



Imagine getting TONS of writing done.

This is big.

In fact, this is far more revealing than I think many of the authors who said it probably realise.

It's an indication of things at work beneath the surface of writers' lives.

The good news is that something can be done about them.

Now, when it comes to dealing with time and procrastination, you'll find a number of guides, articles, lists of things to do and so forth on the internet, all of them giving insights into the matter and suggesting ways forward.

This kind of thing is like 'first aid' for writers - the suggestions might serve to patch them up and help them to get a bit more done, but they tend not to go to the heart of the problem. A 'First Aid Programme' for writers in this position exists at the end of this series of articles - but if the core of the matter could be addressed - if the issues of Lack of Time and Procrastination could be handled in some way there would be no need for temporary remedies and partial solutions. Procrastination and time-related factors when it came to writing would evaporate.

You would never waste time again.

You would get tons of writing done.

Is this possible? Surely, there isn't anything to be done with regards to procrastination? Isn't it simply human nature to be distracted and to put things off?

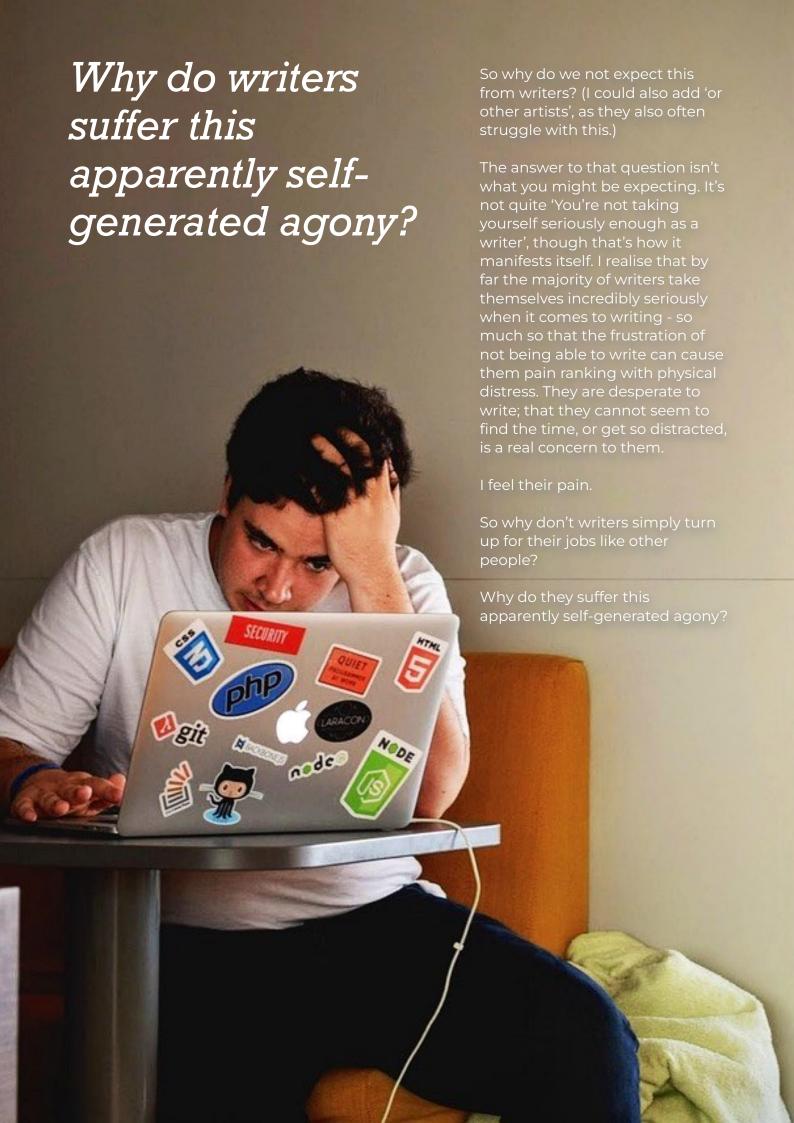


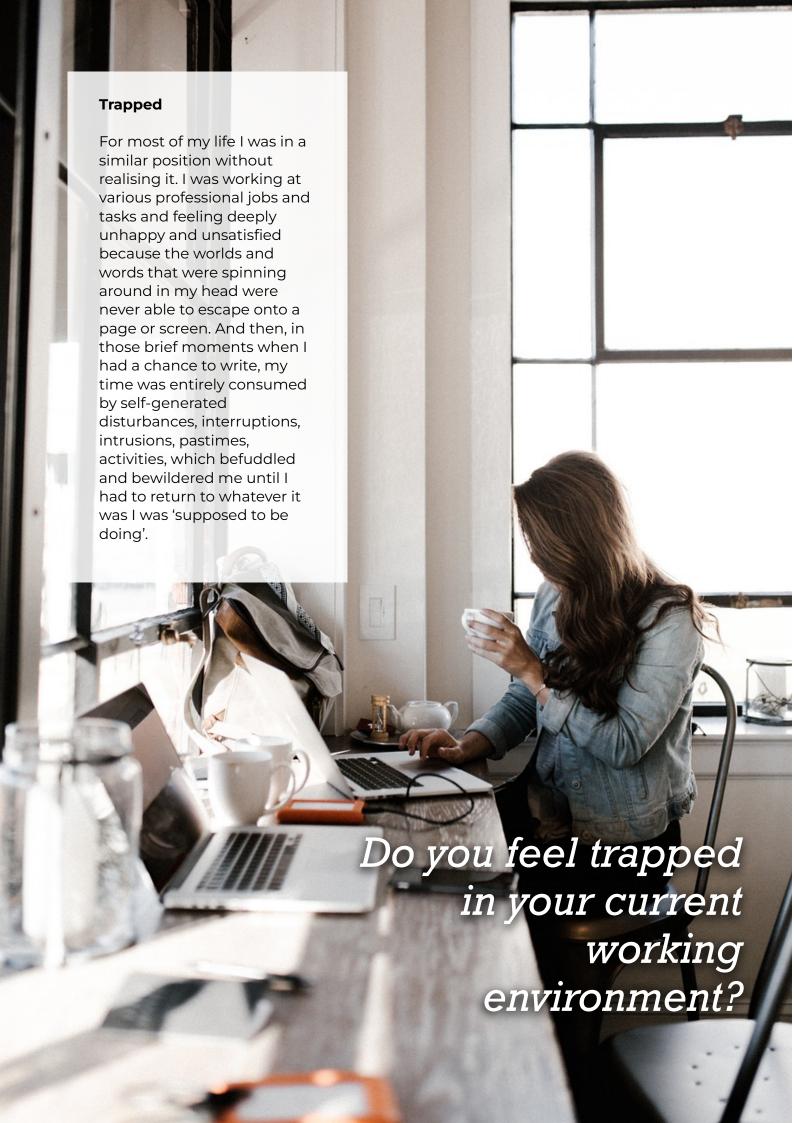
Comparisons

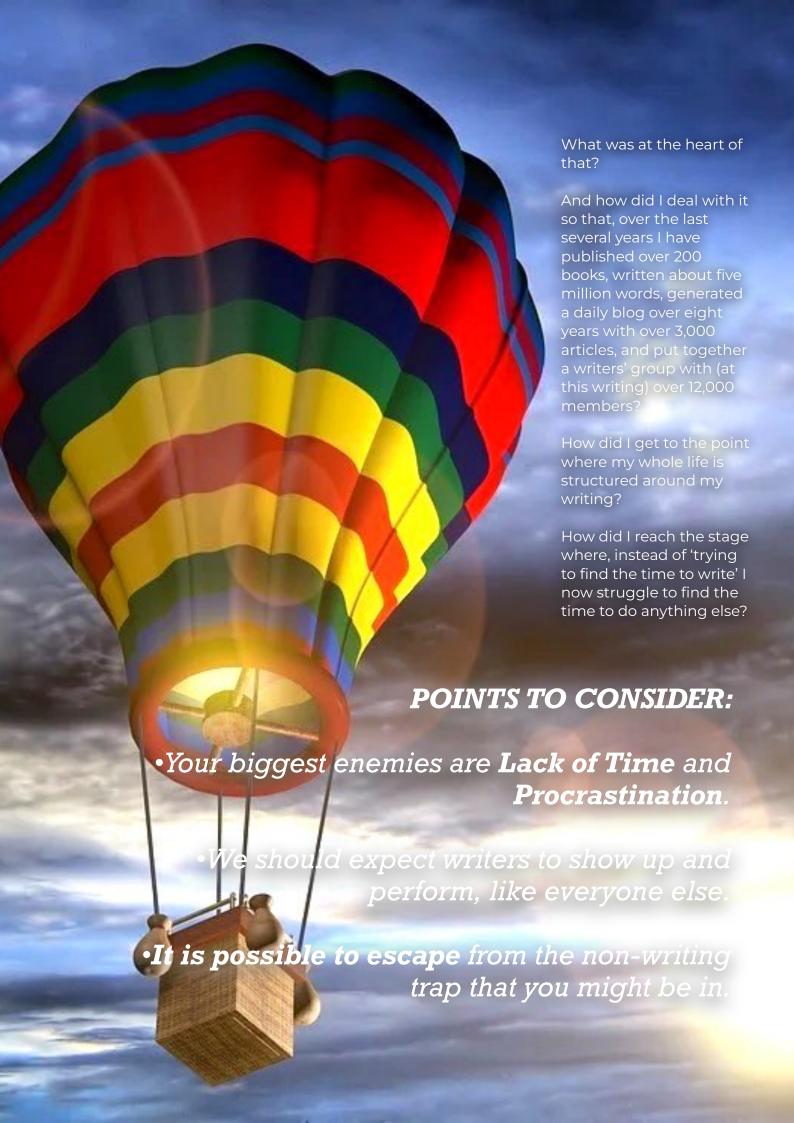
Let me begin leading you down the path to the solution through a comparison: if you went to see your GP (that's 'General Practitioner' or local doctor, for those of you in the States or elsewhere) about a health issue, you wouldn't expect them to not show up for your appointment on the grounds that 'they had been distracted' or 'didn't have enough time', would you?

Even more extreme: if you called the Fire Brigade in an emergency, the last thing you would expect to hear would be a recorded message explaining that all the fire people were off doing something else for a bit, and could you call back?

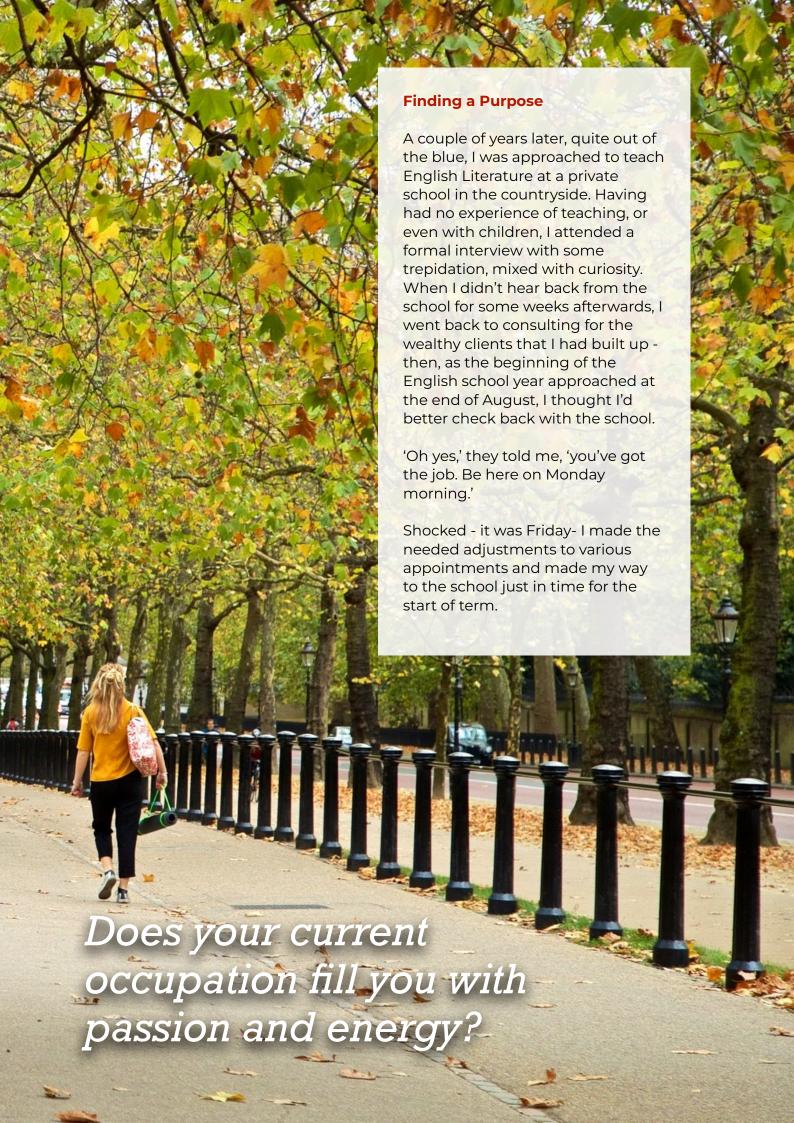
In other words, in almost every other department of life, we expect that others will present themselves as available and functioning according to their jobs. If you describe yourself as something, then society demands that you turn up, ready to perform your duty, as a professional, whether you are part of fire services, a doctor, a data entry clerk, a shop assistant, a salesperson or whatever. If you don't appear and perform, you lose your job. It might be truer to say that, if you don't function as your job, you are undermining what you are in others' eyes and you will eventually fade away.

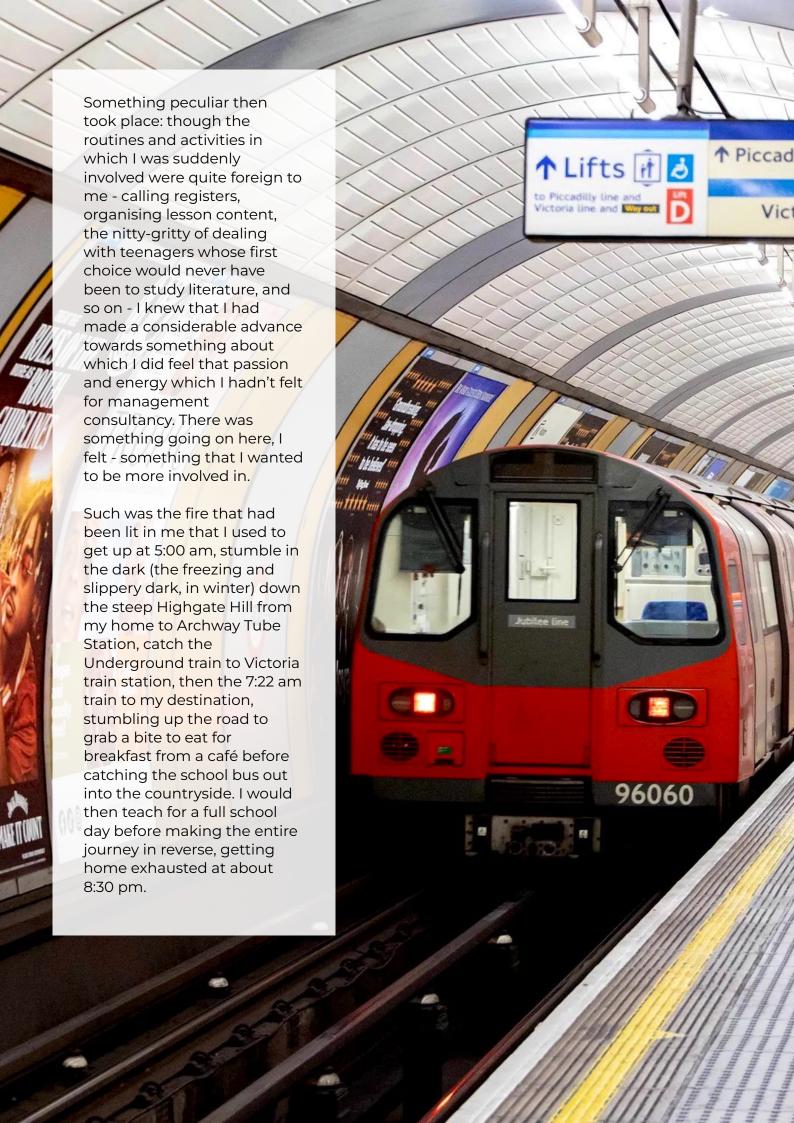


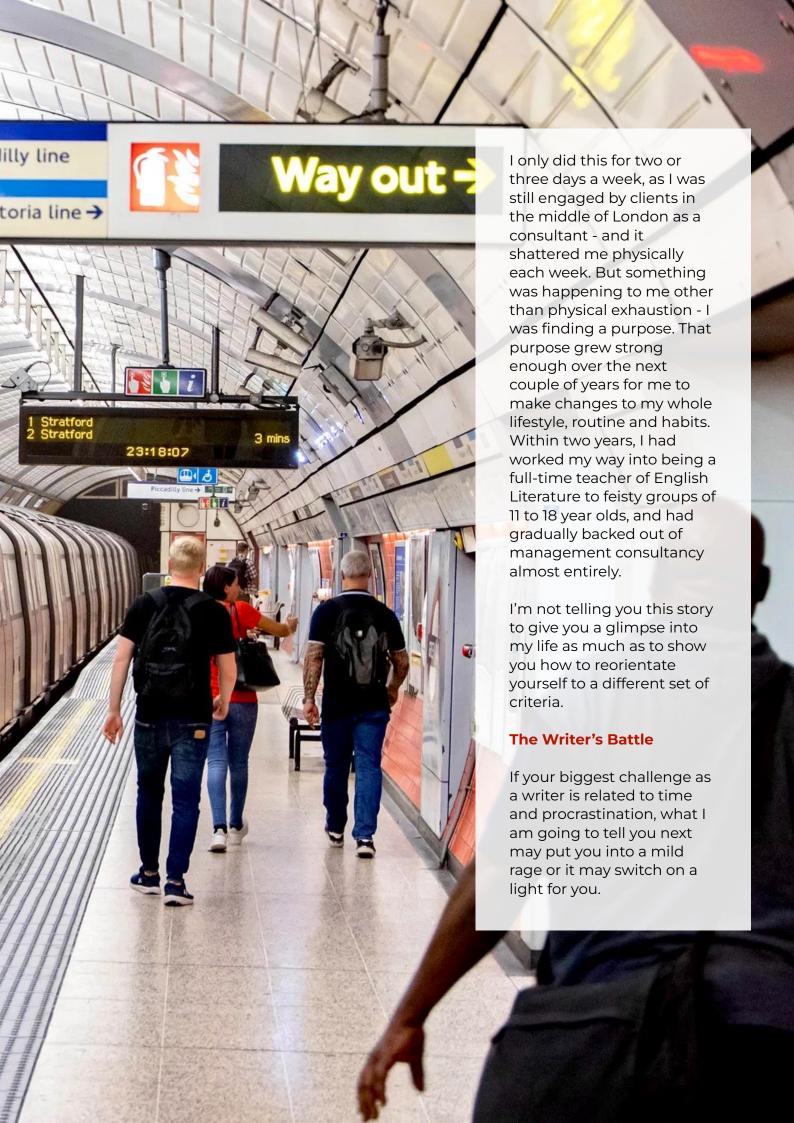


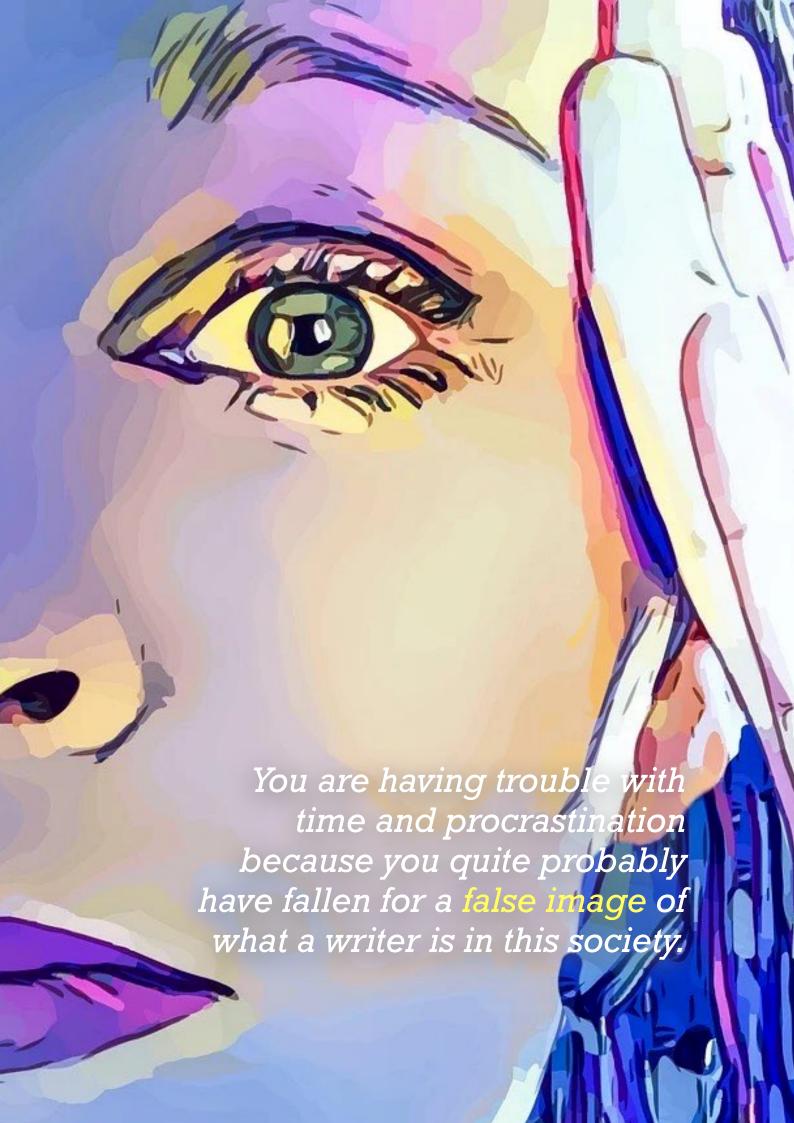






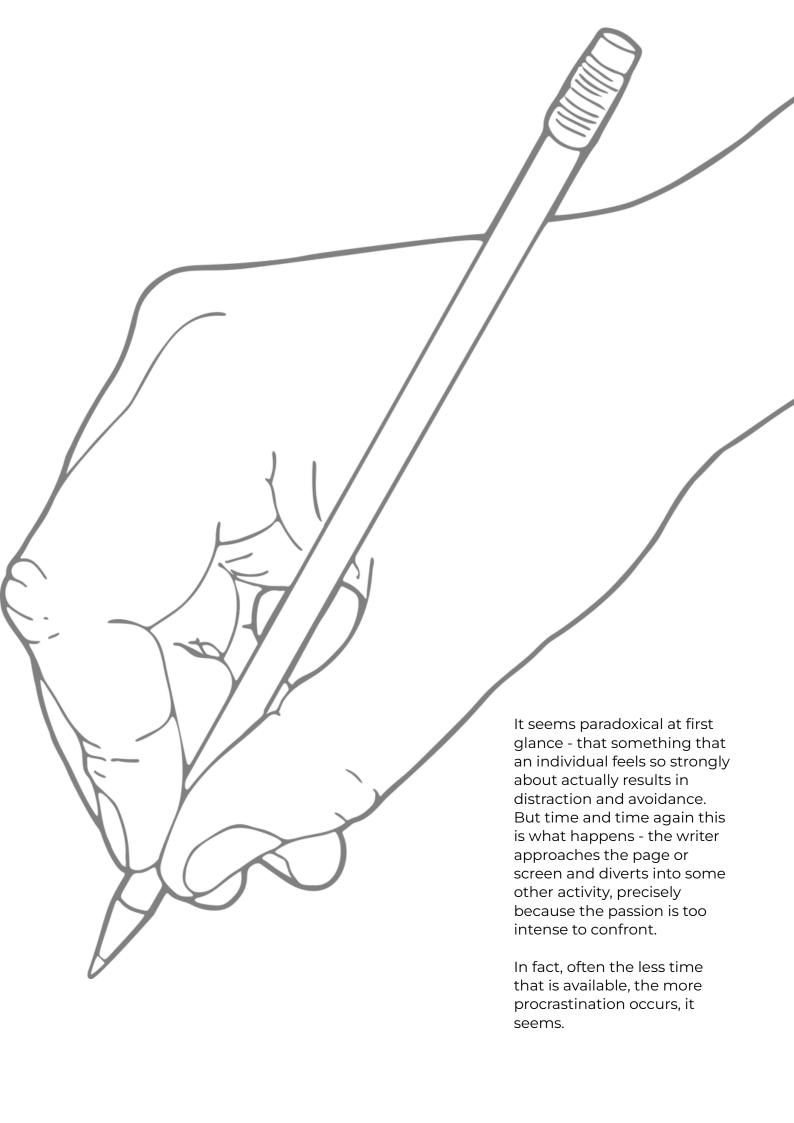












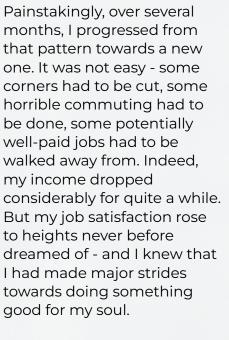
A New Image

What's needed is a reorientation.

