try cutting the time spent on it. Watch it for one hour instead of two, and you'll have seven more hours to write every week. Don't watch it at all and you'll have fourteen extra hours!

If you spend long periods gossiping with friends on the phone, try cutting it down and using emails to keep in touch instead. I'm not suggesting you should cut off all contact with your friends, but if you want to be a successful writer, you'll have to sacrifice some of that gossip time.

## *Break out from the rut*

Are you one of those people who go through their days by rote? Up at 7.30am, breakfast at 8.00am, set off for work at 8.30am, at work until 6.30pm, dinner and TV until 9.30pm,

watch the news at 10.00pm and go to bed at 10.30pm? Do you follow the same schedule pretty much every day? Do you spend a lot of time doing something because you've always done it, not because you enjoy it or it makes a positive contribution to the quality of your life?

If that sounds like you, then try having a break from your set routine and be surprised at how much extra time you have. For example, you don't 'have to' watch the 10 o'clock news every evening. If you skip it for two nights a week you will have created some writing time for yourself. Perhaps you are one of those who can write with the radio on in the background. In that case, listen to the news on the radio while you're writing and kill two birds with one stone.

### *Sleep a little less*

If you are a morning person, get up an hour earlier. If you're a night owl, go to bed an hour later. Pick a time at which you feel most creative.

## *Use your lunch hour*

Don't write at your desk though because you're likely to be distracted by office activities or hassled by your boss about that urgent report. Escape to the back of your car, a café or the park to do your writing, anywhere where you won't be disturbed for a while.

If you work near a library then you are lucky. You can use your lunch hour to do research for your writing. Nowadays most libraries have internet facilities so you can also conduct online research.

## *Use your travel time*

If you take the train or the bus to work, use that time productively rather than looking out of the window. Carry a notebook with you at all times to jot down ideas or even write your next chapter. Or print out a few pages of your writing for editing during this time. Look at your fellow passengers for ideas: one of them may be the perfect character for your novel.

If you drive to work, invest in a hand-held recorder. You can use it to record ideas, or to dictate your writing. Then when you get home all you have to do is play it back and type it in the computer.

### *De-clutter your life*

Spend a few days clearing out the clutter in your life. By this I mean both the physical clutter around the house, and the emotional clutter which has prevented you from writing in the past. For example: how often have you said this to yourself?

"I will write when I feel happier about myself."

"I want to lose some weight first."

"I can't start writing until I've sorted out my relationship problems."

"I don't feel confident that I can write."

See what I'm getting at? Spring-cleaning your life is a good way to start a more disciplined and structured writing life.

## *Get support*

Enlist the help of your family. Ask your partner or parents to look after the children once or twice a week. If you have older children, ask them to help with house chores for a small reward. That way they'll feel they're helping you with your writing, they get paid, the housework gets done, and you get to write for an hour or two. Everyone's happy.

Talk to your family and friends about your passion for writing. They may not understand what writers do, but at least they will be able to feel your passion for writing and provide the support you need. If they don't know you need support, you're not going to get it.

# HOW TO BE MORE PRODUCTIVE

Okay, now that you have freed up some time for writing, how do you make sure you use this time productively?

## *Establish a writing schedule*

Writing is essentially a solitary activity. As a writer you need to be self-disciplined; nobody is going to make you sit down and write. In fact, your family and friends will be glad that you're not writing and are spending time with them. But to succeed as a writer, you must write. Having a writing schedule is an important step. If you don't schedule something, chances are it will get pushed to the bottom of your list and never get done.

Write every day if you can. Otherwise, aim to write on a regular basis: every two days, three times a week or whatever suits you. The important thing is to write regularly. The more you write regularly, the more your writing will flow.

Buy a wall calendar, highlight your writing time a week ahead and put it up where you can see it. If you're disciplined enough you can use a pocket or electronic diary, but make sure you do look at it and not just let it sit in the drawer. Stick to the plan the same way as you would other regular activities in your life. Don't make excuses for yourself.

If you can, write at the same time every day. Writing regularly at a specified time establishes a pattern, and is essential to building a schedule.

### *Pick a time to suit your lifestyle*

If you want to write from midnight to two in the morning and get up at 10am, and it fits in with your lifestyle, then do it. Similarly you may want to go to bed at 9pm, get up at 4 in the morning and write until the children get out of bed.

### *Don't get distracted*

Aim to do nothing but write during your scheduled writing time. Try not to get distracted by writing-related activities

such as research, note-gathering, writing the outline, etc. Do these things at some other time, ie, read the book for your research at bed time. If you find yourself spending all your scheduled writing time in preparatory work and never get down to the actual writing, then you need to take a look at why you're actually avoiding writing.

### *Prepare for writing (if you need to)*

If you have a demanding full-time job, you may still be in work mode and find it hard to relax when you get home. In that case you may need to do something to help ease you into a more productive mood for writing. Call it a transition phase if you like. Try the following:

- o Do some gentle exercise
- o Have a shower or a warm bath
- o Spend 10 minutes with your children
- o Read a few pages of a book
- o Listen to some relaxing music for 10 minute
- o Go for a short walk
- o Enjoy a cup of tea in the garden

Don't over-do this bit though or you'll end up not writing.

### *Stick to the schedule no matter what*

When it comes to your scheduled time to write, do it, even if your mind is completely blank and the last thing you want to do is sit down and write.

Don't worry about writing rubbish at first - even the greatest writers wrote rubbish sometime in their lives. Don't expect to create something worthy of publication each time. Even if you have only managed to produce garbage in a ten-minute slot, you have achieved something: you have written. As most writers know, beginning is the hardest part. Once you've started, it gets easier.

The bottom line is: don't spend too much time thinking about writing, write!

### *Be selfish*

Put up a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on your door (if you write in a separate room), on your computer or on the back of your

chair. Be selfish. Let your family know you are doing something for yourself for an hour or two, but you will emerge as the loving wife/mother or husband/father again in due course. Don't let guilt stop you from following your dreams.

Initially your family may ignore your sign, but don't give in the moment someone shouts: "Mum/dad, where's my ... (fill in the blank)", or "Honey could you get me my (fill in the blank)". Be strict. Don't make exception unless the house is on fire. They will get used to your schedule after a few days.

### *Look ahead*

At the end of each writing session, set yourself a goal for the next one. This can be:

"I'll produce 500 words."

"I'll write 3 pages."

"I'll finish the first chapter."

Having a goal not only helps to motivate you, it will also minimise wasted time when you begin your next session.

### *No excuses*

Don't use "I don't have time" as an excuse anymore. Remember, we tend to make time for something we really want to do. It all depends on how badly you want to become a writer; if your desire to write is strong enough, you will find the time.

Happy writing!