Developing a Writing Habit

Making writing a habit has a number of benefits:

- you will likely be more productive, more motivated, and less stressed
- you will also probably enjoy the writing process a lot more.
- Your writing will certainly improve.

I’ve been a committed procrastinator most of my life, but to my astonishment and pleasure I’ve developed a writing habit of my own. You can too, if you haven’t already!

Something I have learned: writing = thinking. Writing helps you clarify and develop your ideas, and find creative insights – for me, it is a much more effective approach than “thinking” or “talking” out your ideas, although those approaches have their place. You must give yourself time to write, and you must write, or your ideas will never reach their full potential.

Restarting Your Writing: Some strategies and considerations

- Set a daily goal – something realistic, that you can achieve. Write it down.
  o Many people rely on what Bolker calls the “inspiration method,” which means sitting glued to the chair until an idea comes; most people do not do well with this method.
  o In fact, research indicates that most people should not write for more than 2 hours per day.
  o A helpful approach is to set a certain number of pages per day as your writing goal – for example, 3-6 pages every day for a week.
  o Establish ways to remind yourself about your writing goal: post-it notes on the coffee maker / bathroom mirror, friends, electronic reminders, etc.

- Create a writing habit:
  o Write at the same time and place every day, and precede it by the same habits (i.e., wake up, go for a walk, make a coffee, then sit down to write for 2 hours)
  o Getting your writing done first thing in the morning can be very effective. (But this may not work for everyone!)
  o Start with 10 minutes of free writing to warm up; it’s much easier to start by committing to these 10 minutes than to 2 hours. You will keep writing after the 10 minutes are up.
  o During your writing hours, write. Don’t “check something” on the internet, or stop to make some tea, or watch a YouTube video for three minutes. Just write.
  o If you are really stuck writing about one aspect of your work, write about a different aspect. Keep writing.
  o When you’re writing, avoid editing, proofreading, fact-checking, etc. The purpose is to produce words on paper / a computer screen. Edit later. Just write, even if it’s not great-quality writing.
o Keep a piece of paper next to you, to write down anything that you want to give your attention to – then give it your attention when your writing time is up.
o Consider rewarding yourself; certainly acknowledge your small achievements in developing a writing habit! Pay attention to what works for you, and how you benefit when you write regularly; it will help motivate you.

• When you’re not writing:
o Carry a notebook around to keep track of good ideas
o Set up a daily routine that supports your writing habit
o Take care of yourself (nutrition, sleep, exercise and hydration are very important!)

Most importantly, find and do what works best for you. Not only are you on a journey of discovery about your thesis topic, but you are also on a journey to find out what conditions you need to be the best writer you can be.

Resources