To escape from the Big Lie - that a writer's life must be one of penniless struggle in which time is so highly valued that it focuses passion into a laser beam which is then so 'hot' that it is shunned - an individual must progress towards a completely different image.

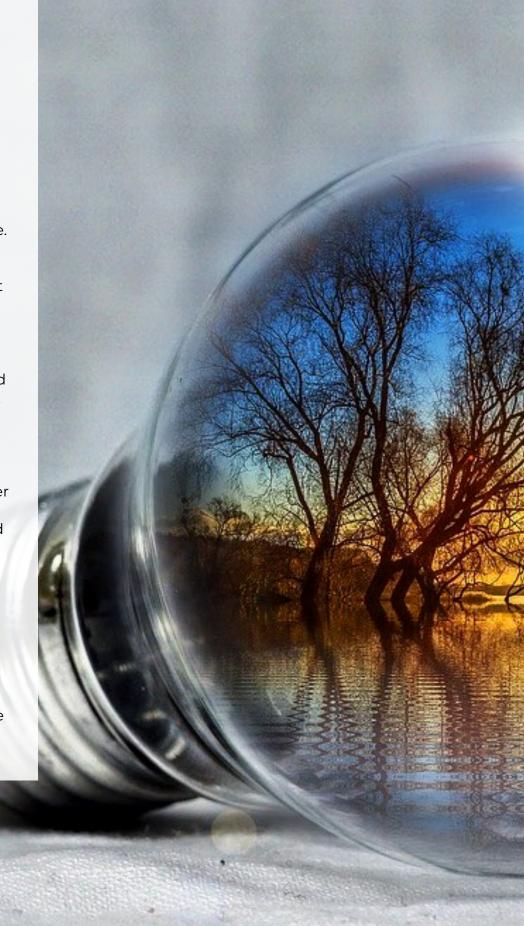
The new image is of a writer whose entire life is structured around writing.

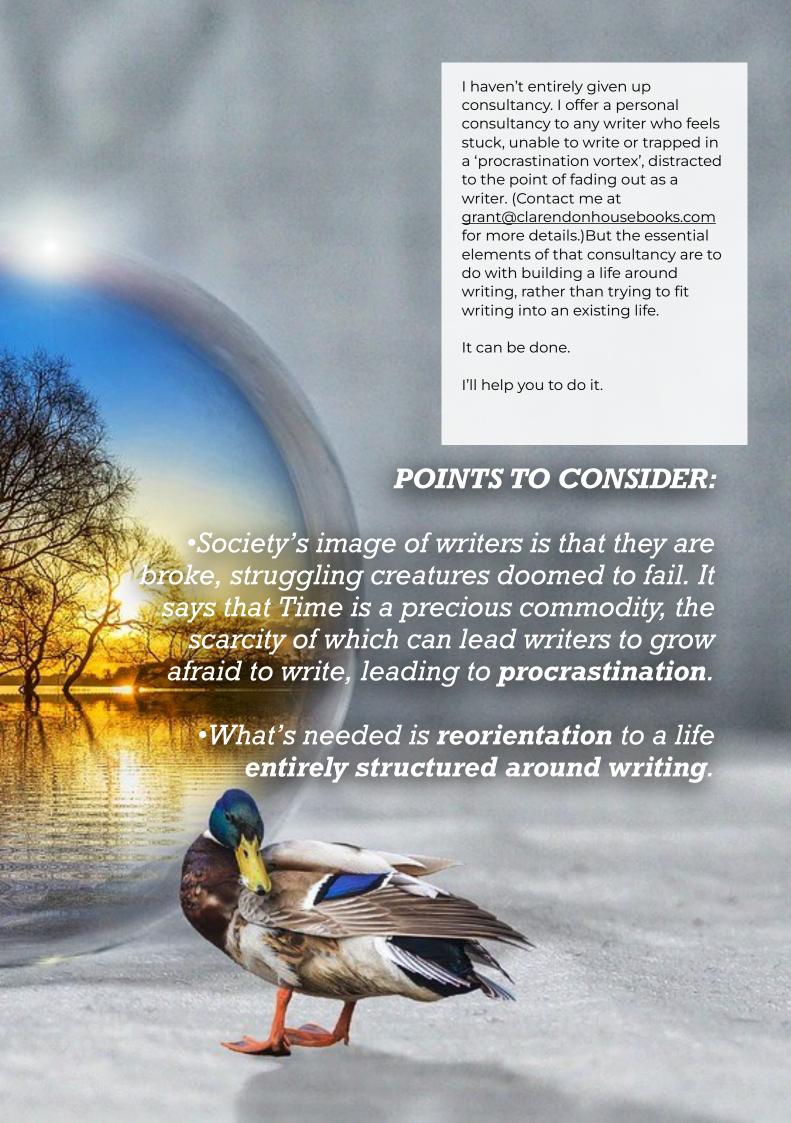




It took a few more years - and quite a considerable amount of pain - to progress further. But now my entire life is structured around writing. Yes, I have other things that I have to do, other duties, other roles, including (unexpectedly) the cherished role of parent. But that inner angst that made me deeply unhappy has gone. And I am able to generate an output writing-wise that I couldn't even have imagined generating a few years ago.

I even get to procrastinate a little without stress - because I know that I have the time.







We've seen how the writer's biggest challenge, by survey result, has to do with time and procrastination, and that this really isn't going to be solved completely by those short-term remedies which enable a writer to eke out a few minutes here and there to get something onto the page (though those kinds of things help to relieve pressure, like first aid).

What's needed to defeat procrastination and time issues completely is an almost total reorientation around writing: if you really want to conquer these large issues, large changes are needed.

But it's all very well me using myself as an example when my circumstances might be fairly unique. What are the broad steps that any writer should look at taking if he or she wants to build a life

around their work, rather than the other way round?

Here are some suggestions. Not all of these will be practicable for all people, but implementing even a few of them should go a long way towards the goal of having a writing-centred life.

They are just a beginning there's much more to come.

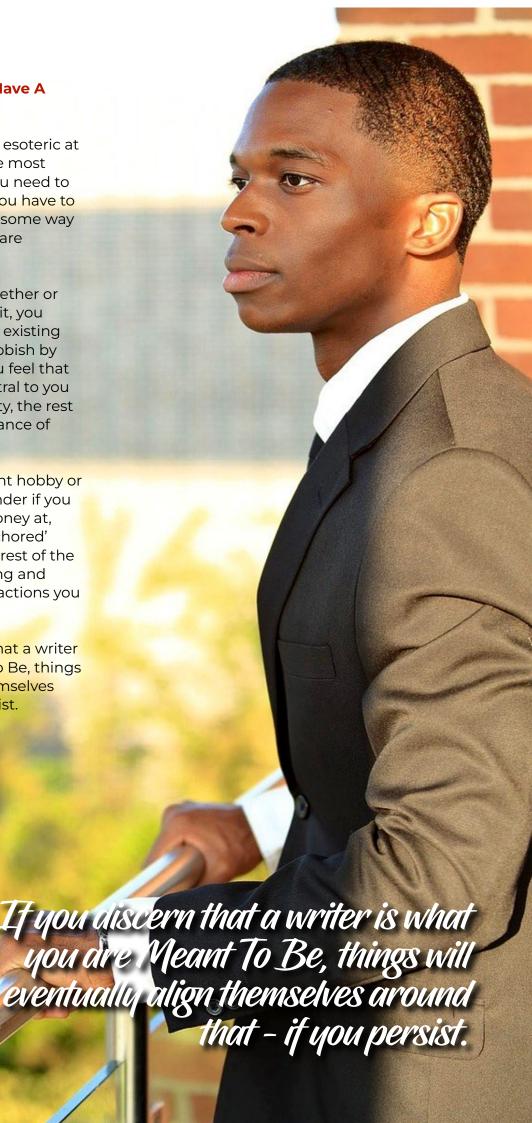
1. Recognise That You Have A Purpose

This might sound a little esoteric at first, but it is perhaps the most concrete prerequisite you need to make any of this work. You have to know or feel or divine in some way that writing is what you are 'supposed' to be doing.

This is irrespective of whether or not you are any good at it, you understand: even if your existing writing is considered rubbish by you or anyone else, if you feel that writing is somehow central to you and to your life and sanity, the rest of these steps have a chance of working.

If writing is just a pleasant hobby or something that you wonder if you can make some easy money at, then you will not be 'anchored' enough to carry out the rest of the plan - Life will come along and brush aside any further actions you might try to take.

If you discern, though, that a writer is what you are Meant To Be, things will eventually align themselves around that - if you persist.



2. Don't Dream: Plan

You might have already spent considerable time daydreaming what it would be like if you could write full time. There's nothing wrong with daydreaming, but the thing to do is to transform these idle dreams into plans.

Work out how long you need to transform your life so that you can concentrate on writing.

If you look at this realistically, you're probably going to need five years at least. It took me two years

to get reorientated from being a management consultant in London to a full-time English Literature teacher in the countryside: then it took a further ten years to move from that position to my current position of full-time writer. You don't have to take ten years - I made some fundamental mistakes along the way which added time into the equation. Without the mistakes, I estimate that it would have taken me five years in total to make the transition to a writingcentred life.

It might take less for you because you might not be so embedded in a life far removed from that of a full-time writer, like I was.

Planning includes confronting some uncomfortable things. You probably have routines, possessions, patterns of living which will have to change dramatically or be given up entirely to make this work. One of the almost inevitable things about planning to live a writing-centred life is that your income will plummet - so you need to design a life around a lower income.

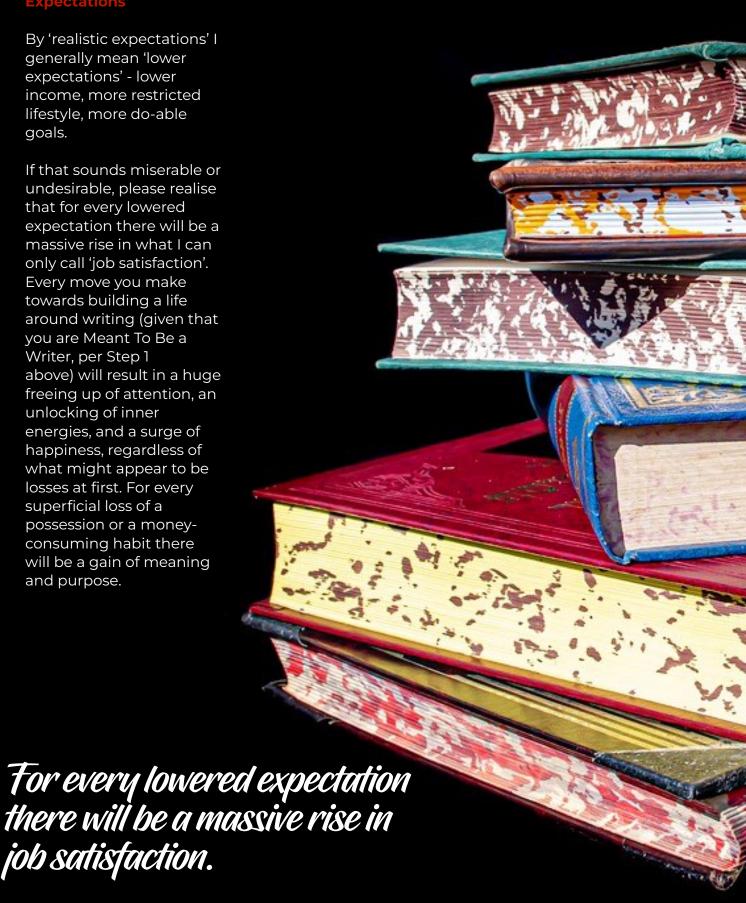




By 'realistic expectations' I generally mean 'lower expectations' - lower income, more restricted lifestyle, more do-able goals.

If that sounds miserable or undesirable, please realise that for every lowered expectation there will be a massive rise in what I can only call 'job satisfaction'. Every move you make towards building a life around writing (given that you are Meant To Be a Writer, per Step 1 above) will result in a huge freeing up of attention, an unlocking of inner energies, and a surge of happiness, regardless of what might appear to be losses at first. For every superficial loss of a possession or a moneyconsuming habit there will be a gain of meaning and purpose.

job satisfaction.





For example, my expectations as a consultant were at one point that I would be able to influence the evolution of post-Soviet Russian society through a programme of educational radio programmes which would reach hundreds of thousands of interested Russian business people, thus creating a global effect. These expectations were lowered over the space of two years to the idea that I might be able to influence about two dozen or so teenagers by inculcating in them a love of literature and the sanity and hope that that brings, perhaps resulting in them making a difference in their individual lives. My first set of expectations were grandiose and unwieldy, ego-based and unrealistic; my second set were more concrete, achievable, altruistic and came true over a year or two: the children I taught eventually went to live in various places all over the world, from where they kept in touch with me and updated me regularly about their advances into various careers to do with culture and the arts. They were creating effects I couldn't have dreamed about, and those effects were real and grounded.

As my career coalesced even more around writing and literature, people reported to me the most meaningful and powerful revelations and triumphs from working with me.

So the one set of hopes, though grand, turned out to be vague and resulted in nothing, while the adjusted set of hopes, though humble, brought about real heart-felt and life-changing transformations.

'Lowering one's expectations' is probably the wrong way to describe what actually happens, then. It is more like 'aligning one's expectations', making sure that one's expectations are actually achievable and result in live, measurable products that make a difference in the real world.

As a writer, your stories may or may not change the world - but you can work on them so that they will affect a few people at least. What is better? Grandiose ideas which come to nothing? Or trimmed-down ideas which create real wonder and change in people's hearts?





4. Get Practical About Money

Part of my personal solution was that I was lucky enough to meet a woman who became my wife, and whose support, financial and otherwise, remains a bulwark of my current set-up. This doesn't mean that the whole thing is a one-way street or that I am being 'sponsored' - it means that I do certain things for her and she does certain things for me. In other words, there is a basic exchange occurring, one of the results of which is that I get to focus on writing.

There are other ways of getting support than marriage, obviously. But don't expect a one-way flow: expect to provide something which results in a flow coming your way.

Living costs are the Big
Distraction: there has to be
some way of paying for the
mortgage, the food, the bills,
and everything else that each
calendar month demands from
us in the society in which we
live. Whether you marry into a
solution or develop some other
way of getting this under
control, unless you do get a
grip on it, the writing-centred
edifice can collapse pretty
quickly.

However, if you apply the steps above, you can reduce the whole burden of costs quite seriously over a period of time.





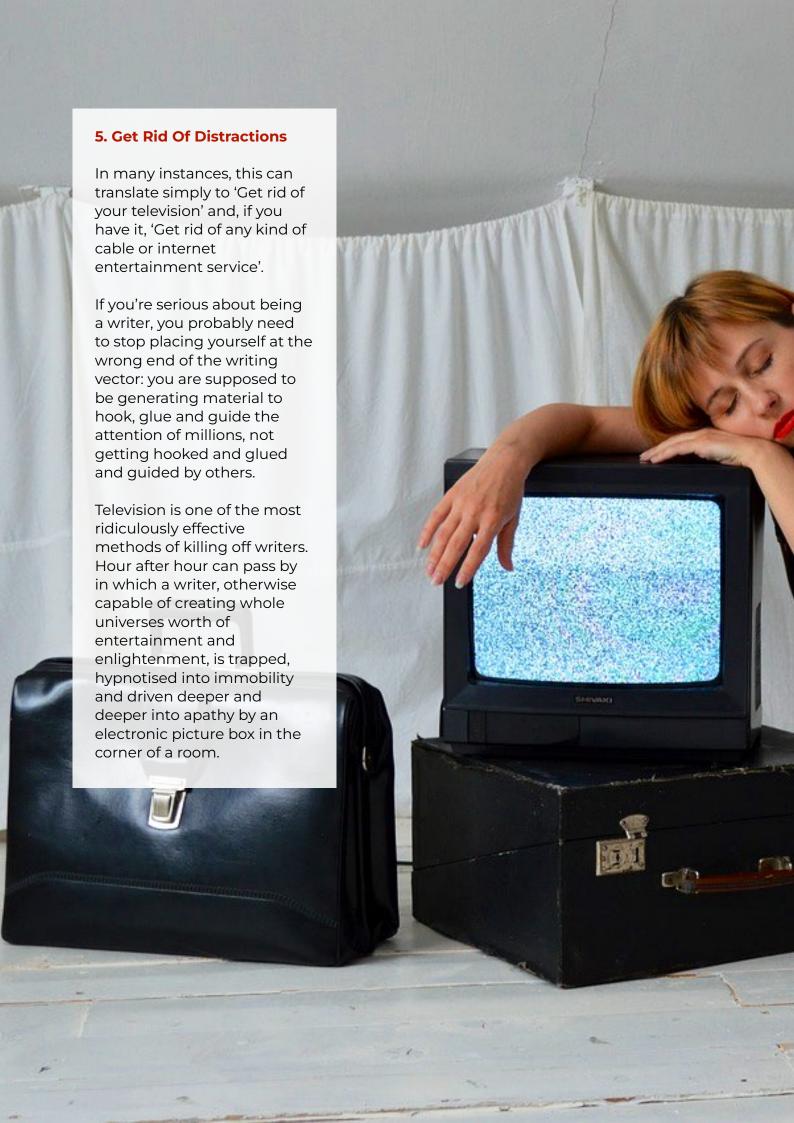


For example, I went from outgoings of more than £3,000 a month in London to under £1,000 a month in the country through occasionally drastic cutbacks and moves. Then, over the following years, I was able to a adjust this even more. This wasn't simply a case of cutting out wastefulness, which obviously has to be part of any realistic plan: it involved moving house to a cheaper part of the country and selling off much-loved assets.

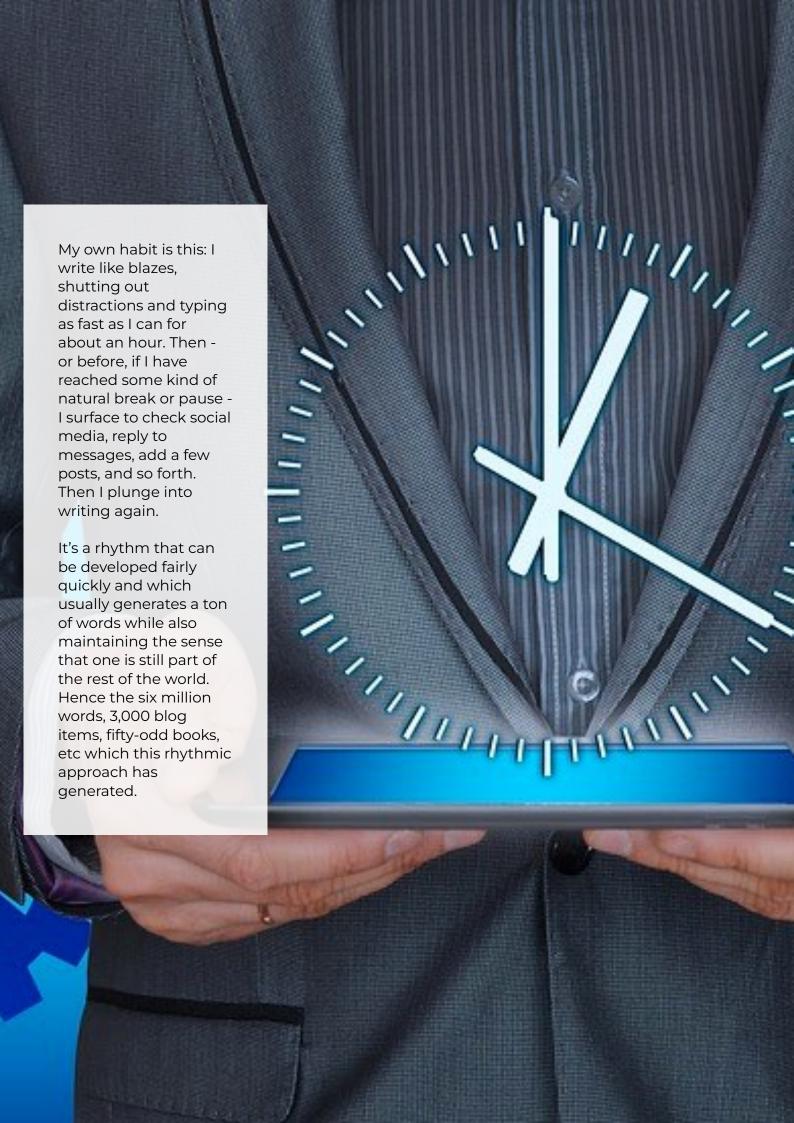
I did warn you that reorientation on this scale was not always easy.

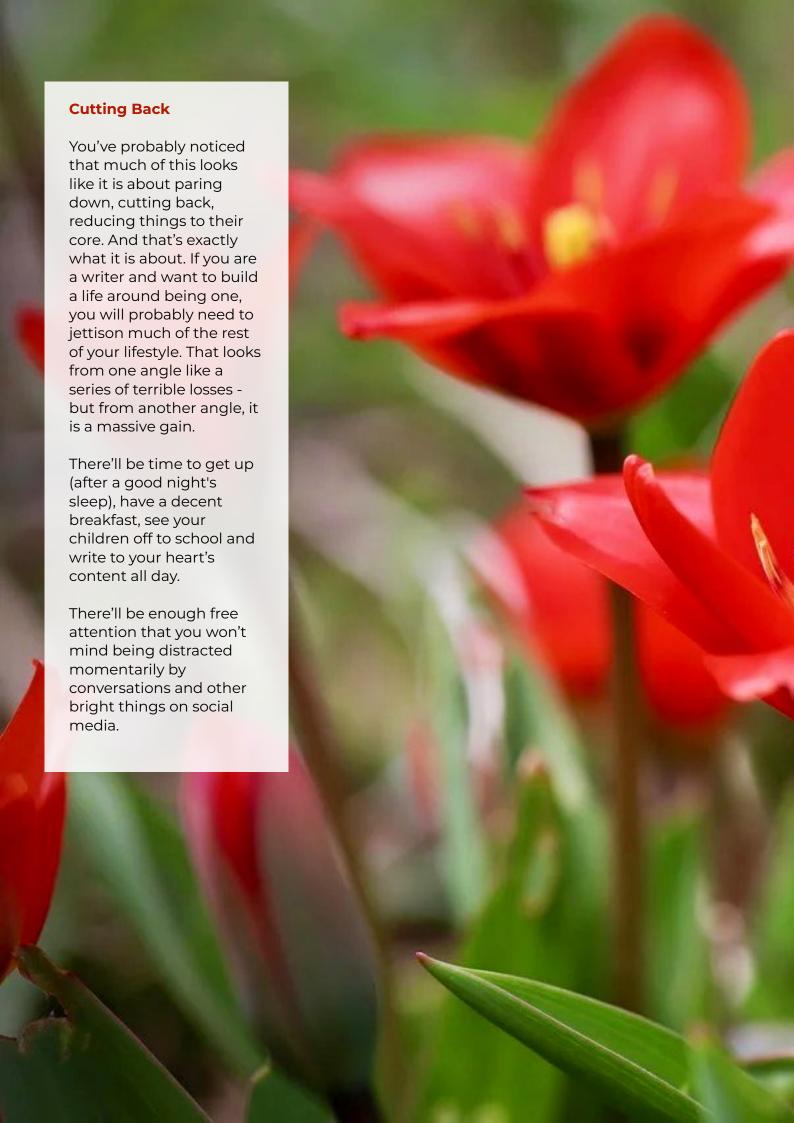
But the rewards were correspondingly great: not only do I now get to concentrate on my writing every day, I am also situated in one of the most pleasant parts of Britain, with surroundings that beggar belief in terms of their beauty and wholesomeness.

When it comes to wastefulness, there is a further aspect to be confronted.

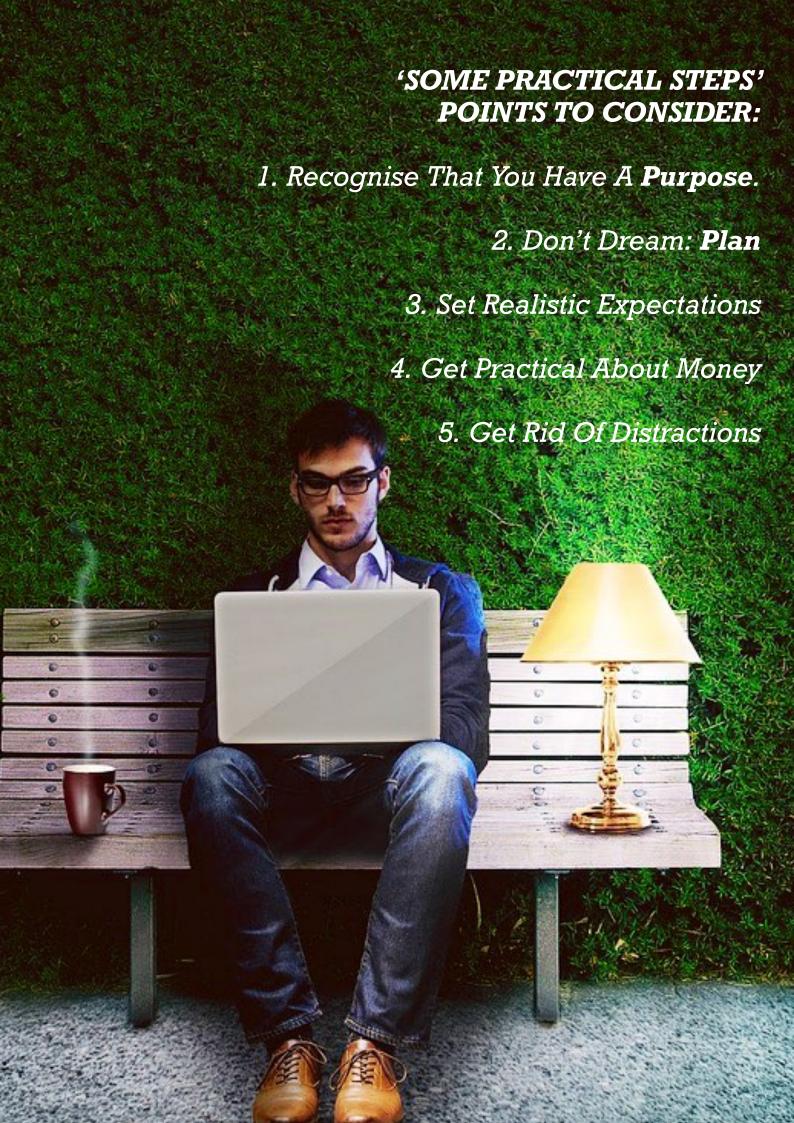














If you've read the earlier chapters, you'll know that the biggest barriers for writers, according to survey results, are Lack of Time and its companion Procrastination.

You'll also know that to fully handle these barriers you will need to make significant changes to your lifestyle so that your writing takes centre stage and everything else fits in around it, rather than the other way round.

Then you need to write. You need to write copious amounts of unforgettable material, fiction which not only excites you but stands out from everything else that is out there.

All the excuses - 'I don't have the time/energy/self-discipline/organisational ability/stamina' and so on, the kinds of things I read about every day on social media - all of those things need to take a back seat.

Writing needs to be in the driver's seat (to extend that metaphor).

You probably realise this.

It's the determination to follow through on that

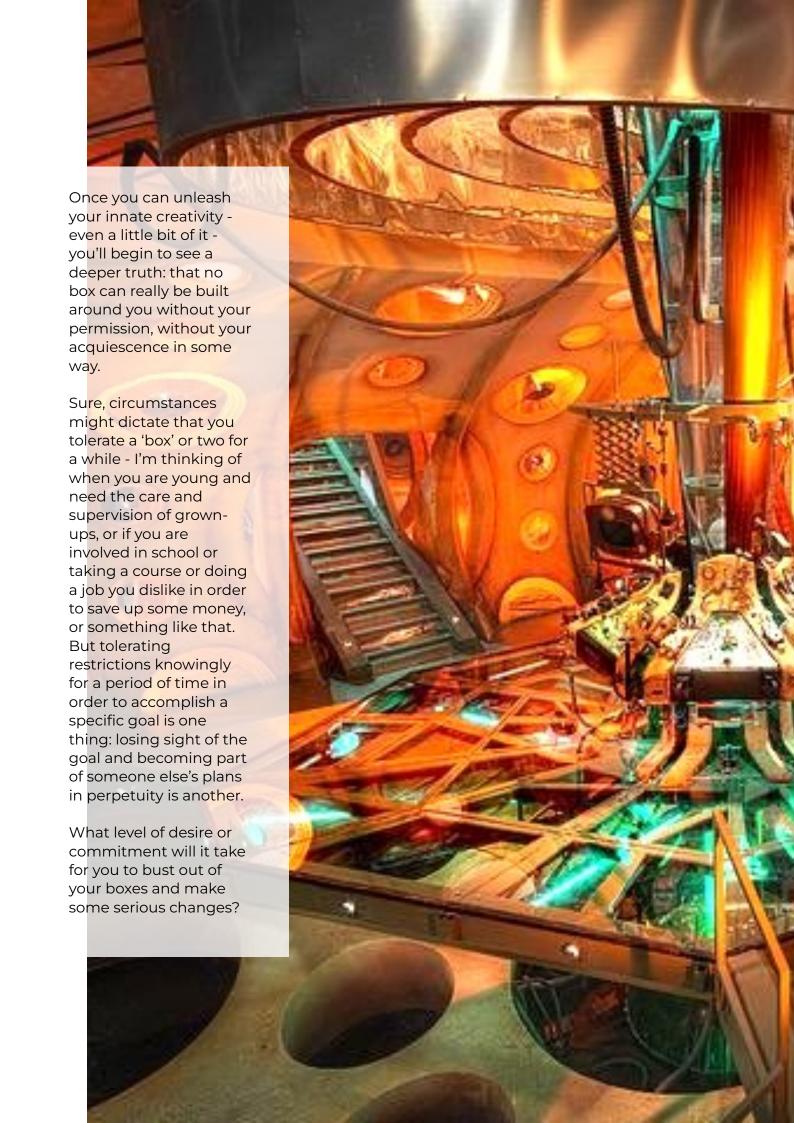
realisation that you need now.

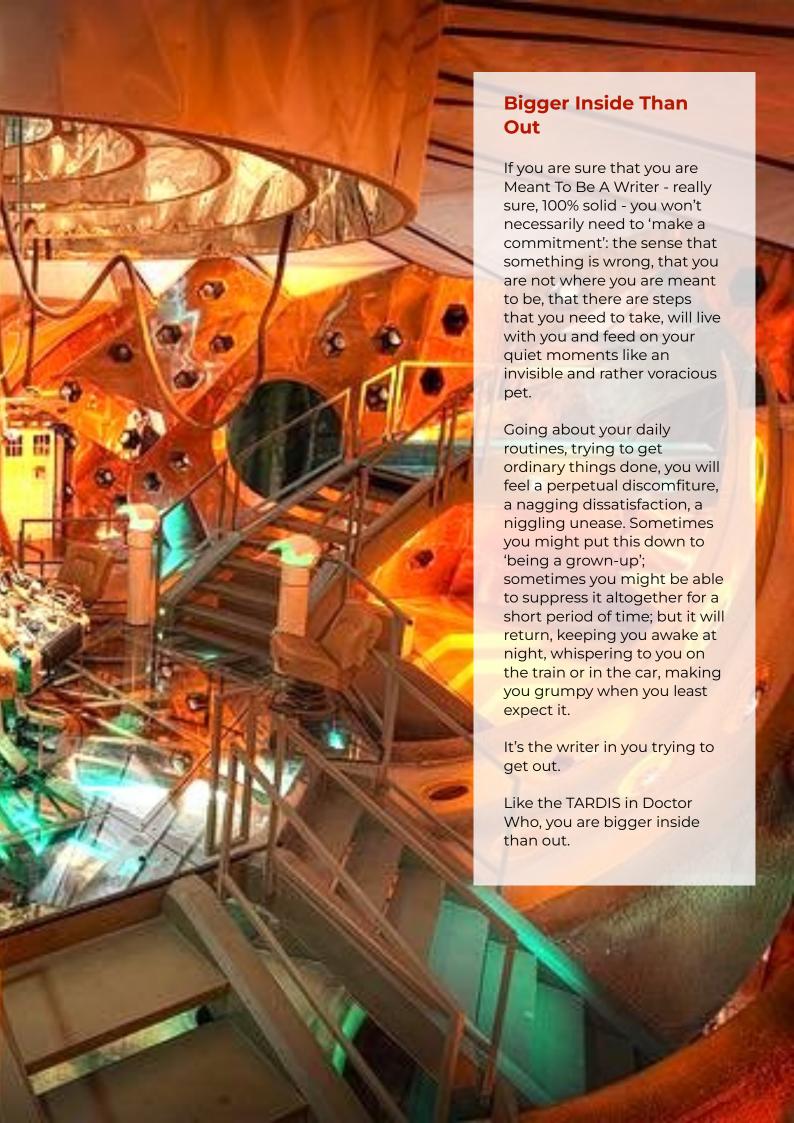
How do you get that?

Well, as in the famous Seal song, you have to 'get a little crazy'.

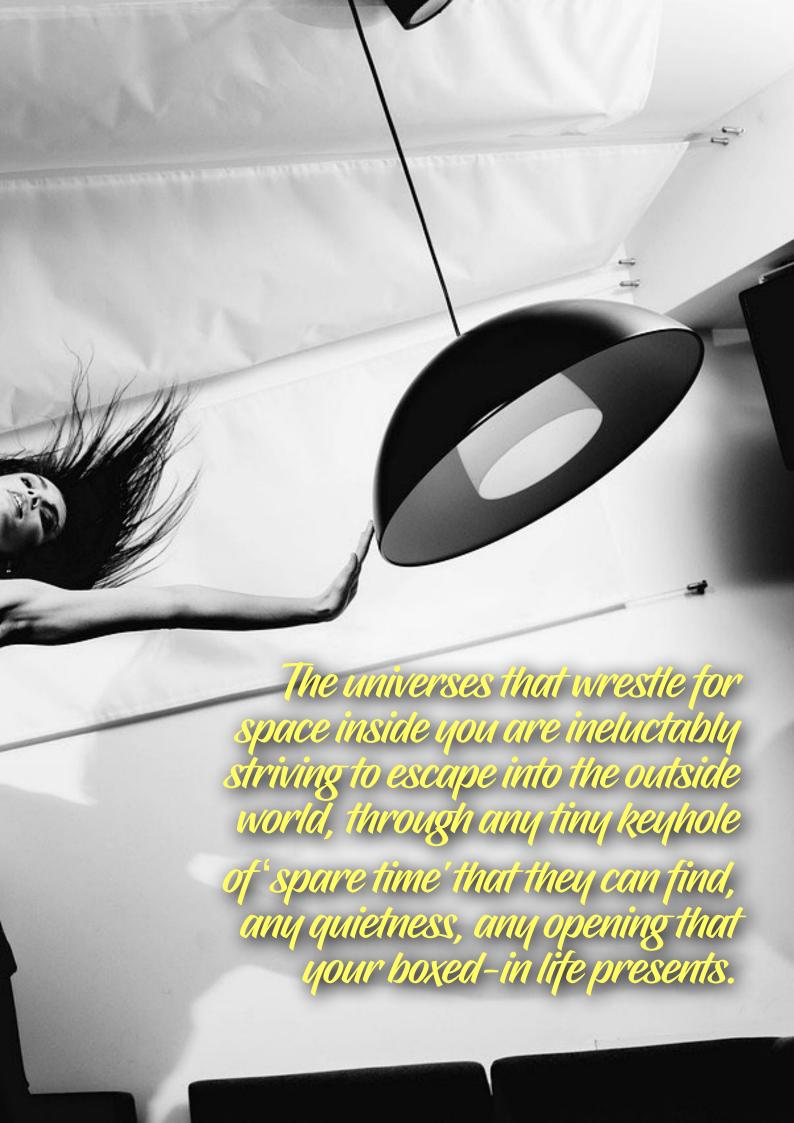
You have to see outside the boxes which you've either created around yourself or which have been built around you by others. These are the boxes labelled 'work' and 'income' and 'society' and 'this-is-what-l'm-supposed-to-do' and perhaps a few other things.















You want to be a writer - for real, not just part-time, not eking out desperate moments of writing after hours, but fully functioning on all your 'cylinders' as what you were always meant to be.

Big changes probably need to be made.

Do you remember when you were small being afraid to do something which, as a grown-up, is now commonplace to you?

Perhaps you were scared to go into a dark room, or to go upstairs by yourself, or later, maybe you were terrified to sit behind the steering wheel of a car (I was 40 years old before I obtained my driving license)? But now you do all those things without fear, almost without thinking. Dark rooms and upstairs hold no terror for you - and that series of synchronous actions involved in driving a car, that once seemed so daunting, you now do automatically with ease.

You could say that the fear you had of the dark or of different parts of the house or of the act of driving were created in your head. You were generating your own limitations, in other words. By what is often a slow process, most people overcome these limitations and move on.

Not everyone recognises that the limitations were self-created.



Here's an interesting thing: many writers write without the faintest idea of communicating anything. This can act as, and usually is, a big disaster.

Many, many years ago, I was present at an argument that was taking place between a husband and wife over the telephone. It was so loud that I could hear the other end of the conversation as clearly as the husband's end in front of me. The conversation went on and on, perhaps for half an hour, with accusations and challenges and upsets and counteraccusations and so on flying back and forth with the speed of electricity, while I and another friend, waiting to go out with the husband, paced up and down and looked embarrassed. It was plain that, despite many words being said, this could have gone on much longer. Finally, in impatience, I grabbed the phone and said so that both of them could hear:

'I have never heard a conversation go on for so long in which so little communication actually took place. I'm interrupting you both because it is obvious that if you were to actually communicate for more than a minute, everything you have discussed could be resolved. I suggest that you make a time to do just that.'





And I hung up. I was a bit cross, and arrogant at the time. But both parties received what I had to say in stunned silence. They knew that it was true.

I see something similar - though usually much milder - occurring with some writers: lots and lots of words, but little actually said.

If you could reduce your proposed novel, or series of novels, or entire output down to a simple statement, a few non-fiction words which might give a reader a clue as to what your books are 'about', what would you say?

Many writers look at me dumbfounded when I ask them that.

They have never actually thought about it like that. The act of writing, they thought, was merely sitting down and permitting the imagination free rein, like, as the expression 'free rein' suggests, dropping the reins of the galloping horse and allowing it to carry you wherever it wishes.

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In the previous chapter, I asked you to write down what you want to communicate. This is quite different from what you want to write: you might be full of desire to write a space fantasy, or a love story, or a vampire novel, or the world's funniest Western, or whatever, but that's not what I mean.

Great authors have something to say. Whether they ever sat down like this and tried to sum up what that thing was exactly is debatable - but this is where we are starting, primarily because I have found that many, many writers don't have a clue

what they are trying to say and this has consequences.

The first consequence is, quite frankly, their writing suffers for it. You can tell immediately when a writer has permitted the 'horse' of his or her imagination to wander 'whithersoever he would', like the Green Knight at the end of the mediaeval poem Gawain and the Green Knight: the writer's resulting story (unlike the mediaeval poem) is a little aimless, padded, meanders in a meaningless fashion and, like the Green Knight, vanishes into the mists.

Stories that wander like this end up falling back on

commonplace tropes because they don't know where they want to go.

The second consequence, just as significant, is that the writer doesn't manage to build up the horsepower (to stretch the horse analogy in a different direction) to actually get any writing done with sufficient passion and volume so as to ever be able to make it as a writer. He or she just trundles along, and gets tangled up in Life, and his or her writing appears only sporadically or dwindles away to nothing.

In pours Life; out pours Time. Procrastination rules.

Moving Boxes

We have spoken earlier about the 'boxes', tangible and intangible, which writers permit to grow up around themselves until their freedom to write is seriously impeded. These things have varying degrees of solidity and reality, ranging from income needs and family commitments to packed schedules to mundane routines which eat up all the available time to mental attitudes which have grown up over years and which seem as daunting as physical barriers. Whether these boxes are solid or not, they require energy and persistence to shift out of the way.

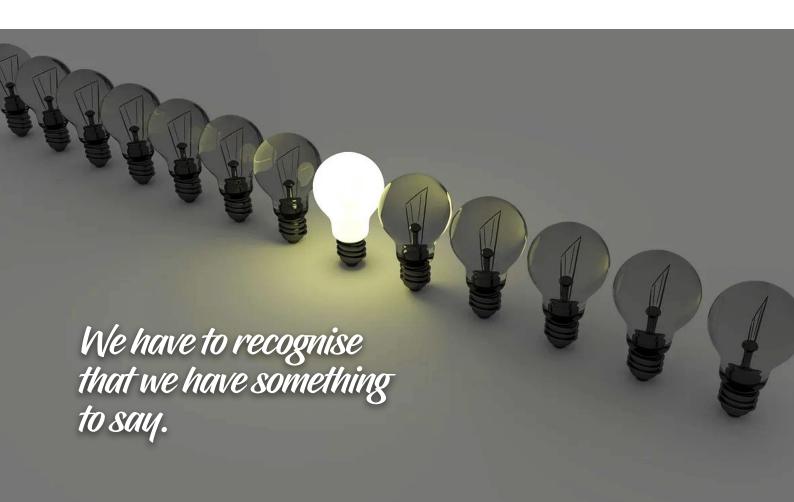
I think that I have moved house about 27 times in

my life. I envy those who have been able to remain in one location for decades: my nomadic existence up until about four years ago meant that, every couple of years or so, I would be faced with the formidable task of packing up all my earthly belongings and lugging them to some new home. This mainly consisted of carefully transferring shelf after shelf of books, including my collection of over 5,000 rare comic books, into suitable boxes and consigning them to delivery vehicles. On occasion, as when I lived in a motorhome for three years, all of this stuff would disappear into storage. shut into the darkness ready for the day when I would muster up the effort to move it again. In my youth I could do things like

this regularly without feeling the strain, but as I grew older, each box became a tiresome burden, each journey to and from these places became an ordeal.

Moving the 'boxes' which constitute the lifestyles we have constructed around ourselves can be equally challenging, if not more so. Some of the boxes that we have to move out of the way contain not books or comics but dearly held ideas, coveted beliefs, things which have apparently given us support over long periods of time. How do we gather the energy to get through this rearrangement of our lives?

We have to recognise that we have something to say.



Grabbing the Reins

At first, when you try to grab the reins of the imagination horse and assert that you are still there and are supposed to be in control, the results may be puzzling. As you engage that other part of your mind, the rational part, and ponder what it is that you are trying to communicate as a writer, it can seem as though you are getting further and further away from writing, and perhaps even wandering into the quagmire of philosophy and personal values and all that sort of thing. So let me try and help you out by giving you some simple pointers.

The first thing is that, in writing a piece of fiction, you are usually trying to affect at least one reader.

That initial reader might be yourself; you might graduate in time to someone else, perhaps a friend or someone you have mentally constructed, or some vague idea of 'your readers', a concept upon which you probably haven't spent much time. But the basic point is that You, the Writer, are trying to get something across to Them, The Readers.



At first, when you try to grab the reins of the imagination horse and assert that you are still there and are supposed to be in control, the results may be puzzling.

Second point: there are really only two broad effects which can apply you are either trying to leave the reader feeling uplifted, entertained, enlightened in some way, happy, smiling and that kind of thing; or you are trying to have him or her feel thoughtful, downbeat, afraid, perhaps giving him or her some insight into the grimness of the world, bestowing a feeling of sadness or horror or something like that.





If you are ambitious and clever, you might be trying to do both at the same time, which the master authors can occasionally pull off, as in a Shakespearian play or one of Dickens' greatest novels - but generally you are aiming to leave the reader feeling 'happy' or 'sad': happy with the book and perhaps a little happier about Life; or sad about the events of the story and perhaps a little more cynical about Life.

(You obviously don't want them sad or cynical because the story was badly written - that's another thing altogether.)

Which type of ending are you going for?



If the first, then your broad genres are going to be Comedy or Epic, as defined in my book <u>How Stories</u> <u>Really Work</u>.

If the second, then your genres will be Tragedy or Irony, also outlined in my book.

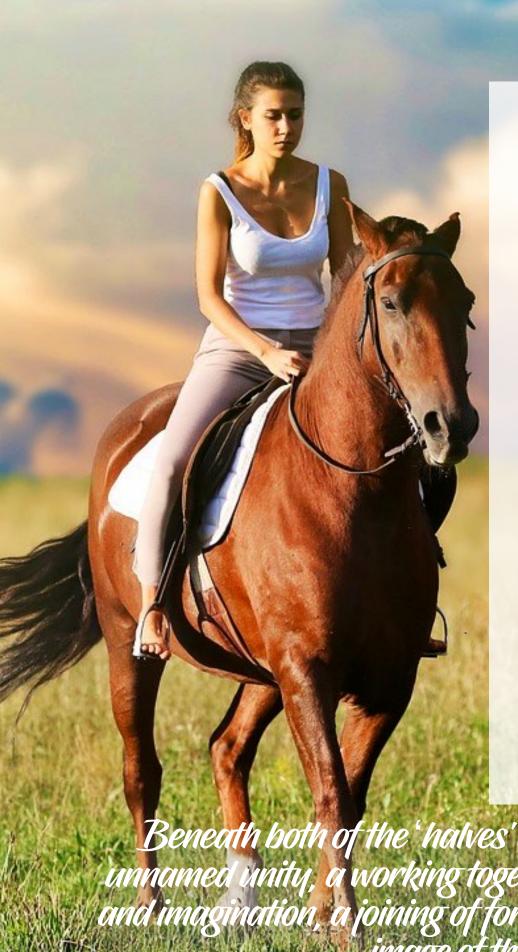
As soon as you can define things this much, and determine into which of the four all-embracing genres your intended writing falls, the easier this all becomes. If you're after a happy or a sad ending, you can put this into your own words without too much more trouble.

Note that you don't have to come up with some grand and correctly worded statement in order to move on - a series of scribbled, disjointed notes will do fine. You might end up with something like:

'I want readers to feel happy feel good about Life - want to carry on living, enjoy life, read more of this, have a laugh.'

or

'I want readers to feel sad - Life is dark - wary of strangers recognise that Life is empty in its core - get thinking about stuff for real.'

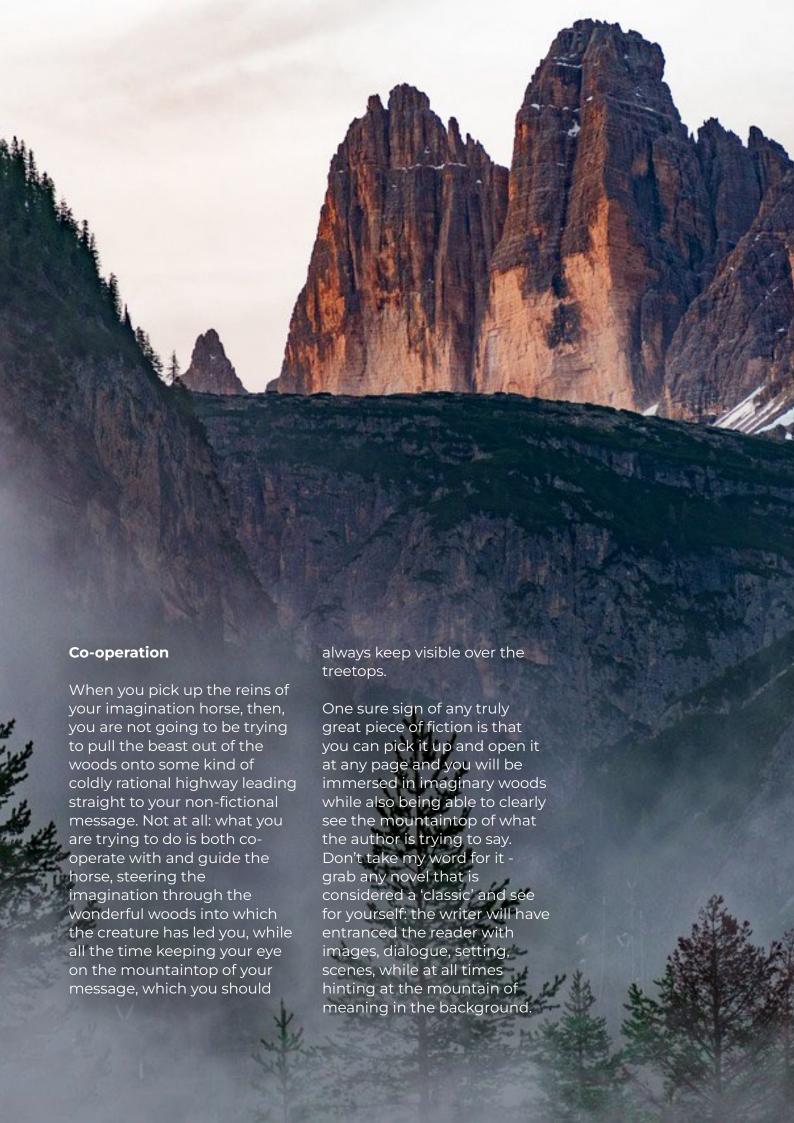


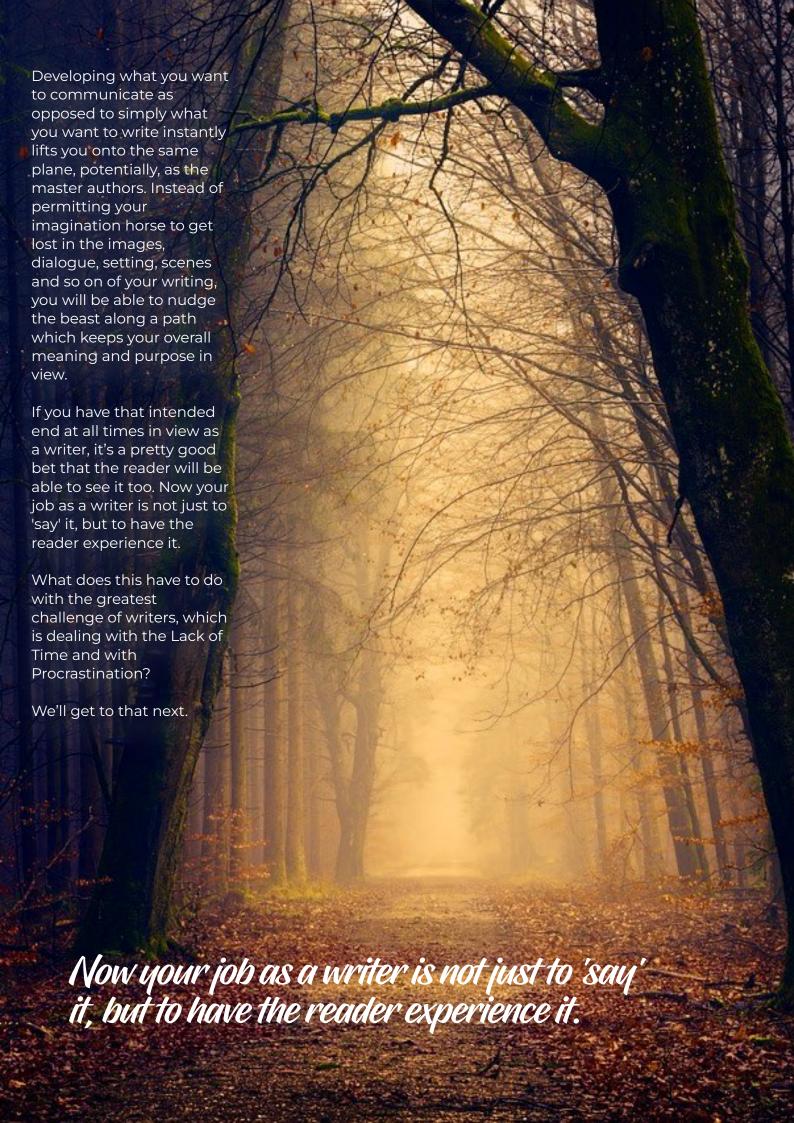
Or something in between, either more fully developed or more scrambled. Let's face it: if you could reduce your entire fictive output to a few non-fictional words completely and adequately, what's the point of writing stories about it? Part of what fiction does which rational statements like this can never hope to approach is to add the depth of meaning, the shades, the nuances, the interpretations, the colour, to a set of thoughts which rational-sounding words fall short of by definition.

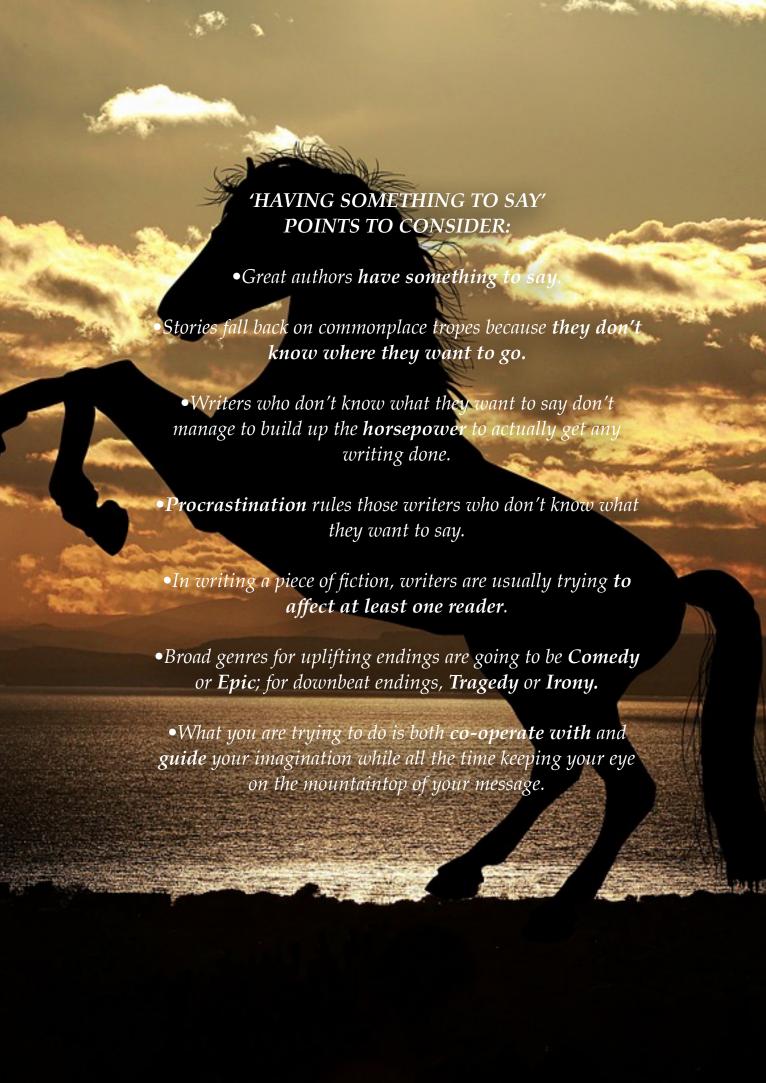
It's an interesting point that this kind of exercise exposes our modern division of the mind into 'rational' and 'imaginative' sections as something of a sham. Beneath both of the 'halves' of the mind lies an unnamed unity, a working together of rationality and imagination, a joining of forces, much like the image of the horse and rider.

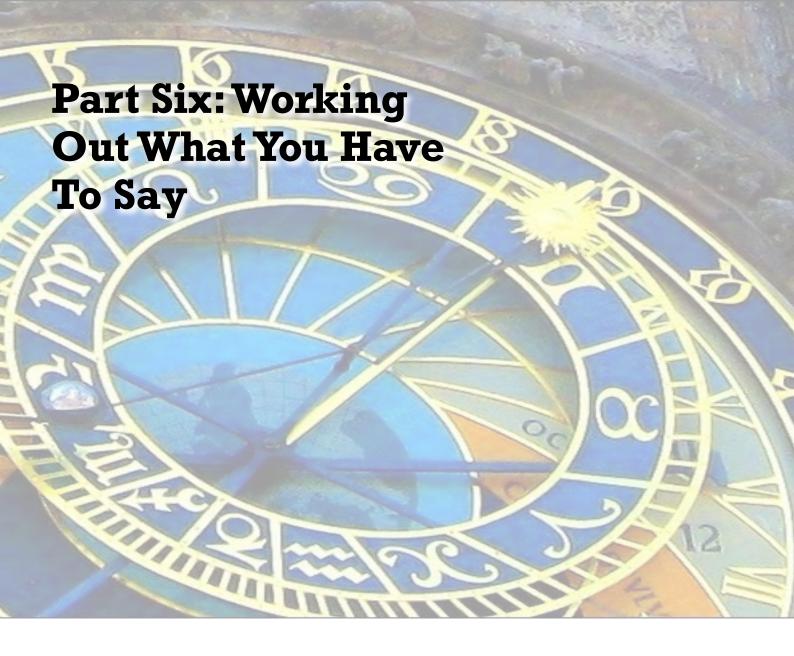
It is that co-operative unity that you are looking for.

Beneath both of the 'halves' of the mind lies an unnamed unity, a working together of rationality and imagination, a joining of forces, much like the image of the horse and rider.









The writer's biggest enemies (verified by survey, as we have seen) are Lack of Time, accompanied by Procrastination.

I've argued that any perceived lack of time can actually worsen the procrastination problem: as Time seems to become scarce, the focussed passion that accompanies the deepfelt need to write can become so intense that many writers back off from it. Rather than 'take the plunge' and use the precious hour or two that has become available to

unleash their passion, they find themselves checking emails, playing games on social media, or allowing themselves to be distracted by just about anything.

The preciousness of the little time available for writing acts to electrify the whole subject - and so they wander off and do something else, cursing themselves in the same moment for wasting the opportunity to write that was there but has now evaporated into a cloud of pointless activities.

The ultimate remedy?

Create more time.

Re-arrange one's life so that Time is plentiful.

Do that, and that multitude of distractions which seem to accumulate around 'free time' like moths gathering around a candle, gradually seem less daunting: they lose their destructive power, and become just light-hearted distractions.





Saying Nothing or Saying Something

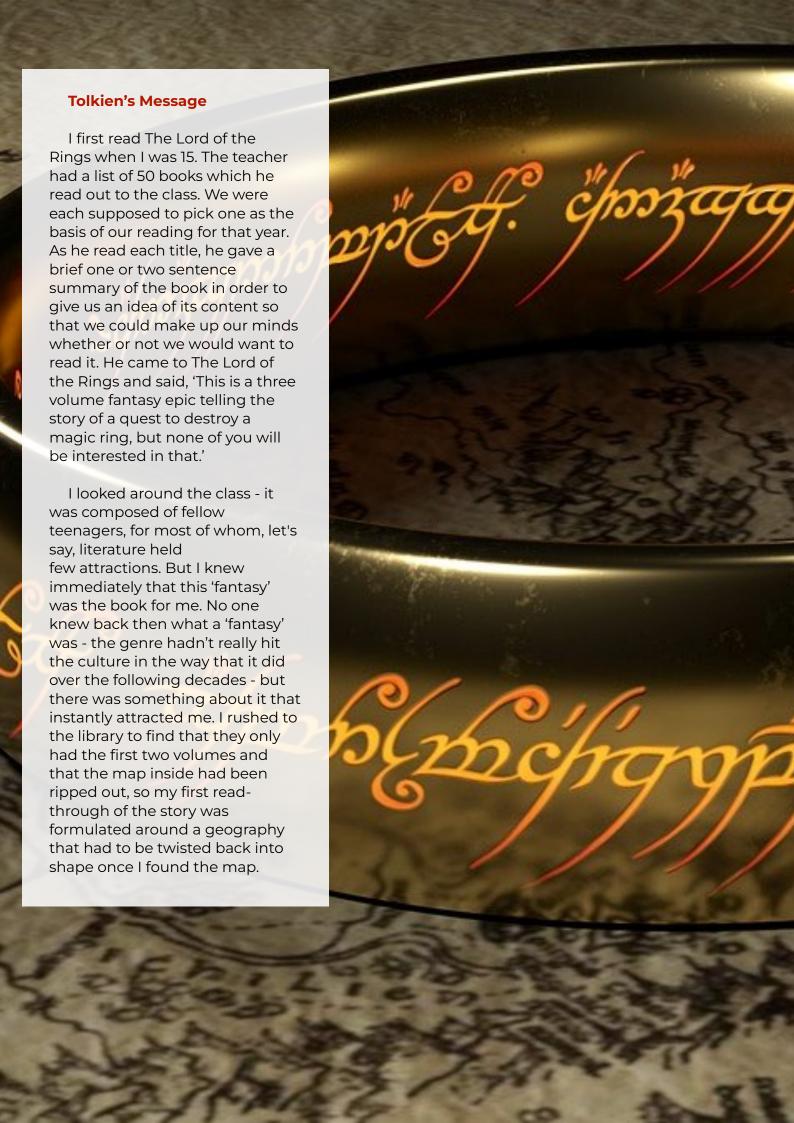
The unfortunate truth is that one can write and write and write and accumulate thousands and thousands of words without actually communicating anything at all. I've read a number of so-called draft 'novels' which are nothing but massive conglomerations of sentences leading nowhere and saying nothing to the reader. I'd even go so far as to say that the vast bulk of unpublished 'creative writing' that is done in the world out there (and some that is published) is of this kind.

In trying to resolve this, I've suggested that a writer might like to try jotting down, probably in note form, what he or she would like to say to readers: is the message of the work a 'happy' one or a 'sad' one? Does the writer want to make a philosophical point, or convey an emotional mood? In other words, what would you write in a few sentences on a piece of paper which you are instead planning to say through a short story or a novel?

Of course, as we have seen, it's not really entirely possible to reduce what one wants to say to a scribbled note. But in the attempt to do so, you have begin to activate a different part of yourself - the part that is above the stream of images, ideas, words, scenes, dialogue, emotions and so forth which you normally consider to be 'writing'.

Stepping back from all of those things, you can begin to see that you are using them to communicate something.

For example, let's look at the writings of J. R. R. Tolkien for a moment.





This is crucially important, if you want to write a 'good book'.

I recently read the beginning chapters of a thriller set in the near future - something about an asteroid approaching Earth and the attempts to deflect it. It had almost everything: stern, heroic characters, knowledgeable scientists, rockets and phone calls to the President, etc. But it had no idea what it was trying to say.

Just as I had been doing with Tolkien, the author had obviously been excited by some thrillers that he had read or more likely seen at the cinema and had decided to write his own. But what he and I had both ended up with was a kind of hollow parody of the original, a badly copied sketch, a disjointed and meaningless pastiche.

Tolkien worked out what he wanted to say while under fire in the trenches of the First World War. Morgoth and the struggles of the First Age, which evolved over decades into the complex and rich history of a sub-created universe, were born in the realities of savage battles in which Tolkien had lost almost all of his closest friends. He had something to communicate. At first it was only to himself, a kind of way of looking at the world which embraced the darkness and made it make sense - but when his invention of the hobbit gave him a mechanism for conveying the realities of his world to others, his message gradually reached millions.





Igniting Your Star

When you have yours, the logistics of changing your life so that you can write can suddenly fall into place. What seems daunting and impossible perhaps moving house, changing jobs, rearranging finances, establishing whole new lifestyles - becomes transparent and actionable. Knowing what you want to say ignites a star in the darkness and gives you something to go into orbit around, rather than the mechanical 'necessities' of your current existence.

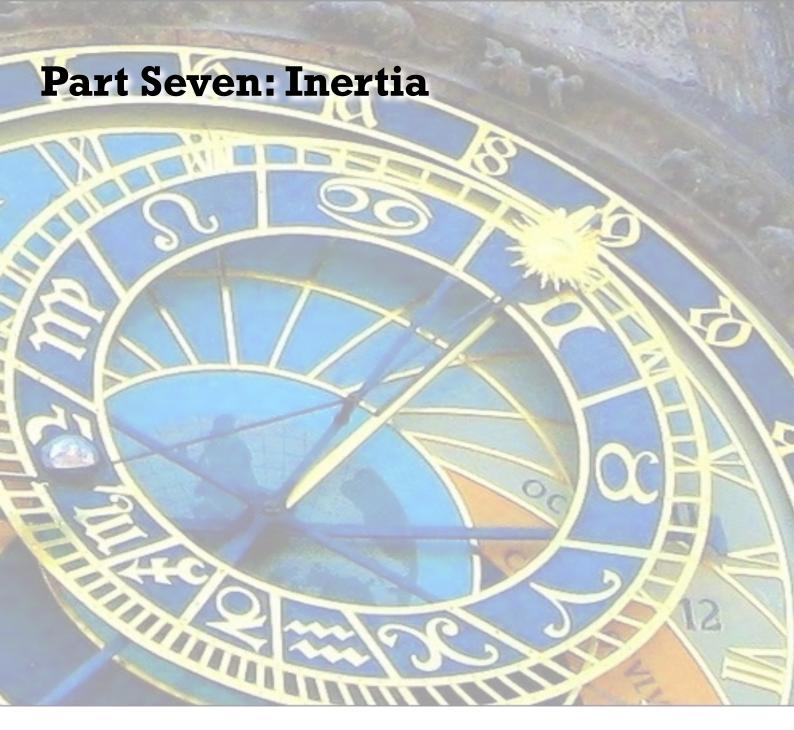
There are about seven levels of progress towards total 'writerdom', and they are what we will look at in the next chapter.



Knowing what you want to say ignites a star in the darkness and gives you something to go into orbit around.

'WORKING OUT WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY' POINTS TO CONSIDER:

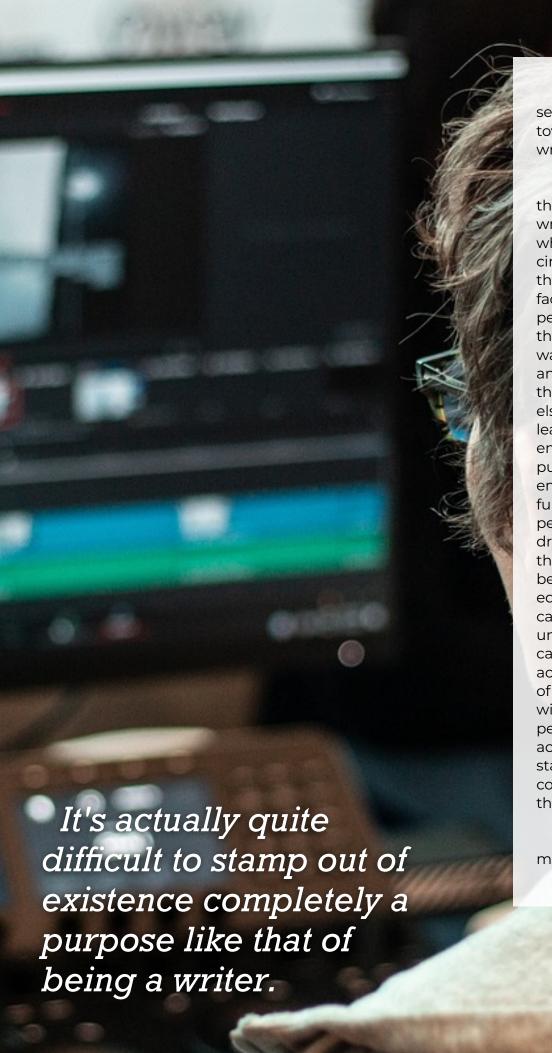
- It's possible to write thousands of words and communicate nothing.
- •In attempting the impossible task of reducing a story to a non-fictive statement, writers activate that part of themselves that is above the stream of images, ideas, words, scenes, dialogue, emotions and so forth which they normally consider to be 'writing'.
 - Writers who don't do this often end up with hollow parodies, a badly copied sketches, disjointed and meaningless pastiches.
- When you know what you want to communicate, what can seem daunting and impossible becomes transparent and actionable. You generate the power to escape the mechanical 'necessities' of your current existence.



Inertia is defined by the dictionary as 'a tendency to do nothing or to remain unchanged'. The word comes from 'inert', which means 'lacking the ability or strength to move' and is derived from the Latin word iners, inert-'unskilled, inactive', from in- (expressing negation) plus ars, art- 'skill, art'.

It's probably true to say that writers who suffer from a lack of time to write, and from procrastination, do so because they are pinned down in their lives by a set of circumstances which keep them exactly where they are. Struggling to get a 'little bit of writing' done each week, or maybe each month, and then coming back to that piece to find that it is inadequate and needs to be done again, all the while battling with semi-conscious urges to bounce away from the

thing altogether and look at videos on Facebook and so forth, is probably a familiar picture to many would-be writers. Surveys that I have done over the last few years show that there are a huge number of writers out there screaming for a solution to all of this - they are desperate to write and are reaching for some way out of the inertia trap.



That puts them at the second level of the climb towards freedom as a writer.

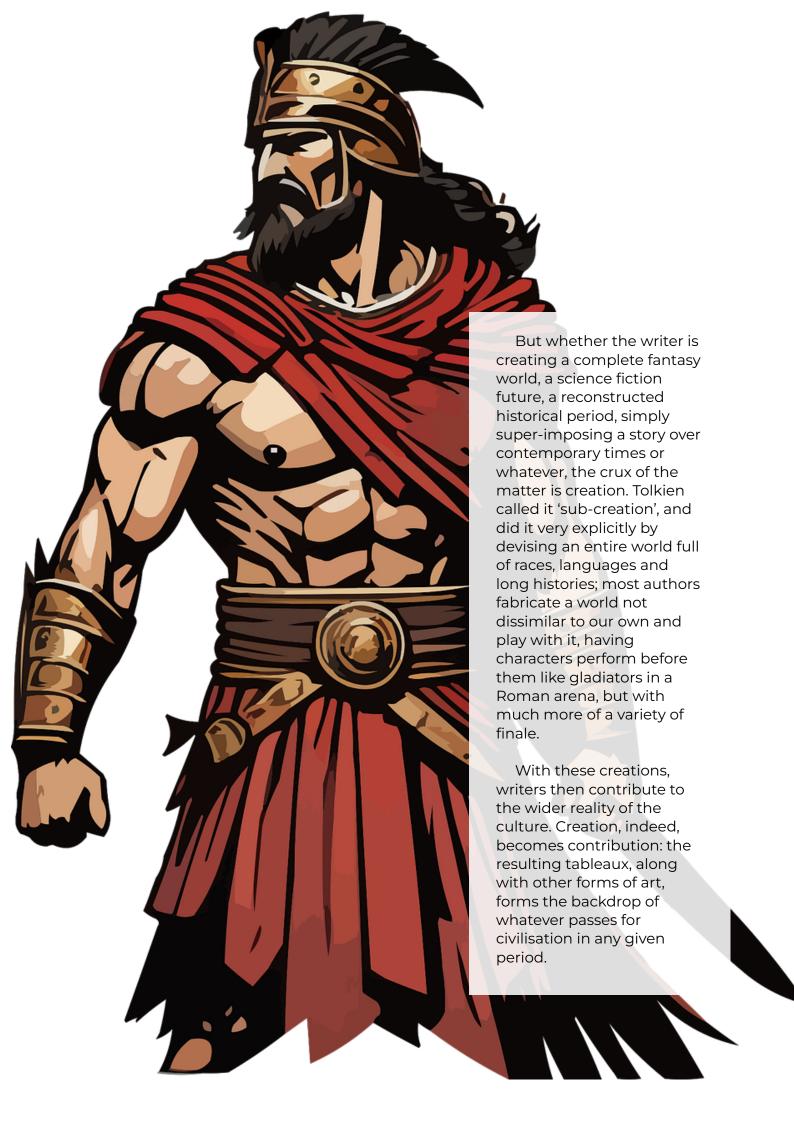
The first level is worse than that: that's when a writer is so submerged into whatever his or her circumstances are that there is no hope at all. In fact, at the very bottom, the person has usually decided that he or she 'never really wanted to be a writer at all', and has instead sublimated that desire into something else. This can go so far as to lead a person to adopt an entirely new identity and purpose, and to embark upon a quest to fulfil entirely different and perhaps even opposite dreams - several writers in this frame of mind sadly become critics or even editors and build their careers around undermining the lives and careers of writers who are actually writing. The dream of writing has perished within them - or almost perished. Because it's actually quite difficult to stamp out of existence completely a purpose like that of being a writer.

What does it actually mean to be a writer?

It has much in common with the idea of being a magician. Writers usually are passionate about being writers because it gives them the ability to create worlds of their own, in which people of their own manufacture can be set doing tasks of the writers' own design, moving towards ends foreseen and constructed by the writer. Quite often, this goes wild: the devised characters 'break ranks' and seem to pursue of their own accord ends which were never consciously in the minds of their creators. Stories 'take on a life of their own', adventures unfold which were never planned, glorious new horizons open up which were never predicted. That's part of the joy of creation, and part of the appeal of being a writer.



Stories 'take on a life of their own', adventures unfold which were never planned, glorious new horizons open up which were never predicted.



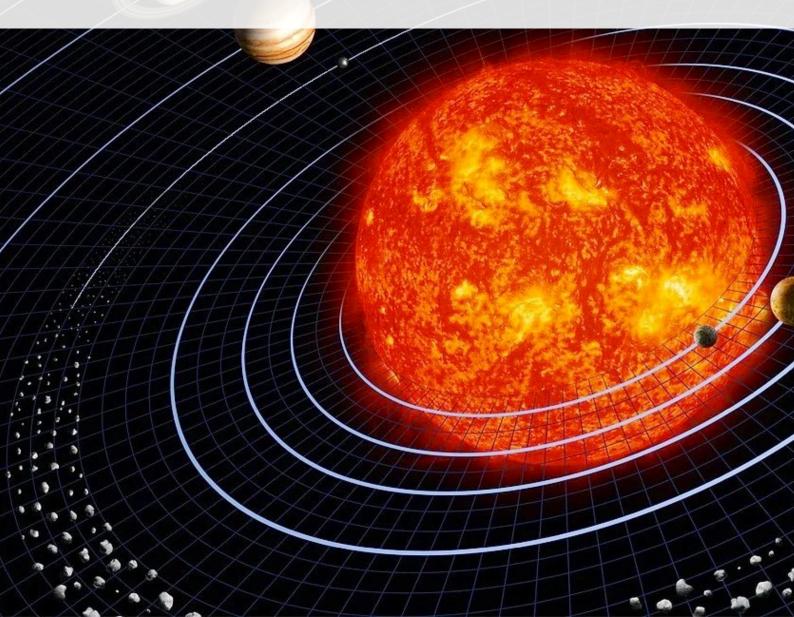
Failure to Contribute

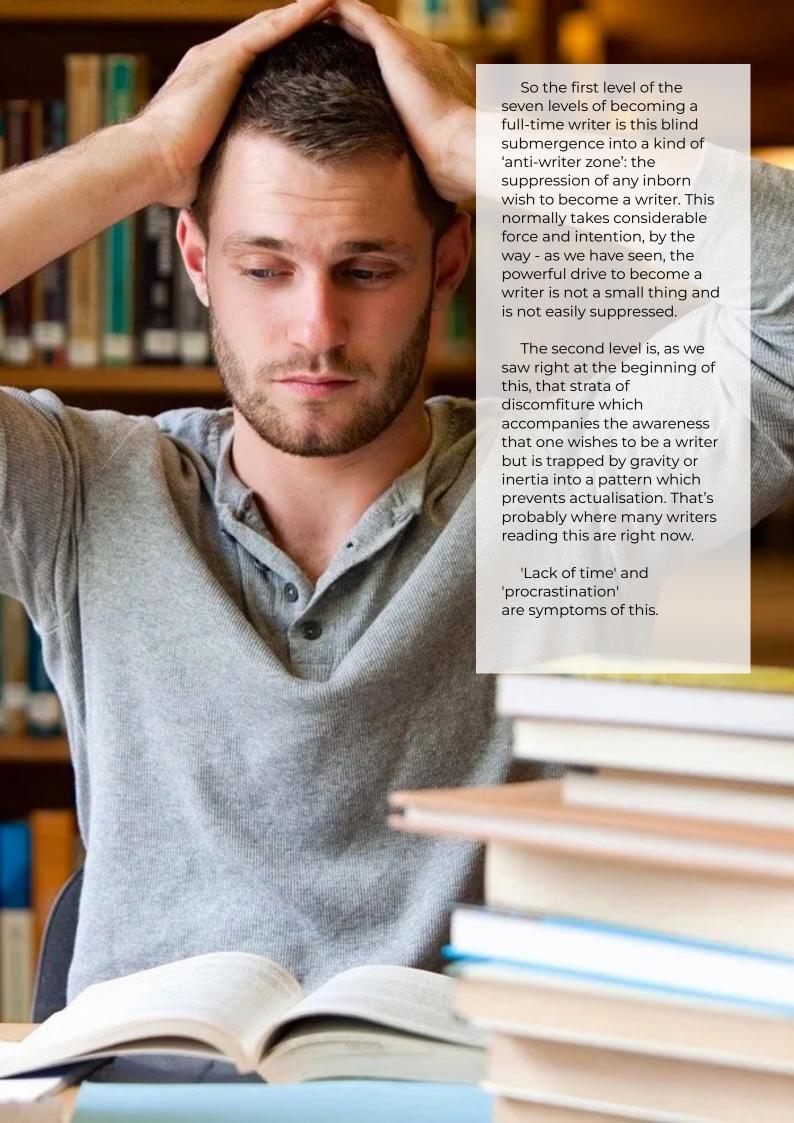
When a writer for one reason or another cannot find the time to write, or is distracted from doing so, therefore, the consequences are potentially more grave than at first glance: an individual's ability to create a world and to contribute that creation to the larger picture is blunted, diverted, impeded. There can be psychological impacts upon the individual - frustrations build, dissatisfaction grows, tempers flare - but there are consequences for the wider society too. Whatever unique creation a writer had to offer is prevented from contributing to the culture.

When I think of the works of Tolkien and Lewis, and their contribution to the culture of the late twentieth century and beyond, I sometimes ponder how lucky they were not to be killed on the front lines of the First World War - and then I think of all the young people who were killed, and the massive loss to the civilisation that their deaths entailed, with all their potential contributions never having been formed or added to the wider picture.

In other words, it's a big deal when a writer doesn't write, not just for the writer but probably for the rest of us too.

Inertia is real. The way we set up our lives carries real weight. Responsibilities, habits, routines, are not usually things that can just be dropped and walked away from. A helpful image in all this might be the pattern of the solar system inertia becomes gravity, a force which keeps us 'in orbit' around certain things that we set up as priorities. Unless our path around our central 'sun' is disturbed in some way, we will keep on moving around that sun, round and round forever. The stars will be eternally out of reach.







The third level is when a writer is able to eke out some time, using various remedies which I and others have written about elsewhere. These episodes or islands of time give that writer some hope: at least some writing is getting done, piece by piece, even when the gravitational pull of his or her normal life circumstances tugs the writer back into line again. Those islands of time are better than nothing.

But they aren't the fourth level. That's when the writer realises that he or she has to make big changes to a complete lifestyle - and sets about doing so. To do that, as we have covered in earlier chapters, one needs to develop a fire strong enough to achieve 'escape velocity'; one needs to understand that one has something to say, and that one's message is important enough to be a contribution to the culture as a whole.

What message, however inadequately it might be understood even by the writer, is so strong, so central, so irresistible, that it will have the power needed to pull the writer out of the orbit into which he or she has become accustomed, and into a new course entirely?

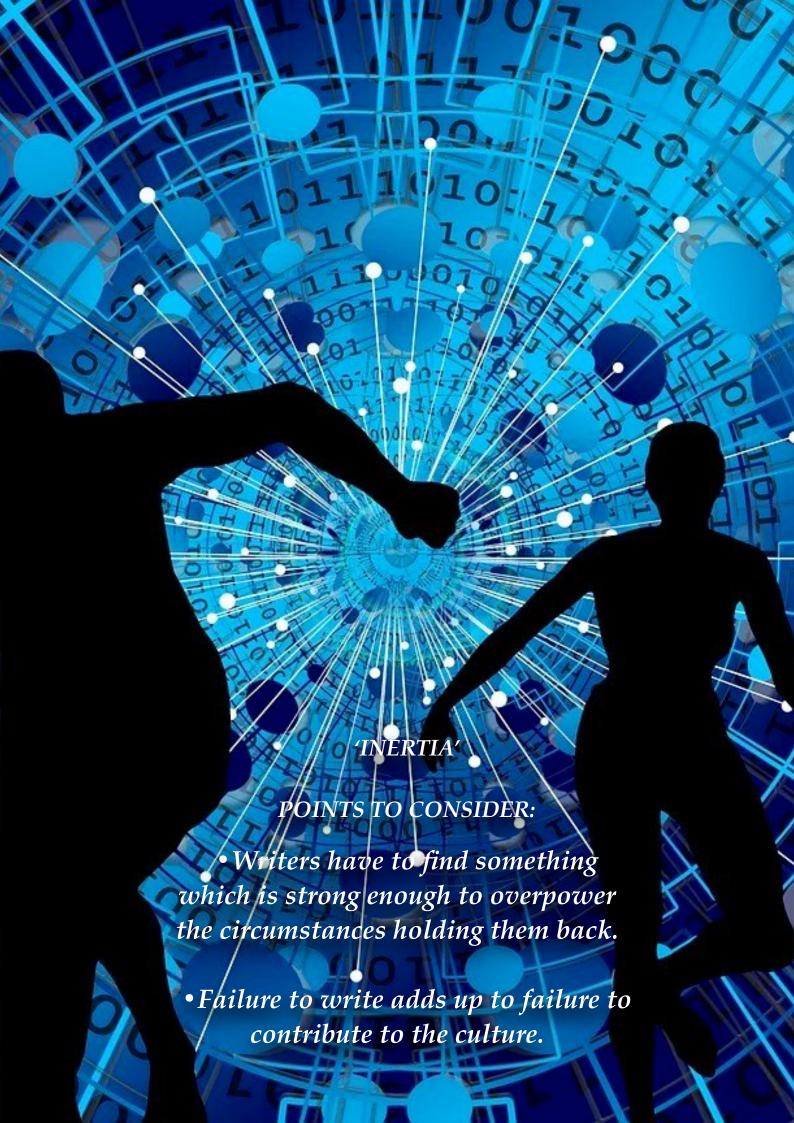
What do you have to say that will put the stars within reach?

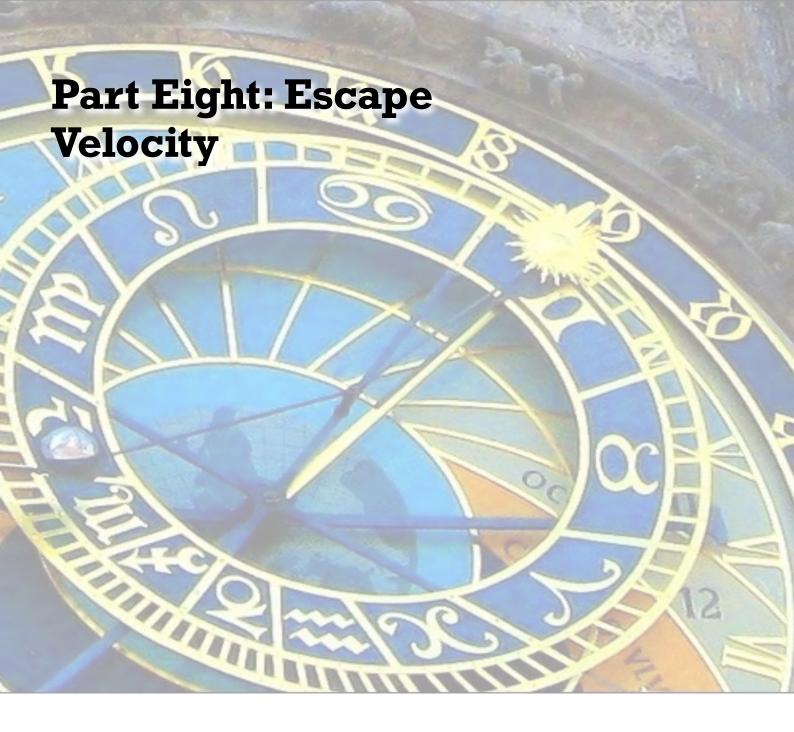
That's why we have been spending time looking at that message.

You need to reach Level 4.

Then of course you need to recall that there are three other levels above that.

But let's try to achieve escape velocity first.





Reaching escape velocity means finding a fuel powerful enough to blast us out of the grip of a gravitational field and into free space.

In the 1963 comedy film The Mouse on the Moon, characters from the fictional European duchy of Grand Fenwick discover that their only export, wine, is adaptable as a highly effective rocket fuel which

they then use to become the first nation to land upon the Moon. The wine is so powerful that it isn't necessary to punch through the atmosphere and gravitational field of the Earth by reaching escape velocity: the moon rocket 'chugs' up into space at a leisurely pace, essentially drifting out of orbit and on its lunar adventure with little difficulty.

Unfortunately, this does not reflect what normally awaits a writer when he or she decides to make serious changes to the lifestyle which is preventing full-time writing. One has to find something which is strong enough to overpower the circumstances holding one back.



One has to 'punch through'.

The truth is that you probably have some inkling of what this is already, because if you are reading this you are probably at least at the second or third level of our imaginary 'ladder' towards freedom as a writer. The dissatisfaction you feel with your current circumstances is exactly what reveals your position.

Earlier, I asked you to try to scribble down in some form what you wanted to say as a writer. It didn't have to be in the form of coherent sentences; notes would do. It didn't even have to be completely comprehensible - it just had to be a beginning.

If you felt that this was not adequate or you were completely unable to do this, here's a different approach.

List out everything that you enjoy doing or that you love. This can range from physical activities to food, to travel experiences, to certain relationships - basically anything positive in your life.





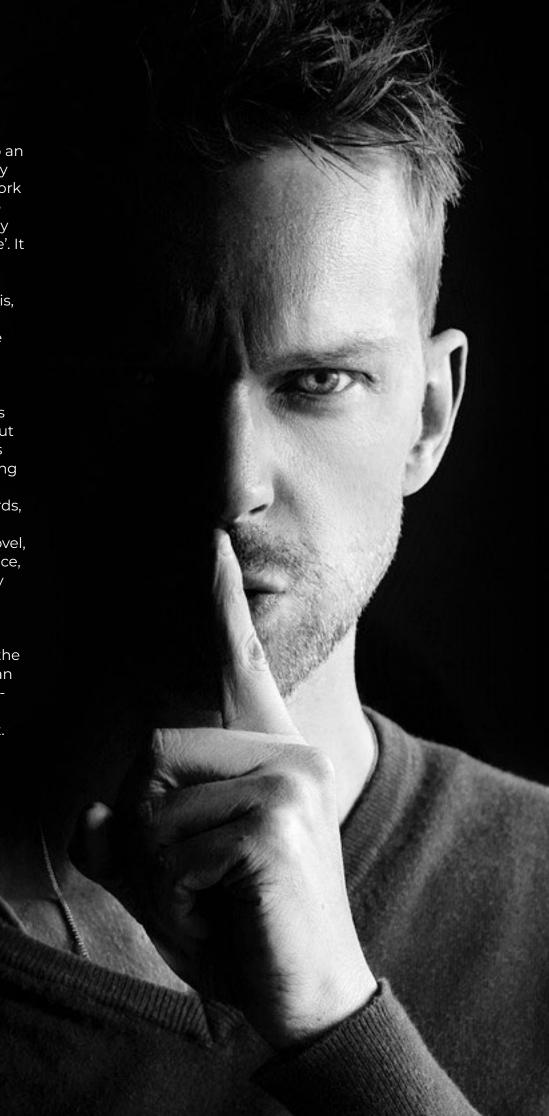


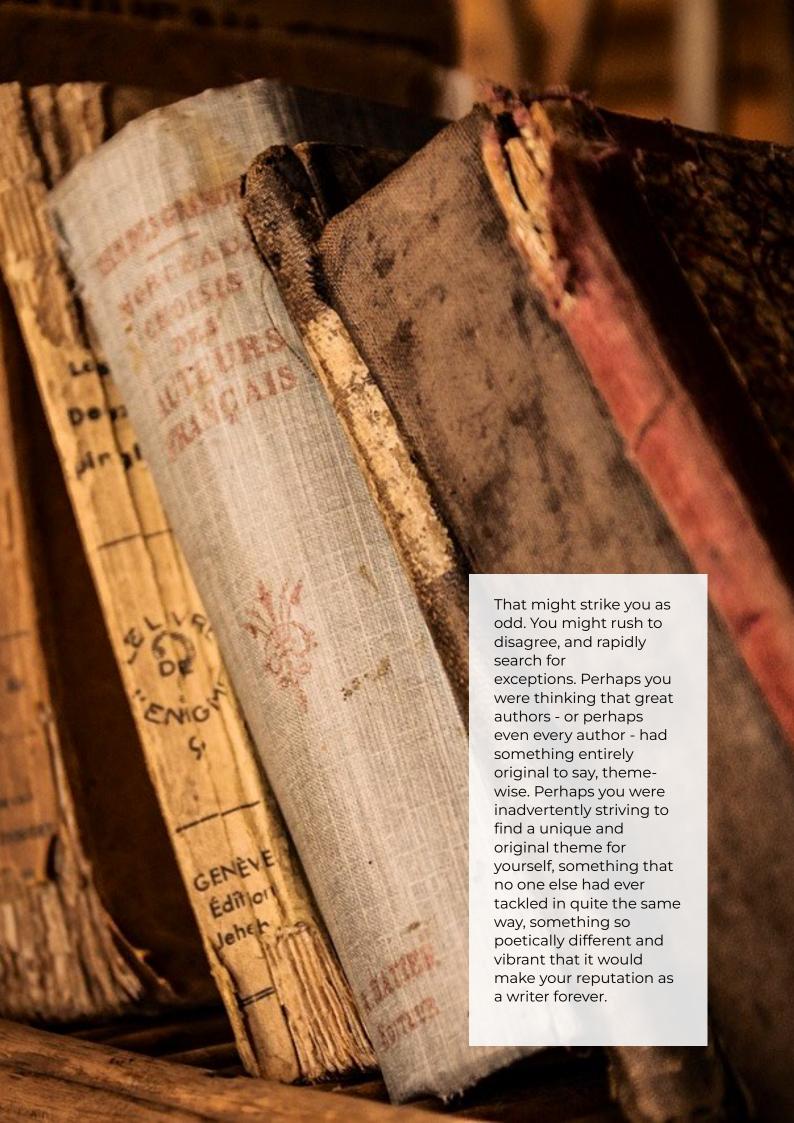


An Oddity

But here we also run into an oddity: of the many, many master authors whose work I have examined over the years, there are hardly any with an 'original message'. It might seem counterintuitive or even blasphemous to claim this, but almost every great writer is saying much the same kind of thing.

Just pick up any classic novel that you choose. It's possible to predict without much risk of error that its central theme will be along the lines of 'Pride comes before a fall'. In other words, in any story, be it fantasy, science fiction, literary novel, Western, comedy, romance, mystery and so on, or any kind of combination of these sub-genres, the underlying theme will at least partly be based on the principle that Pride - i.e. an over-inflated view of Self leads to the inevitable downfall of its proponent.





But the fact is that, probably, what you have to say is not going to be all that different from what most great writers are saying. And what are most great writers trying to say?

That it is wrong to overinflate the Self.

What is right?

Protagonists sacrifice Self a nd assume a place in the wider world. Or something along those lines, obviously with some slight variations.

That applies to almost every work of fiction from A Midsummer Night's Dream or Homer's Odyssey, to just about every Victorian novel you can think of, to modern-day blockbusters like the Marvel movies.

Does that strike you as strange?

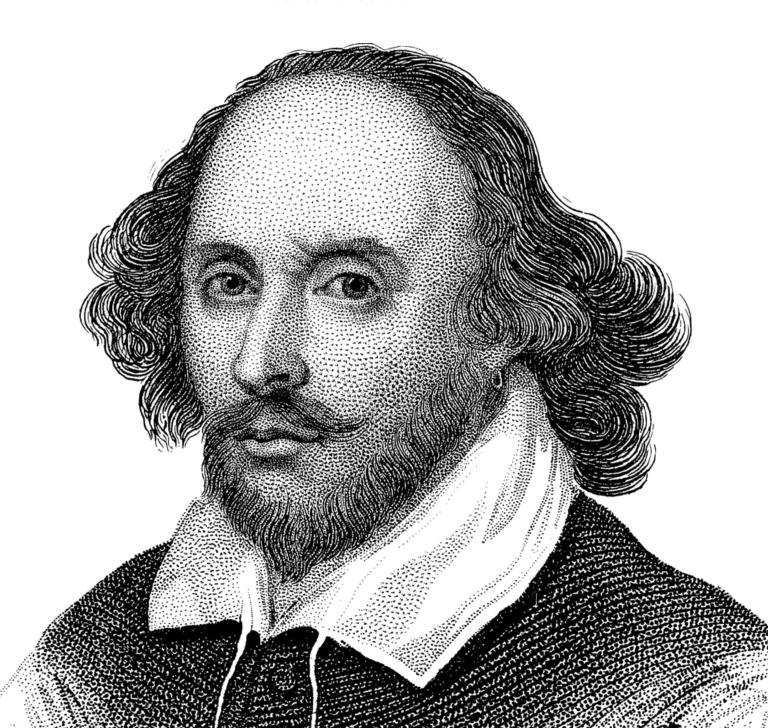
Maybe it is - but it should also come as a relief.

You don't have to find a unique theme.

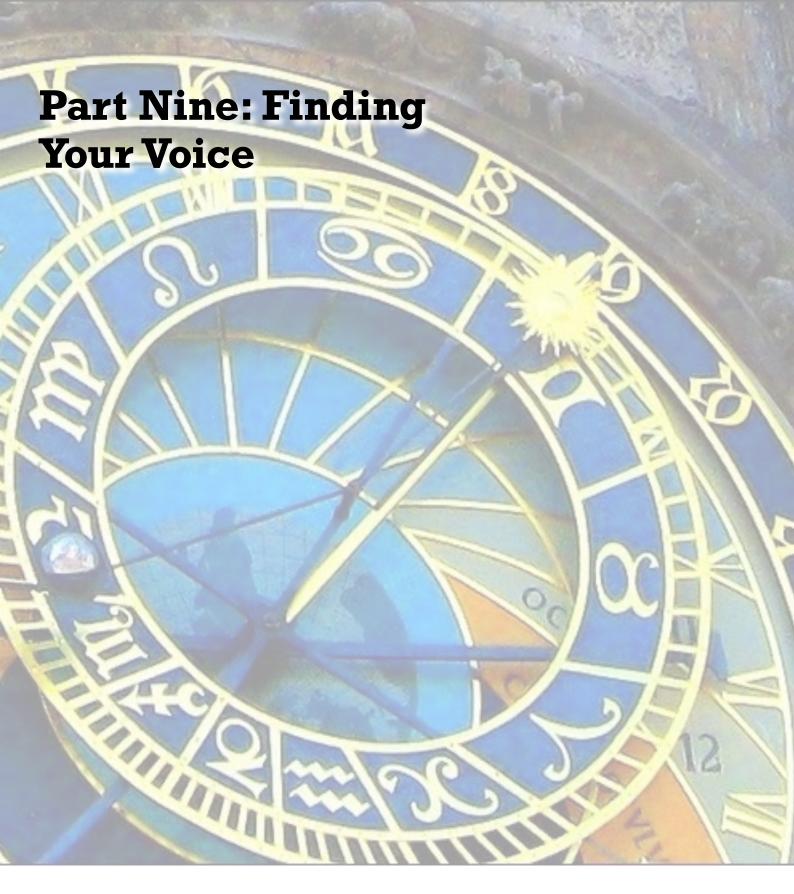
What you do have to find is a unique voice - a way of saying what everyone else is saying (more or less) but with a 'twang' or flavour or wavelength all your own.

How do you find that unique wavelength?

Stay tuned.







Finding a voice as a writer is unfortunately normally dependent to a large degree on writing lots and lots and lots until a clear, individual voice emerges.

And you can't write lots and lots and lots until you escape the inertia of your current circumstances and have time to write.

So it looks like a Catch-22.

You can't do what you need to do because you need to do it in order to be able to do it.

But it's possible to get past this by looking at things another way.

Seven Levels











How do you escape the Catch-22 of needing more time to write in order to find your voice which will energise you to find more time to write?

How can you move up this ladder?

You have to flip this all backwards.

Escaping the Catch#22

You have to look at the whole series of levels in another way.

You are meant to be a writer. If you weren't, apart from anything else, you probably wouldn't have read this book this far.

Something is driving you to be who you are meant to be.

So let's take that as a given and use it as a lens through which to look at the bigger picture.





If you are meant to be a writer, what is it that is pulling you off that purpose?

What is it that is twisting your life so that you can't seem to reach the goal of writing full-time?

What is hindering, impeding, distracting you?

This is a pretty ruthless look at things, so if you don't like brutal truths, turn away now.

If you are supposed to be a writer and you're not writing, something has dragged you away from your innermost truth.

Even deeper?

You have permitted something to drag you away.

Effectively, you have betrayed yourself.

Don't panic, it doesn't get much grimmer than that and there is a pathway out.

The Pathway Out

Firstly, you have to recognise that you really are a writer - that writing is the thing that is closest to your heart. Of course, you may have family and friends and all kinds of things that are also close to your heart - this isn't meant to devalue them. But in terms of a life purpose, in terms of something that you should be doing, you must decide or realise that that is writing.

The trick is not to just arrive at this theoretically. Make a statement about it, if only to yourself. Those great writers who have written autobiographically about this kind of moment also make it clear that it wasn't just all in their heads - they acted upon their decision. They consciously changed something in their lives - not everything, not all at once, just something - that then made the goal of being a writer more real to them.

Perhaps they gave up something that was consuming their time; perhaps they adopted a schedule outside their normal working hours, and stuck to it; perhaps they simply wrote 'I Am A Writer' and stuck it up on their wall or mirror.

Life has a habit of dragging such intentions down, back into the whirlpool of habit. So what follows is a series of steps designed to make sure that that primary intention which you have declared does not get swamped but moves forward and builds momentum.

Do these - don't just read them and then stare at them.

Act.





2. Do something effective.

Though you might not yet be in a position to totally destroy Lack of Time and Procrastination, you can do something in the short term. Organise a block of time - a weekend, at least, or preferably a week or two - and set them aside totally for writing. Set yourself writing goals for this time and accomplish them. Apply the steps of the 'First Aid' Programme outlined later.

Sit down with your partner or family and explain that you want to make some changes and that you are starting with a serious commitment to writing. Get their cooperation as much as possible. (As a corollary you might want to ponder that anyone who isn't at least a bit flexible when it comes to helping you achieve your innermost goals probably needs to be reassessed as

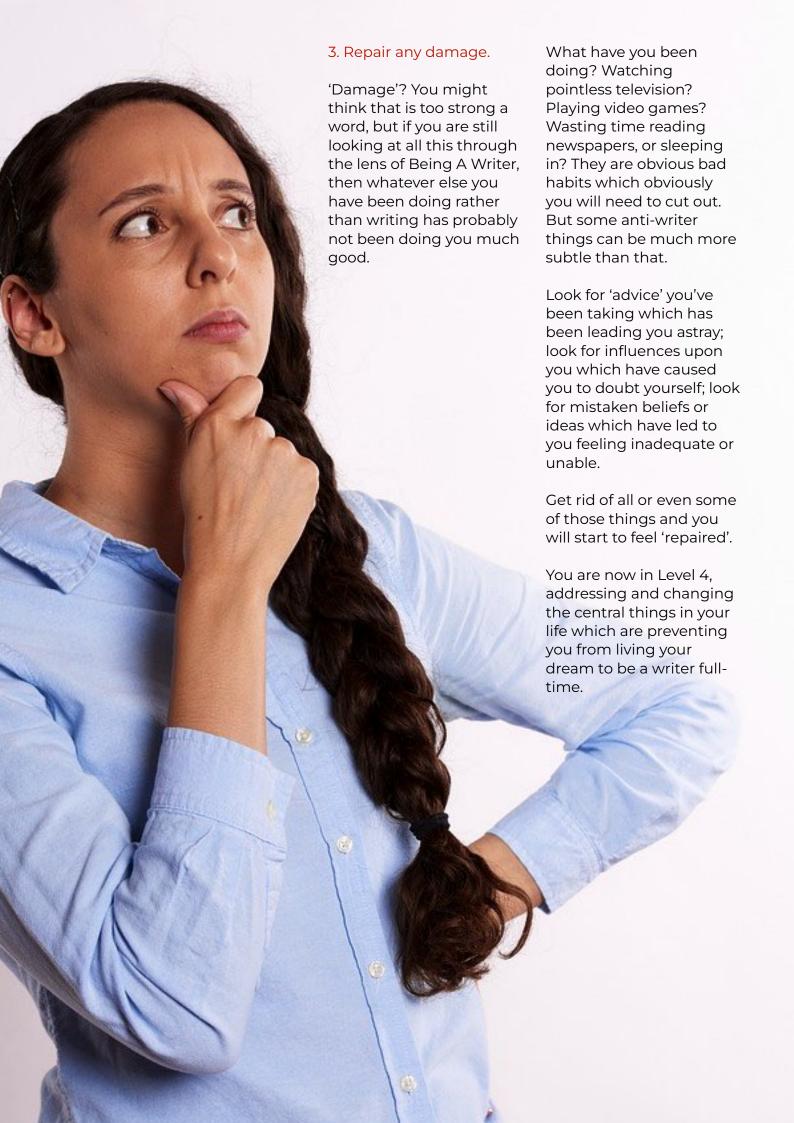
far as their place in your life goes.)

Perhaps they also have deep purposes and goals which you can help them with. Work this out.

You'll be amazed at not only how much you will get done but also at the positive effect that it has on your relationships with these people.

Truth begets truth.





This isn't going to be easy: if it were easy, you would probably have done all this by now. Some tough choices and challenges are involved. Discipline is required.

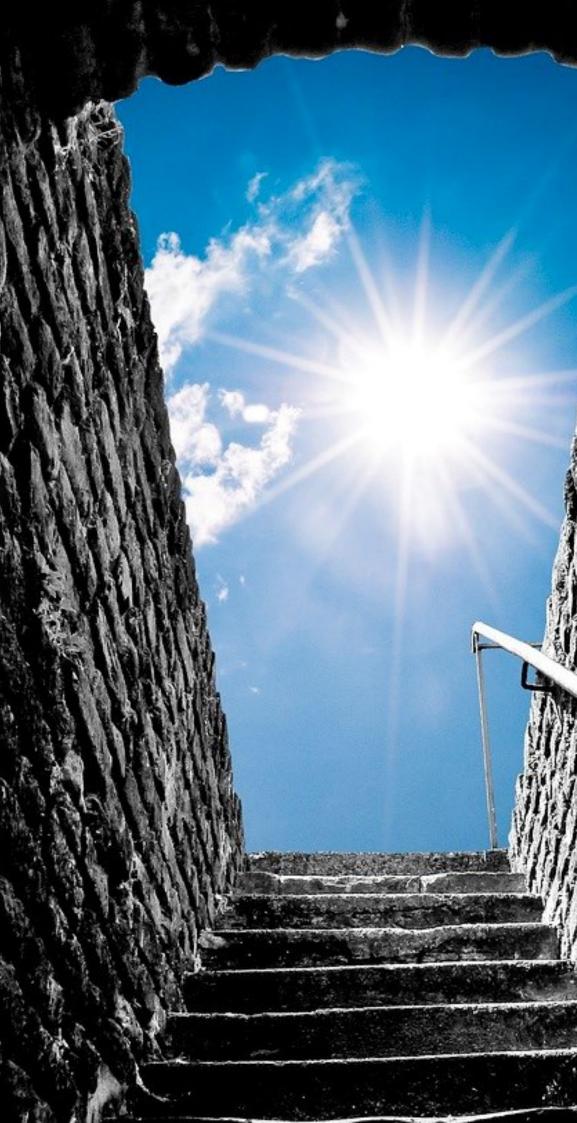
If you can't face those choices and challenges, what happens? If you don't discipline yourself enough, what are the consequences?

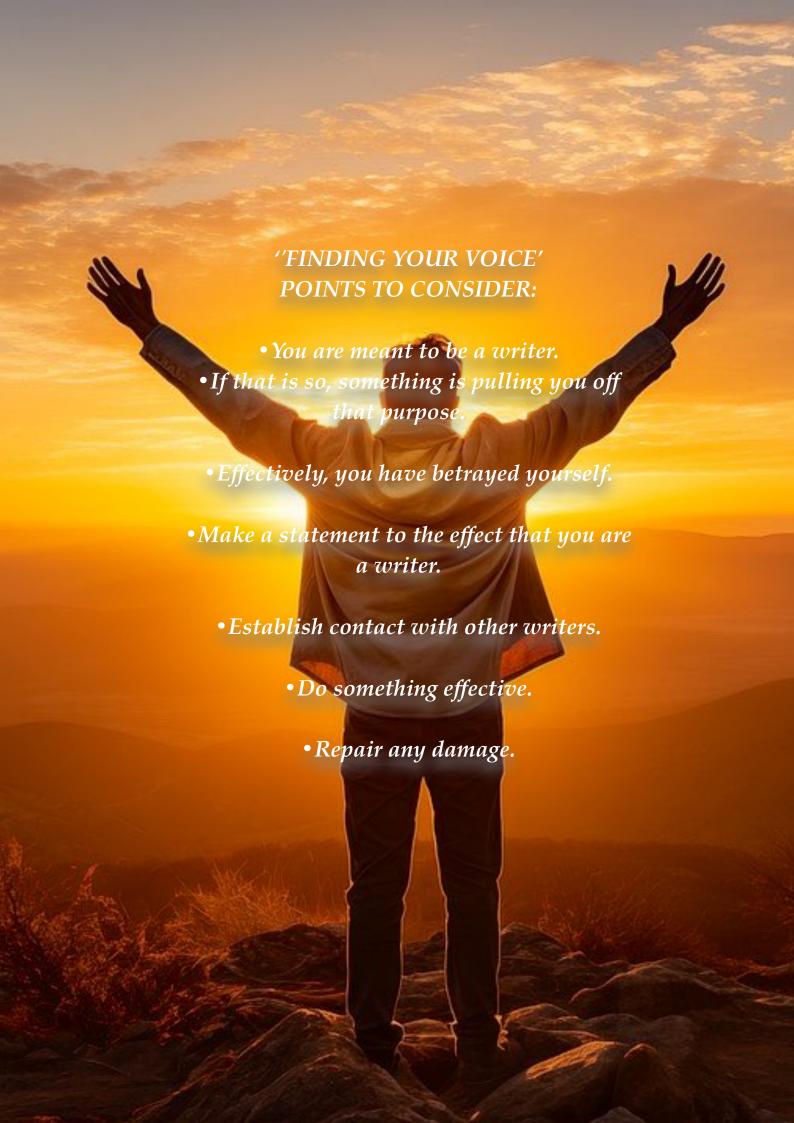
You will not perish in a ball of fire, let's face it. But you will not move up the ladder. And inevitably, Life being what it is, the gravity of the levels below will slowly pull you back down into the Vortex of Not Writing.

Lack of Time and Procrastination will capture you again.

What does the new lifestyle promised by Level 5 look like and what should you be wary of?

That comes up next.







Okay, so you've begun.

Not just talking about being a writer, or complaining about not having enough time to write, or hitting yourself on the head for procrastinating, but actually acting upon your innermost desire to be a writer.

You've made a commitment; you've nailed something to the mast of your life; you've openly discussed this with the

people you need to discuss it with. Perhaps you have even managed to eke out a more serious block of time than you have ever managed to before and have written something.

What does the future look like?

The Illusion of the Past

One of the biggest and most convincing illusions presented to us as human

beings is the weight and power of what we call 'the past'.

Habits, routines, associations, patterns, commitments with which we are entangled and so forth - all creep around us like a giant boa constrictor, slowly squeezing out our oxygen as they hypnotise us into submission and convince us to return to the 'old ways'.



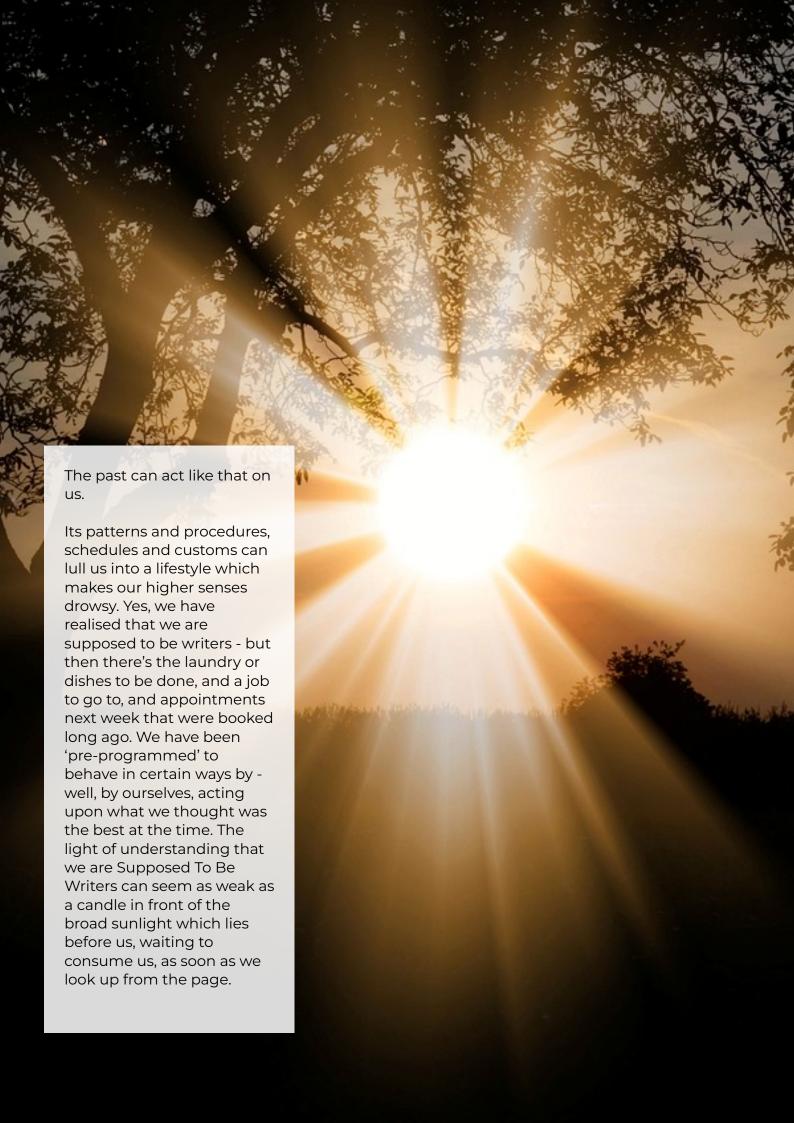
They almost fall prey to her spell, but then Puddleglum steps forward and stamps out the fire which was producing the perfume that was making them all drowsy. As they begin to recover, he makes a statement:

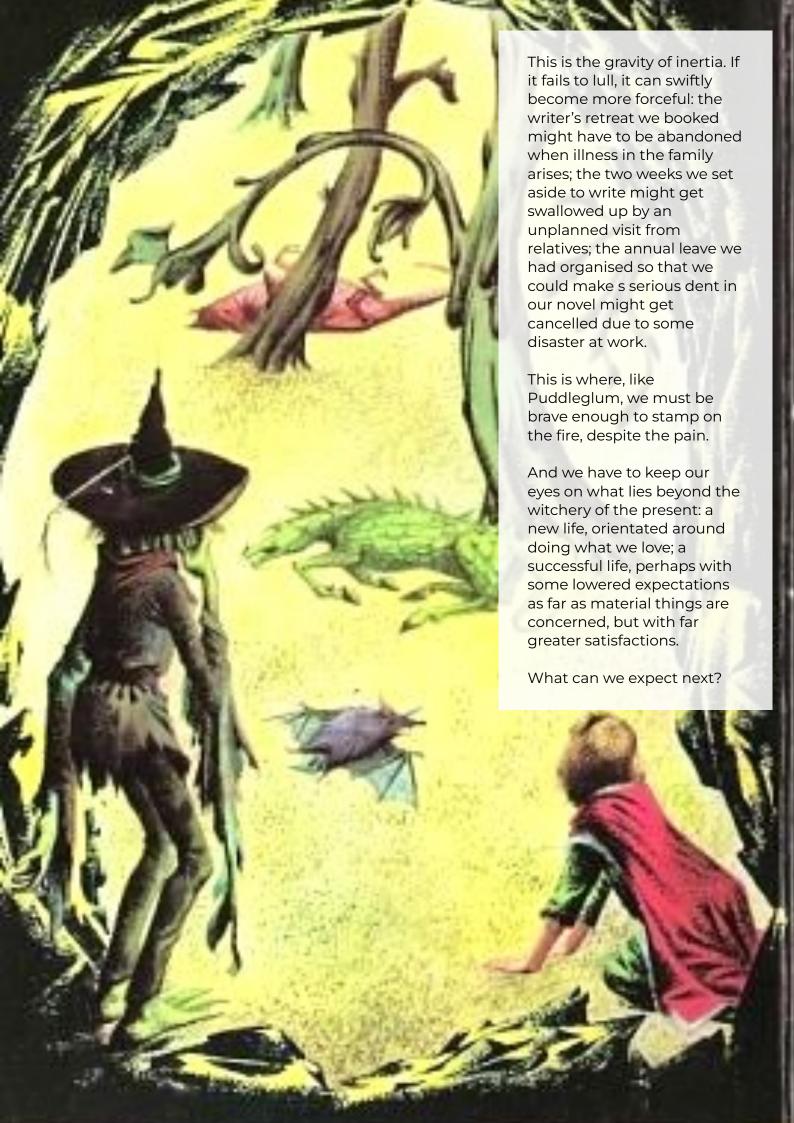
'One word, Ma'am,' he said, coming back from the fire; limping, because of the pain. 'One word. All you've been saying is quite right, I shouldn't wonder. I'm a chap who always liked to know the worst and then put the best face I can on it. So I won't deny any of what you said. But there's one more thing to be said, even so. Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things - trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor

you come to think of it. We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow. That's why I'm going to stand by the play world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia. So, thanking you kindly for our supper, if these two gentlemen and the young lady are ready, we're leaving your court at once and setting out in the dark to spend our lives looking for Overland. Not that our lives will be very long, I should think; but that's a small loss if the world's as dull a place as you say.'

The enchantment is shattered; the witch's spell fails and she tries to subdue them by becoming a giant serpent and subduing them by force. Naturally, she is slain. The heroes go on to escape from the underworld and emerge into the light.







The False Dawn

First, we can expect a false dawn.

We shrug off all of the above, apparently killing the snake of the past, and stride forward to write, having arranged the time and feeling stronger than ever before in our intention to do so. And for a while, we accomplish something. Perhaps our new schedule works and we get something written; perhaps everything seems to fall into place and it looks as though we will be able to go on writing, free at last from other entanglements.

Inevitably, though, the 'old ways' will return.

Something will happen - I can't possibly guess what it might be, we all have different circumstances - and our apparently secure new writing-centred existence will falter.





Surely now we are free to write?

There's one more avenue down which trouble will come unless we are prepared. This false dawn will not last, though it presents a much better scenario to us than anything we may have managed before.

To close off that road to trouble means that we had better take even more seriously our goal to be a fulltime writer.

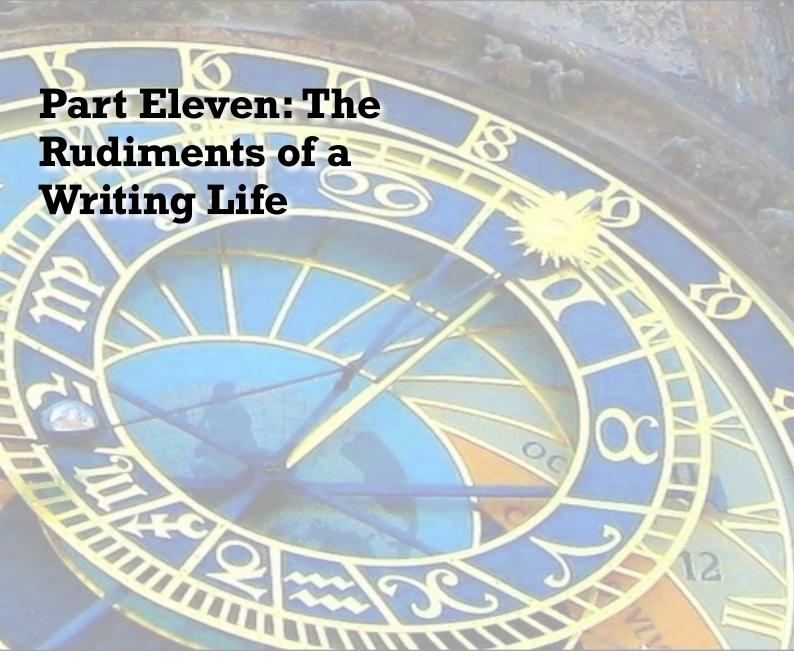
Because that road is built by ourselves.

In the next chapter I hope to be able to explain exactly what I mean by that, and to give you concrete steps to take to help you move upward even further on the ladder to success.

OD







If you have come so far as to have set up the rudiments of a writing life, you have done well - but there is still a little way to go. And it's probably going to be a little gruelling.

What are those rudiments, first?

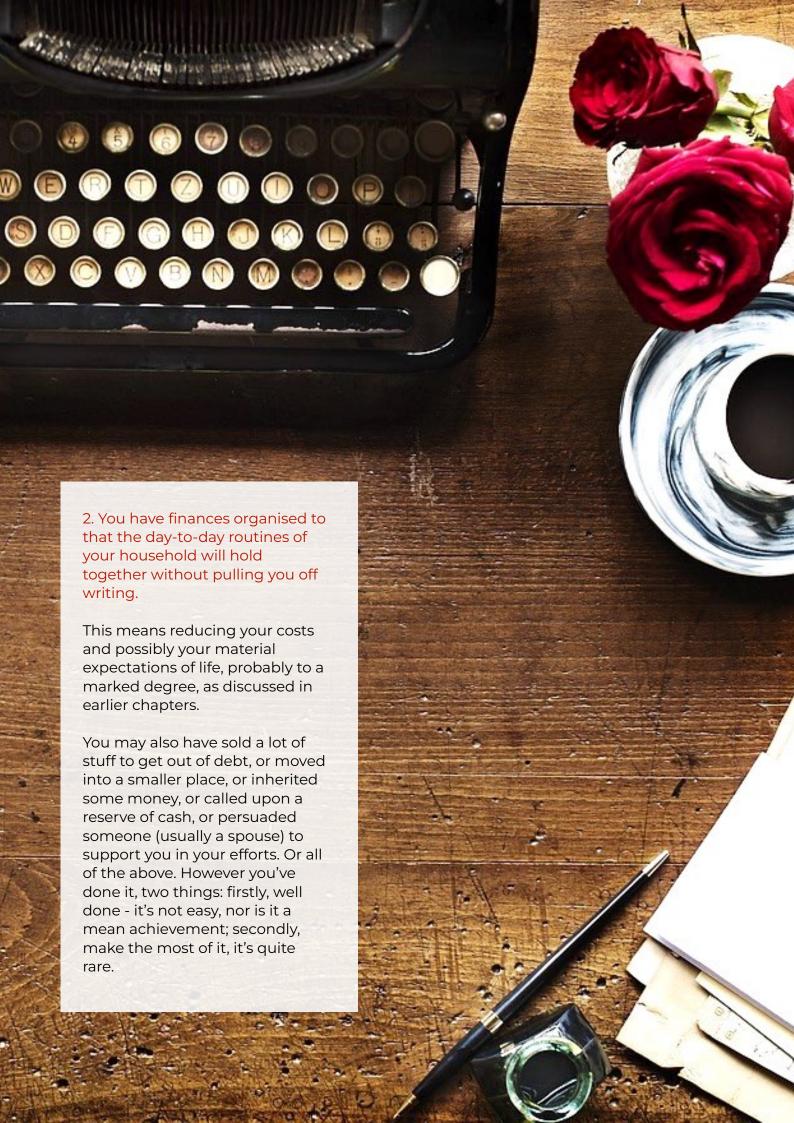
1. You have a lifestyle which enables you to write full-time.

By 'full-time', I mean approximately 30 hours a week, enough time to get some serious writing done. Less than that, and a degree of compulsive behaviour enters into things: you get a slight feeling of desperation when it comes to writing. Accompanying that feeling, perversely but almost inevitably, will be impulses to procrastinate. It's as though the human mind is wired so that the more frantic we feel about something, the more likely we are to 'bounce off' that thing and go and seek some kind of diversion from it.

You probably don't need a psychological study to

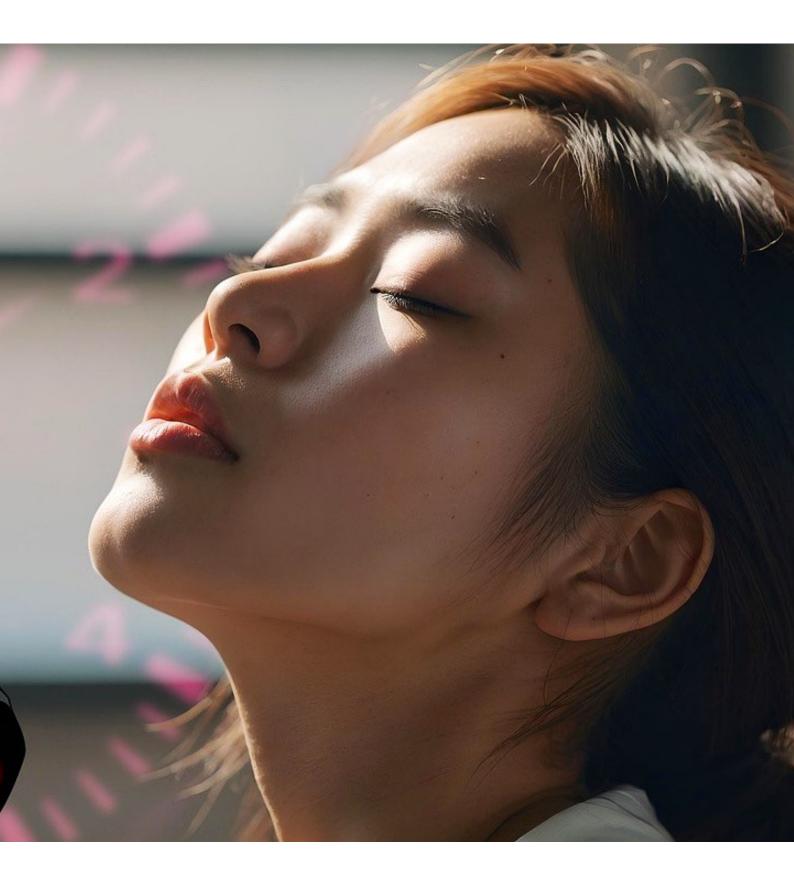
convince yourself of the truth of this: just get uptight about writing and watch the procrastination kick in.

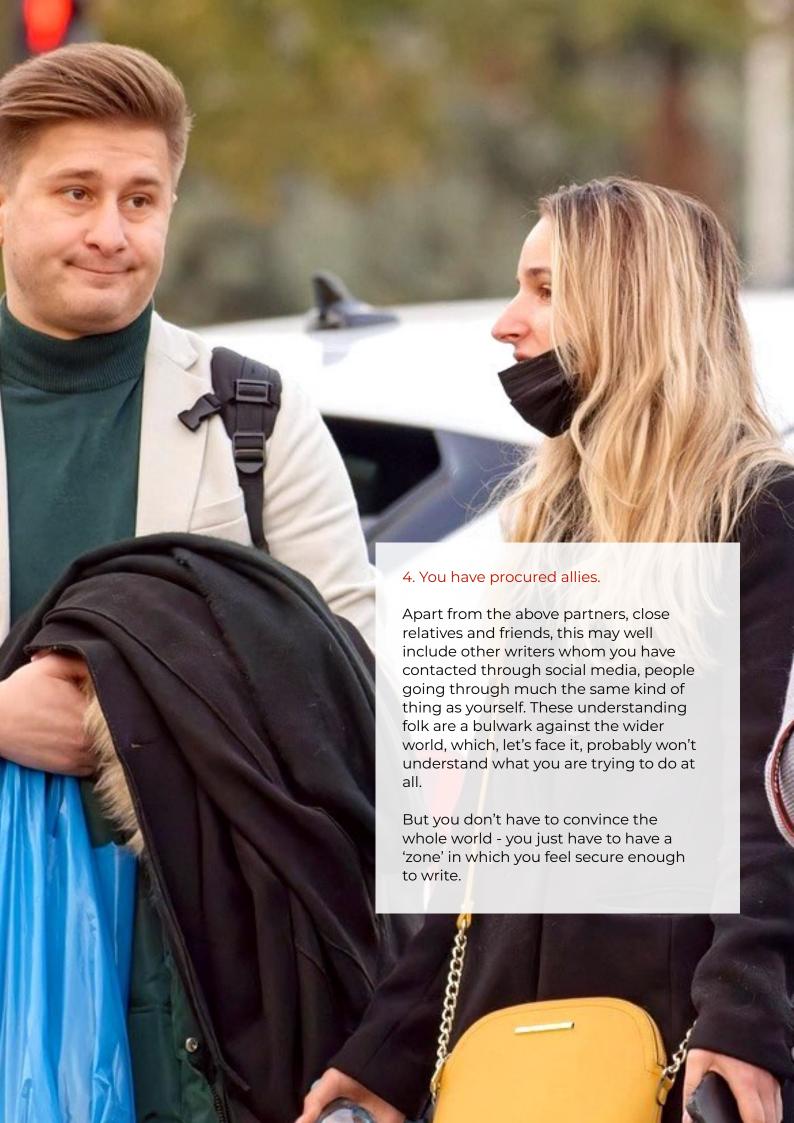
So the solution is to arrange things so that you have so much time to write that you never really get frantic about it. If you get distracted for a moment - by social media, by emails, by those pointless things which usually distract you - it won't matter that much. You'll still have time to write.

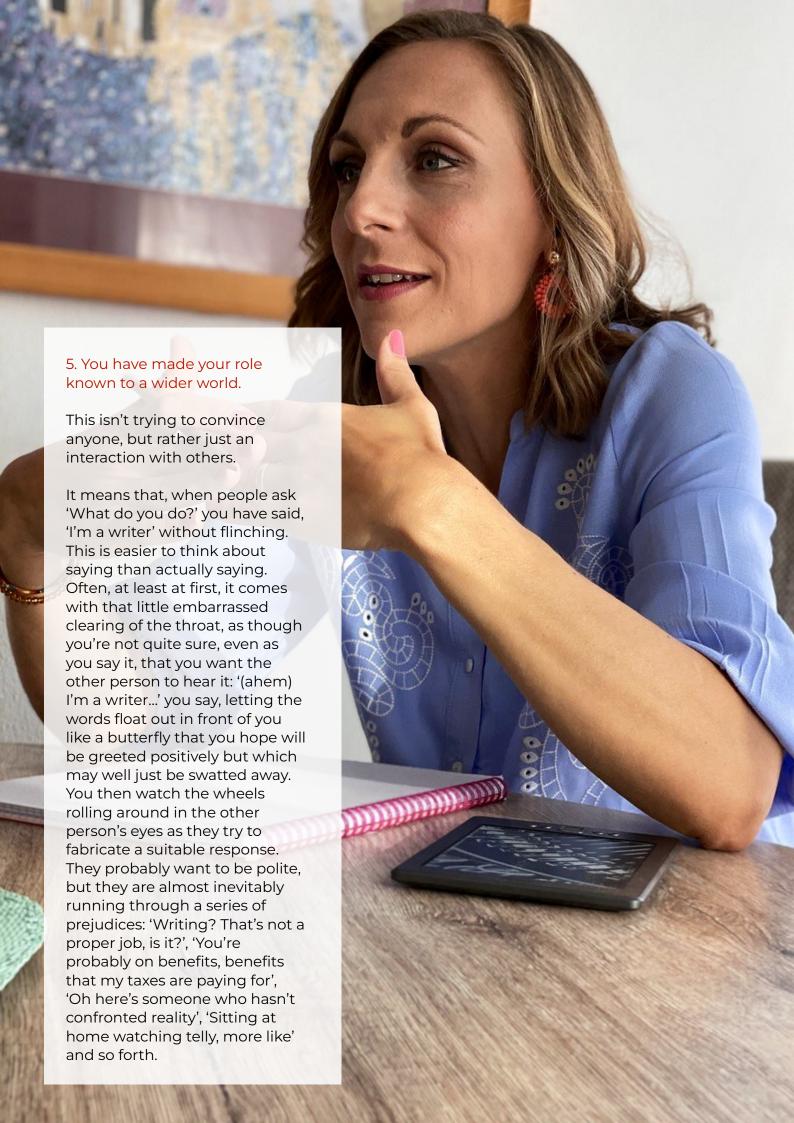


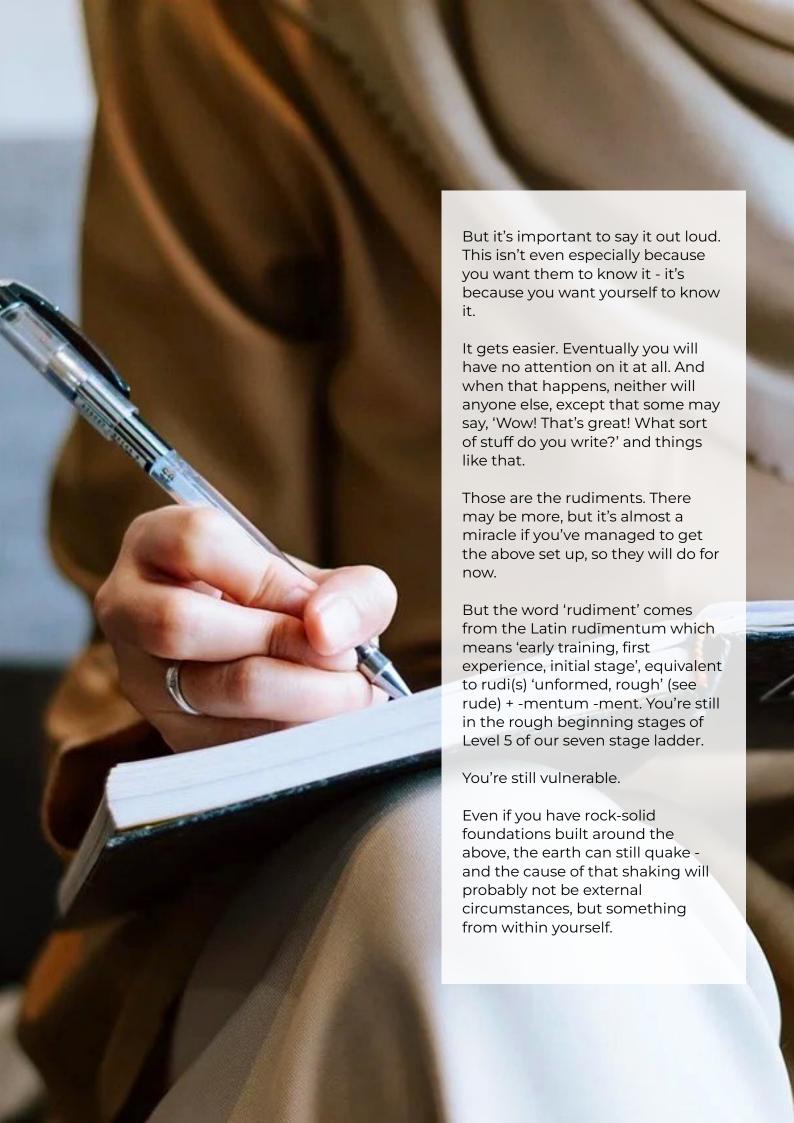
3. You have procured cooperation.

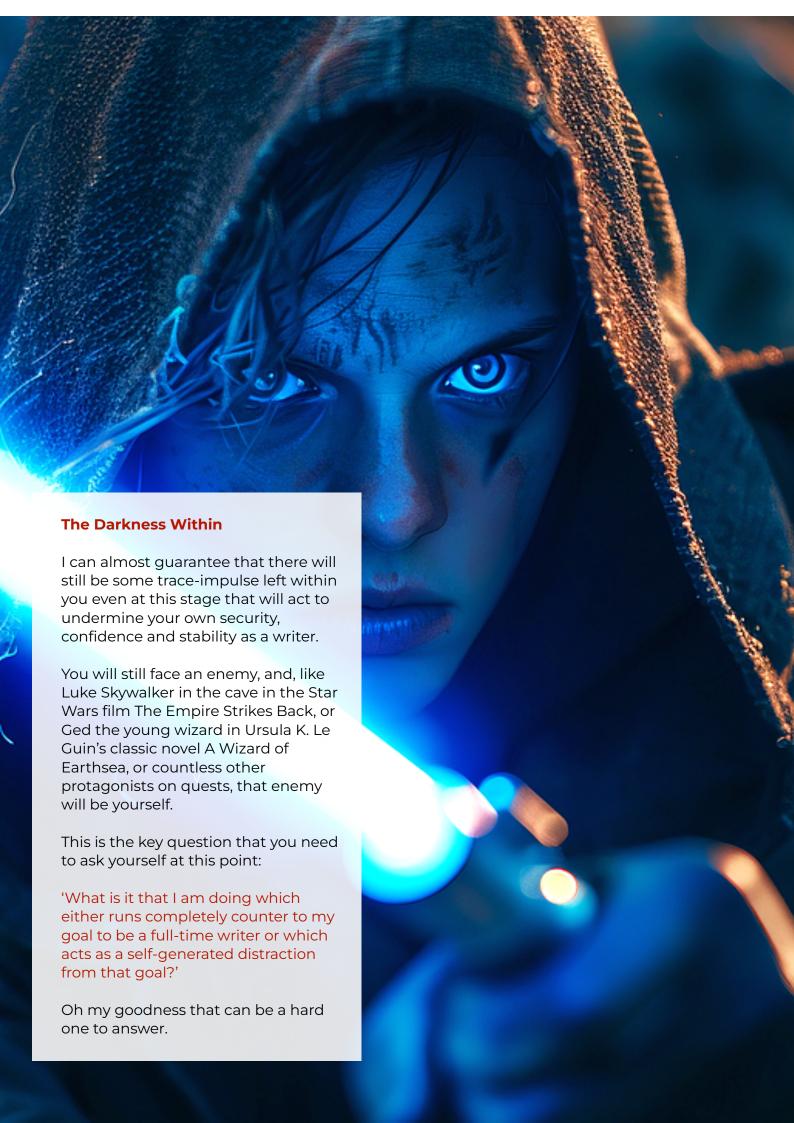
If you haven't already done so in the steps above, somehow you have communicated with those around you so that they have some idea what you are doing and don't try to interrupt you or push you off course. Part of this may have included actually getting rid of, or putting some distance between, you and those people who continually undermine what you're trying to do or make little of it or simply don't understand it.













A Clue

Here's a clue: the thing you're looking for to answer the question above isn't going to be something like 'I spend too long sharpening pencils' or 'I like to go on long morning walks'.

No - it's going to be something directly contrary to your writing goals.

It will be something dishonest by which I mean dishonest to yourself, rather than directly criminal. And you will probably know what it is, but were hoping all along that it wasn't going to come up. You wanted to secretly harbour this one, and somehow slip it through into your future as a successful writer. But, whatever it is, it won't let you be successful and is actively working against success.

Heavy stuff, eh?

Here's the thing, though: if you can get through this bit, it's all downhill from there. Or rather uphill: things get easier and more fun.

Getting rid of your inner shadow and then taking steps to make sure it never returns is like accomplishing a quest. You can become the king or queen of yourself now. The rest is cake.

And in the next chapter we're going to be baking that cake.



"THE RUDIMENTS OF A WRITING LIFE' POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- The Rudiments of a Writing Life:
- 1. You have a lifestyle which enables you to write fulltime.
- 2. You have finances organised to that the day-to-day routines of your household will hold together without pulling you off writing.
 - 3. You have procured cooperation.
 - 4. You have procured allies.
 - 5. You have made your role known to a wider world.
 - The next key question:

'What is it that I am doing which either runs completely counter to my goal to be a full-time writer or which acts as a self-generated distraction from that goal?

The answer is going to be something directly contrary to your writing goals. It will be something dishonest - by which I mean dishonest to yourself, rather than directly criminal.



Our quest to become a writer has been achieved.

We've realised that we are writers, and that the feeling of discomfort associated with Lack of Time, and the constant nagging presence of Procrastination, were early signs that something was wrong, and that we weren't being true to ourselves.

We progressed, using some simple remedies,

into using blocks of time to get some writing done.

But then we confronted our lives, made major changes to the way we operated, and rose into a whole new scenario, one in which we had time to write and the compulsions associated with procrastination eased off or even disappeared.

We were even very brave at that point, and challenged the last remaining vestiges of selfsabotage that were still capable of tripping us up.

So here we are.

Our time is plentiful; our attention is freed up from the constant pressures of Life; we can create.

What should we concentrate on?

Things to Concentrate On

These are some suggested steps to make the most of the rare circumstances described above in which we find yourselves at this point. If we have in fact made it this far, we won't want to waste it. So the following advice is designed to secure our position and to help make our dreams come true.

1. Focus on completing projects.

This is going to vary wildly from case to case, but usually a writer has several projects 'on the boil' including, probably, some long-term things which have never had the time to mature. The simplicity now is to get them finished.

We don't have to chew over stories for months or years at a time, struggling to get an hour or two to work on them: we have the time now to finish them.

We might notice something interesting at this point: we might experience a reluctance to complete things and let them go. We've had them churning around in our minds for so long that they have almost become 'companions of the imagination', or invented pets. Now we have time to wrap them up, there may be a little emotional reticence involved in finishing them.

Here's what will happen, though, if we push through that and get things completed: we will experience a resurgence of creative power, a rise in morale as writers, and gain improved competence in the craft.

It's a good idea to write short stories for a number of reasons, and this is one of them: we can complete story after story in a relatively short time.

Then get them submitted. Find publications; check submission guidelines, tweak stories to fit them if needed; and send them off.

Basically, we now have the chance to become a writing machine, turning out work after work after work with few or no distractions.

Sound like heaven?

It is, especially when compared with earlier stages of the ladder up which we have climbed.

There are other things we can do too.







3. Invest in things which teach the craft of writing effectively.

If we have any 'spare time', or reach a point where we feel that we are pushing at the limits of what we can do as writers, we should take a few courses. But we need to make sure that they are proper and proven courses, courses which teach us more about how to write effectively and which aren't loaded with false, timewasting or misleading information.

How will we know the difference?

This is where our contacts with other writers in the various writing communities we joined earlier will be useful. Seek recommendations; ask for pointers; survey the area.

The more craft we can learn, the more effective our time will be spent producing stories that actually work to attract, entertain and even enlighten readers. We'll create an 'upward spiral' in which we are not only writing more than we ever have before, but better and better quality too.

Of course my book, <u>How Stories Really Work</u>, gives you the basic methodology behind all successful stories and that would be an excellent investment at this point, if not before.

An important word of caution, however: we need to concentrate on quantity first. Only by writing story after story will we practise the craft enough to grow as writers; if we pause to 'learn before we write', we will waste too much time and lose confidence.

Those of us who are perfectionists when it comes to writing will already know that perfectionism slows a writer down enormously. It's better to get something out there and work on making the next something better rather than locking oneself away until one produces a 'masterpiece'.



APRIL

THU

MON	TUE	WED
1	2	3
8	9	10
15	16	17
22	23	24
29	30	

The Long Game

FRI

One of the most important lessons that there is to learn in this game is that it is a longterm one. Very few writers appear on the scene and instantly produce a best-seller which generates enough funds for them to retire to a life of placid writing forever. Unfortunately, the fact that a small handful do exactly that creates a false impression in the imagination of many writers, who hold that picture in their minds even when their rationality tells them that it is so rare that they should not compute with it.

SAT SUN

The truth is more mundane, more prosaic, but also more authentic: success as a writer takes place on a scale of decades rather than weeks, months or even years.

	FRI	SAT	SUN
4	5	6	7
11	12	13	14
18	19	20	21
25	26	27	28

SUN

3

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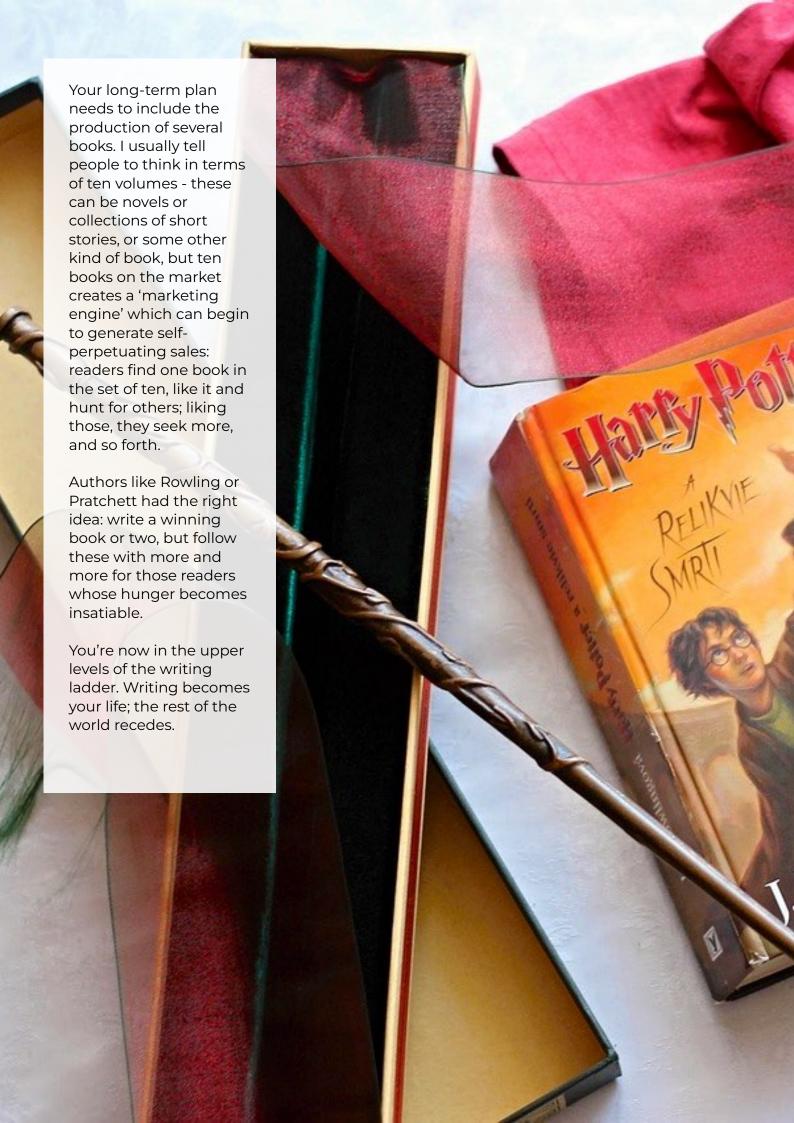
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EMBER

THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1	2	3
7	8	9	10
14	15	16	17
21	22	23	24
28	29	30	

Success as a writer takes place on a scale of decades rather than weeks, months or even

30 31





It's a game in which the exchange of cash is still an embarrassing inconvenience - readers just want to read your stuff, and the fact that they have to pay for a book, which sits on their shelf after one reading but can be read and read again - during which they don't have to buy another thing from you - is a hard commercial reality.

It's a long-term game.

You'll probably laugh, but I'm on a 40 Year Plan. I'm in Year 7, heading into Year 8. It took me three years before I saw any money at all; it will probably take me another two years before I get to the point where the whole thing is selfsupporting.

Think in decades.

It will probably take ten or more books to create a viable stream of readers.

What happens when you do?

Stay tuned.



'ACHIEVING THE QUEST' POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- On achieving a life orientated around writing:
 - 1. Focus on completing projects.
 - 2. Make further economies.
- 3. Invest in things which teach the craft of writing effectively.
 - 4. Think in terms of a long-term schedule.
- Your long-term plan needs to include the production of several books.
 - Ten books on the market creates a marketing engine which can begin to generate self-perpetuating sales.



Please take a moment to look over the image on the following page.

It summarises the various stages that a writer needs to go through to achieve the free time and attention needed to be successful in terms of not only being a writer, but actually doing writing at a viable level.

These levels can be traversed in a very short

time, but most usually take years.

Rearranging one's life so that writing takes priority is not normally a simple operation. But it's important to make the journey in one way or another, if a writer is to be true to his or her inner purposes and identity as a writer.

Surveys show, as we have seen, that a great many writers hover around what I have called 'Level 2', the zone where Lack of Time and Procrastination loom large as mighty enemies.

That's frighteningly close to the bottom, isn't it?

Lack of Time and Procrastination can so hound the writer that the spark to write dwindles and dies, and the writer goes off to do something else, burying their stories deep in the back of their imaginations. Level 7: the ultimate level, when all stages below have been achieved and surpassed and the writer now has a substantial career as a writer, a career that pays and is self-supporting, leaving plenty of time to write more.

Level 6: 'play time' - logistics have all been dealt with: there is now time to do as one wishes, and even to indulge in a little procrastination without placing everything in jeopardy.

Level 5: a writer is emerging from an old lifestyle and moving into a new condition, where new things are possible.

Level 4: the point where serious action needs to occur - the writer must here begin to make moves to rearrange his or her life and rebuild it around writing.

Level 3: a writer manages to use some suggested remedies to find some time to write, perhaps in blocks each week, or by using a gadget between meetings or on journeys to record notes, and so on.

Level 2: becoming aware of one's need to be a writer and struggling to find any time at all - while battling with procrastination as well.

Level 1: the oblivion of losing the plot entirely and giving up on the goal to be a writer, in one way or another.

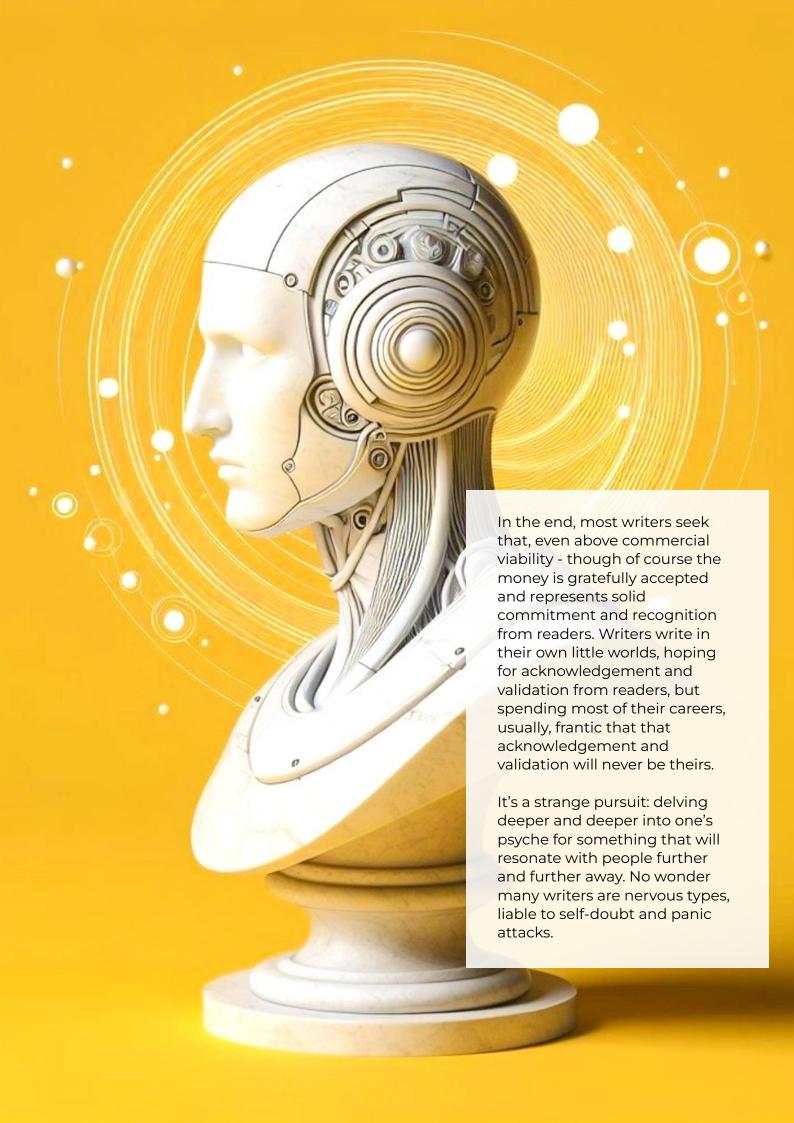
Of course, climbing the ladder all the way to the top is an ideal picture. Many of the world's great authors never managed to reach Level 7; getting to the top of the ladder is not a prerequisite to writing success, simply an outline of a perfect condition for writers. Some never made it much beyond Level 3, and their manuscripts were cobbled together in shelters for the homeless

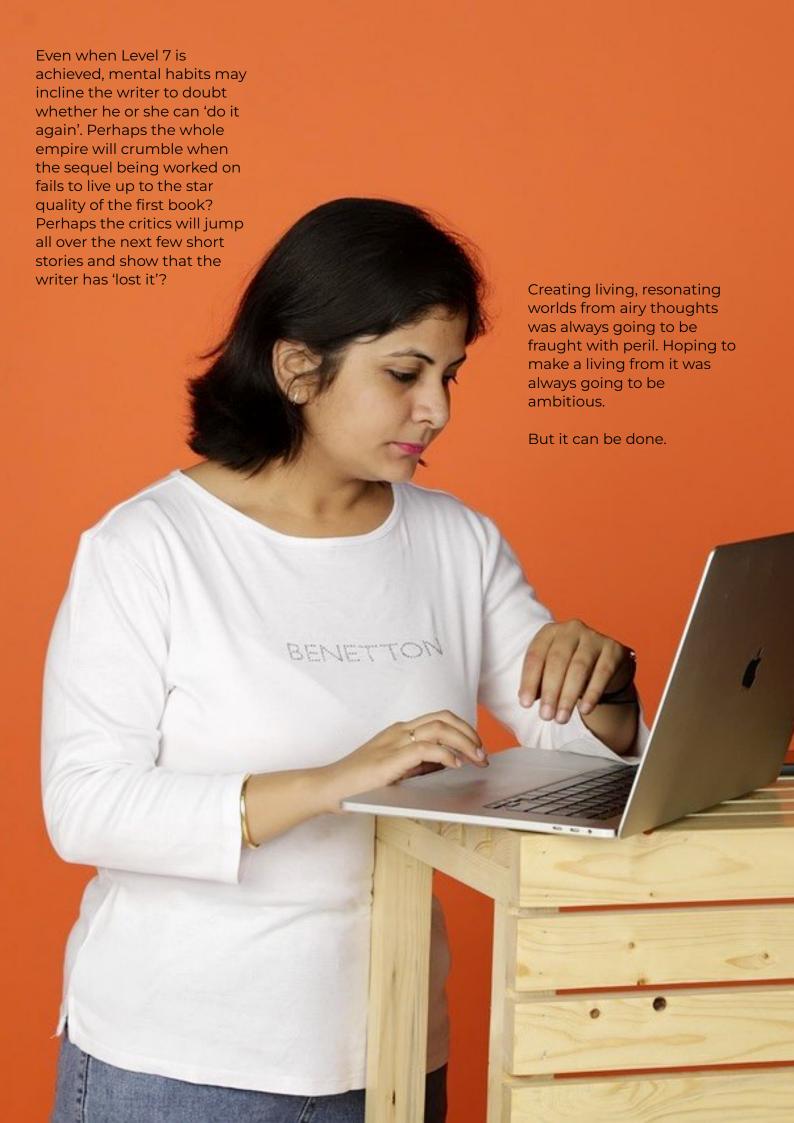
or cafés or late at night after a job of work had been done. They never made the moves to make writing central in their lives, but still managed to finish things, get them published, and strike viable readerships.

This series merely gives you an outline of possibilities and potential. The ladder shouldn't be used as an excuse not to find every moment that you can to write. Life has to be lived as it is; it's not always going to be possible to make the grand changes required to crown writing as the king of everything in your life.

If you were able to do so, though - if you actually reached Level 7 - you can imagine what it would be like.









If you have the courage to climb the ladder, you can join them. As long as you remember to write along the way. Constant writing, constant honing of your craft, constant practice until your own voice emerges from the crowd, these must occur wherever you feel you

may be on the ladder.
Rearranging your life so
that writing takes centre
stage will be pointless if
you don't do any actual
writing. Aim for quantity
first - don't let
perfectionism hold you
back - then constant
practice and learning will
bring quality, and as you

climb the ladder and are able to produce more and more work of higher and higher quality, viability will follow.

I hope to meet you along the way.



'THE LADDER TO SUCCESS' POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- •Rearranging one's life so that writing takes priority is not normally a simple operation.
- •Lack of Time and Procrastination can so hound the writer that the spark to write dwindles and dies.
- •Life has to be lived as it is; it's not always going to be possible to make the grand changes required to crown writing as the king of everything in your life.
- •Creating living, resonating worlds from airy thoughts was always going to be fraught with peril. Hoping to make a living from it was always going to be ambitious.

But it can be done.

•Constant writing, constant honing of your craft, constant practice until **your own voice** emerges from the crowd, these must occur wherever you feel you may be on the ladder.

Aim for quantity first, then as you climb the ladder and are able to produce more and more work of higher and higher quality, viability will follow.



Here are a few more tips to help you with productivity.

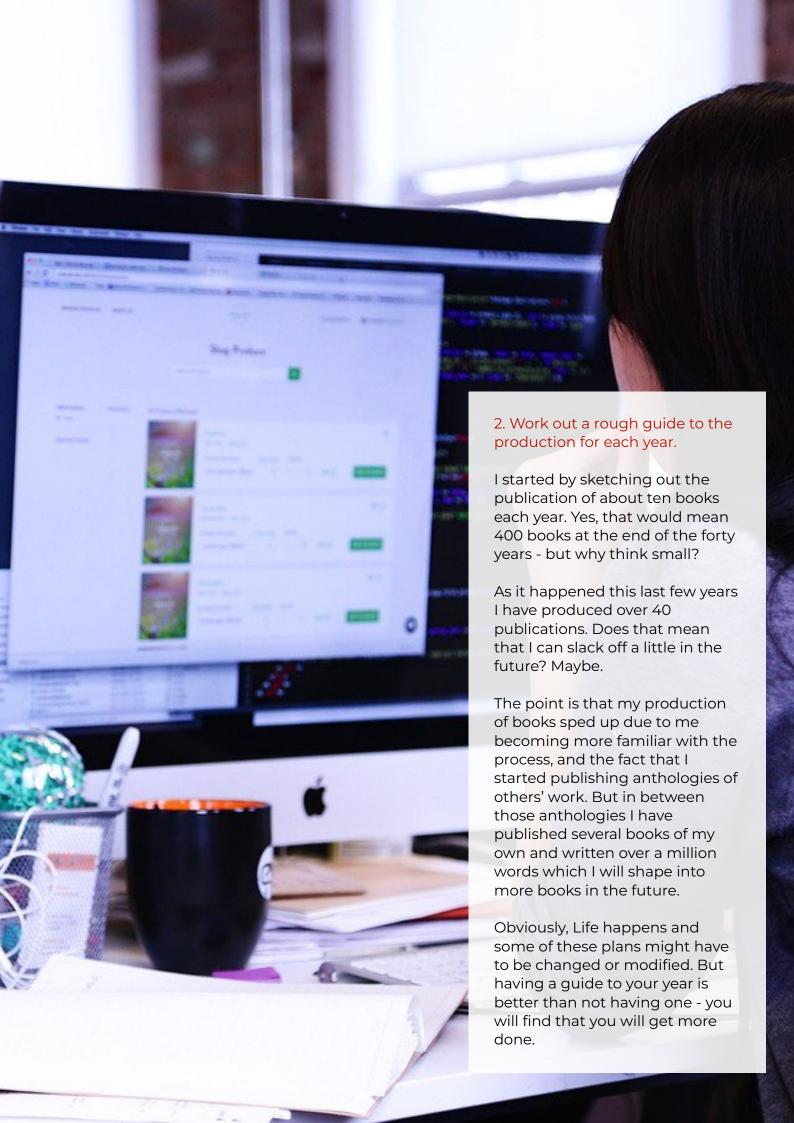
These have worked for methey might not work for everyone, but I suggest that you adapt them to your own situations as you see fit

1. Adopt a plan that extends for decades.

This is the Big Picture, around which all the rest of your production schemes will materialise. As I've mentioned, I developed a Forty Year Plan and included everything that I could possibly think of, including moving house, rearranging finances, settling in, dealing with other logistics - and book production targets for each year.

Looking back, I can see that I have more or less kept to these plans so far, though some have 'mutated' a little on the way, while some things happened slightly earlier or later than predicted.

Developing a very longterm plan like this can be a liberating experience. And here's the thing: if you don't put your vision of the future out there, someone else will put theirs in your way.



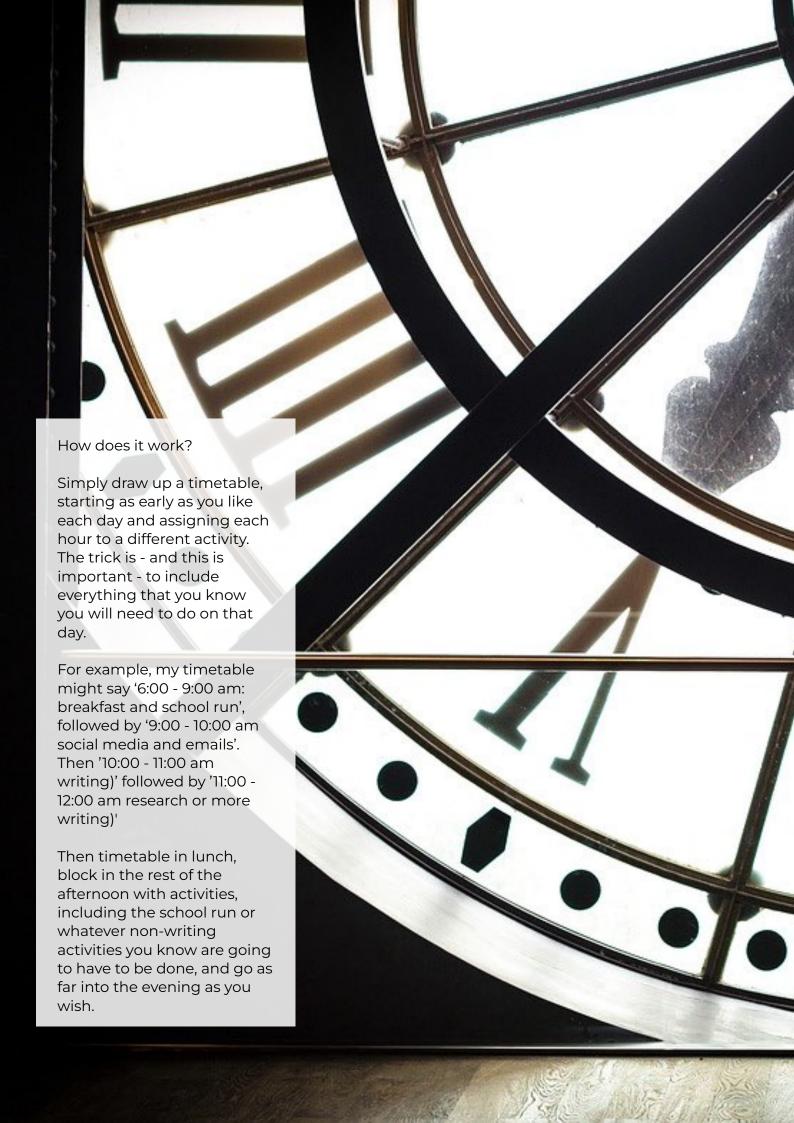
3. Draw up a monthly calendar.

I started trying to do a weekly calendar but was frustrated because once you get into the nitty-gritty of things that happen at a weekly level, obstacles and unforeseen changes come up and throw the schedule off. We'll come to weekly timetabling in a minute, because I am not saying don't do it - quite the opposite.

But try starting with a monthly calendar so that you have some goals which are do-able and which you can see approaching day by day.









Don't be too rigid with all this. If you get too fixated, you tend to also get too fraught and disappointed if your schedule goes awry, which it will from time to time. You don't want to get into a situation where you are saying to yourself 'Oh no! I've gone four minutes overtime into my lunch slot!' or things like that. Use the timetable as a guide, rather than a regime.



Putting all the above together should boost your production to some extent. And you will feel yourself getting closer to the annual goals and the Big Picture that spans decades, step by step.





By far the majority of beginning writers - and even some established ones - are stuck around the Level 2 area of the Ladder to Success. They are in the orbit of other matters in their lives, and are struggling to find enough time to write. These steps are designed to move those writers from Level 2 to Level 3, where 'islands of time' begin to emerge from the sea of troubles.

Brutal though this fact may be, the central reason why you're not being a writer right now is that you don't place enough importance on it. But that alone, as a statement, doesn't quite give you the whole picture.

The reason why you're not placing enough importance on writing - given that your heart burns to write - is that you

are giving importance to other things.

Those 'other things' fall into two categories: those things which you distract yourself with when you know better; and those things which Life forces upon you, like family obligations and the need for food and shelter, which you can't quickly rearrange.

Level 7: the ultimate level, when all stages below have been achieved and surpassed and the writer now has a substantial career as a writer, a career that pays and is self-supporting, leaving plenty of time to write more.

Level 6: 'play time' - logistics have all been dealt with: there is now time to do as one wishes, and even to indulge in a little procrastination without placing everything in jeopardy.

Level 5: a writer is emerging from an old lifestyle and moving into a new condition, where new things are possible.

Level 4: the point where serious action needs to occur - the writer must here begin to make moves to rearrange his or her life and rebuild it around writing.

Level 3: a writer manages to use some suggested remedies to find some time to write, perhaps in blocks each week, or by using a gadget between meetings or on journeys to record notes, and so on.

Level 2: becoming aware of one's need to be a writer and struggling to find any time at all - while battling with procrastination as well.

Level 1: the oblivion of losing the plot entirely and giving up on the goal to be a writer, in one way or another.

This checklist will help you to clarify which activity is which and what importance they take in your life.

Rank the following things in order of importance,

where 10 is Vitally Important and 1 is Not That Significant At All. Be as honest as you can, and actually look at how you do spend your time rather than imagining how it is spent. For example, you

might want to answer '1' to the item 'Time spent watching television' below, but on actual examination you might discover that you're spending more hours doing so than writing.

CHECKLIST

Your job (or source or income)

Your romantic relationship(s)

Your family (including your parents)

Your sleeping patterns

Your existing daily and weekly routines

Your hobbies

Your other commitments (religious, educational, sporting etc)

Your bills

Any other demand on your life and time

Time spent on social media

Time spent watching television

Time spent engaged in activities which might be described as 'idle'

Your writing life

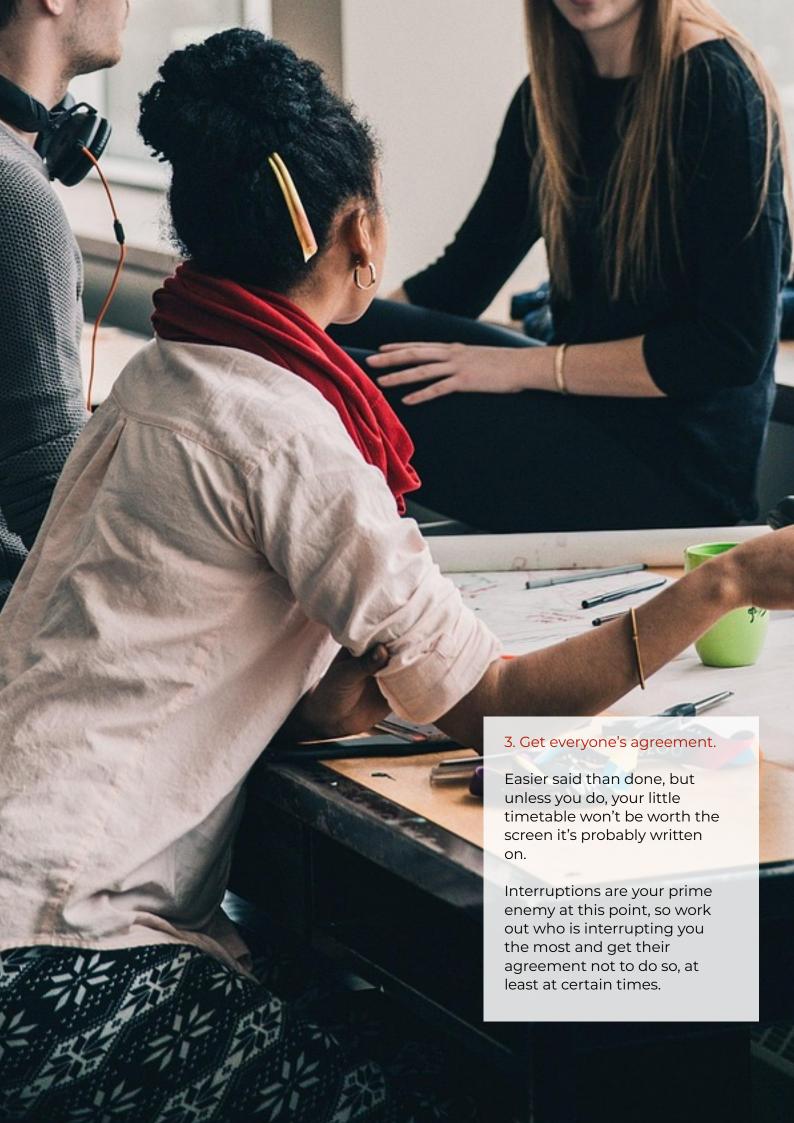
There may be other things too, not covered by this list.

You'll see by your own ranking that other things are probably taking precedence over your writing life. That's understandable and 'normal', but unless something changes, you probably won't get enough writing done to move forward.

So what steps can you take on an immediate basis to move from Level 2 on the Ladder to Success to Level 3, 'Islands of Time'?







4. Expand slightly more on your writing timetable.

Ideally, pick times that are interruption-free, or at least when you are less likely to be in demand.

It's possible to construct a schedule so that you are writing in the early hours of the morning - or even through the night, as long as you get sleep some other time. I once wrote a 300,000 word epic fantasy in three months, by locking myself in an office, working flat-out between 2:00 am and 7:00 am and going home as the sun rose.

But that's an extreme. One long evening each week, or a weekend afternoon, or something like that, and, if you stick to it, you'll find that in a few weeks you have made significant progress - provided you also apply the rest of the advice in this section and don't keep interrupting yourself.

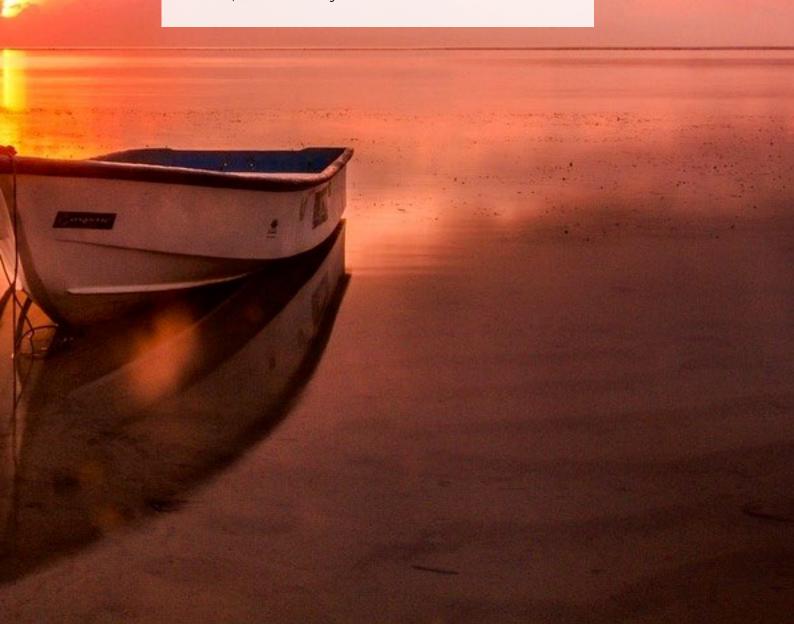
Yes, interrupting yourself...



If the primary enemy of a writer in the early stages of establishing a writing career is interruptions, the most guilty party is usually the writer himself or herself.

Devise a schedule that keeps these to a minimum, and stop interrupting yourself. Self-interruptions range from 'I'll just check my email' to 'I'll get a coffee' to 'There's no way I can write this scene that takes place in front of a fireplace until I've read this three-volume History of Fireplaces in the Seventeenth Century so that I can be convincingly authentic'.

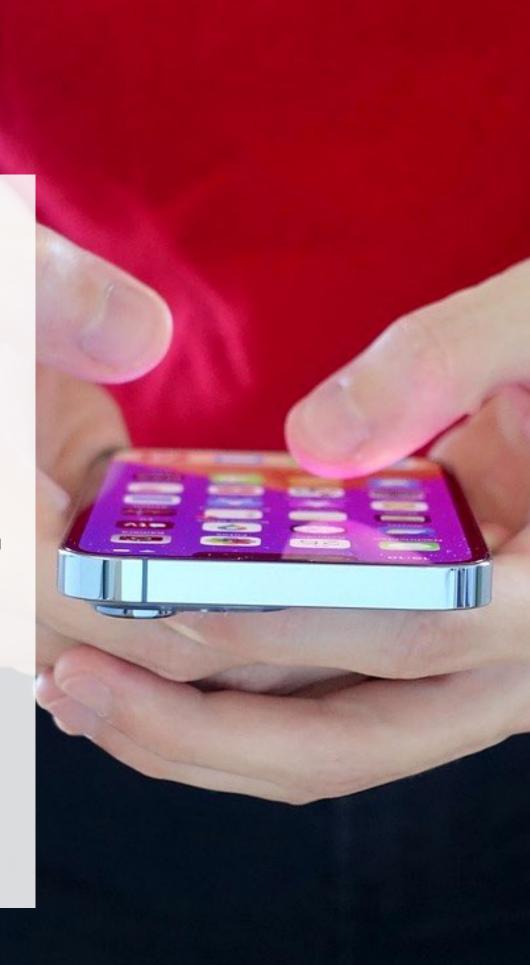
Put distractions aside and get to the keyboard, or desk, or whatever you use.

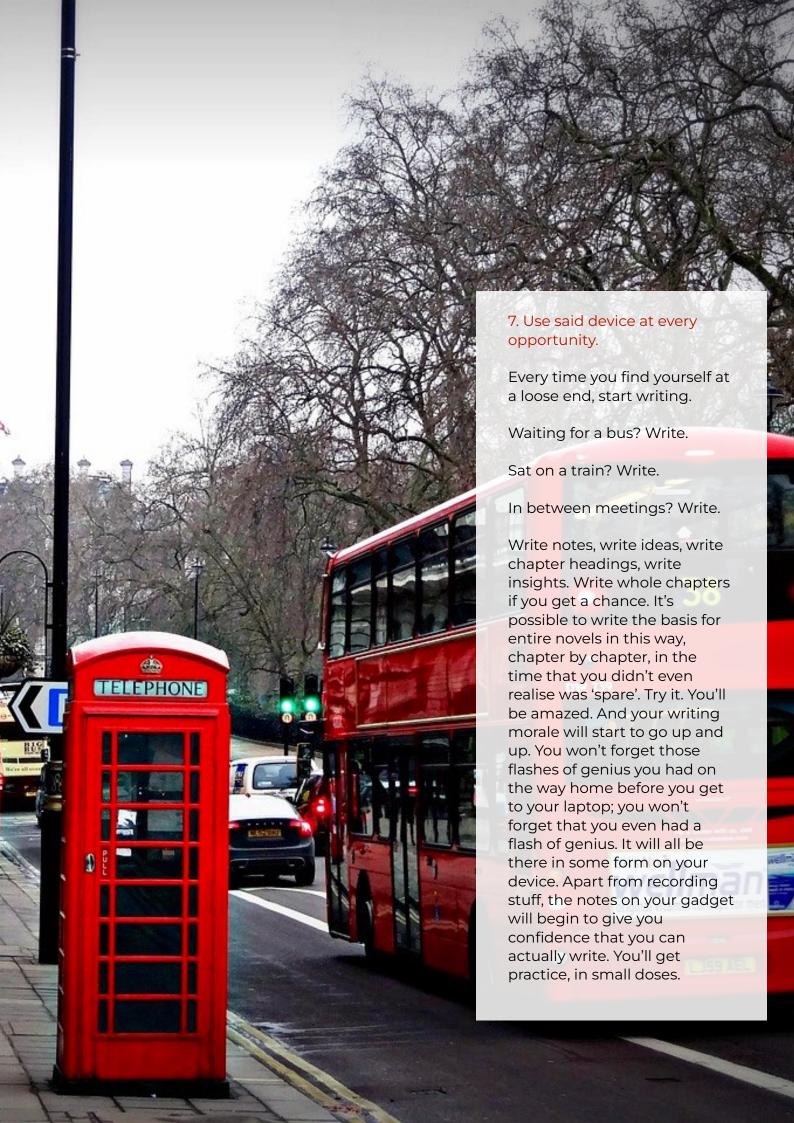


6. Get an iPhone or other gadget that you carry around with you.

I mention iPhones because that's what I use, but any such gadget will do. You need something that you will actually carry around with you, though. It doesn't have to be fancy, but it does have to have the capacity for keeping notes. There are plenty of free apps for this. You don't need anything super-duper or complex: you just need something that you can write into and save. Apple's 'Notes' app is fine - you can write up to any length and then email it to yourself.

Better to have it on your phone, because you will tend to carry your phone around with you at all times, whereas you might forget to bring a device dedicated to writing with you, and that's half the problem. The iPhone 6 has the added advantage of extra battery power so you won't burn up your phone energy.





8. When you have the time set aside to write, write until you drop - don't stop, don't auto-correct.

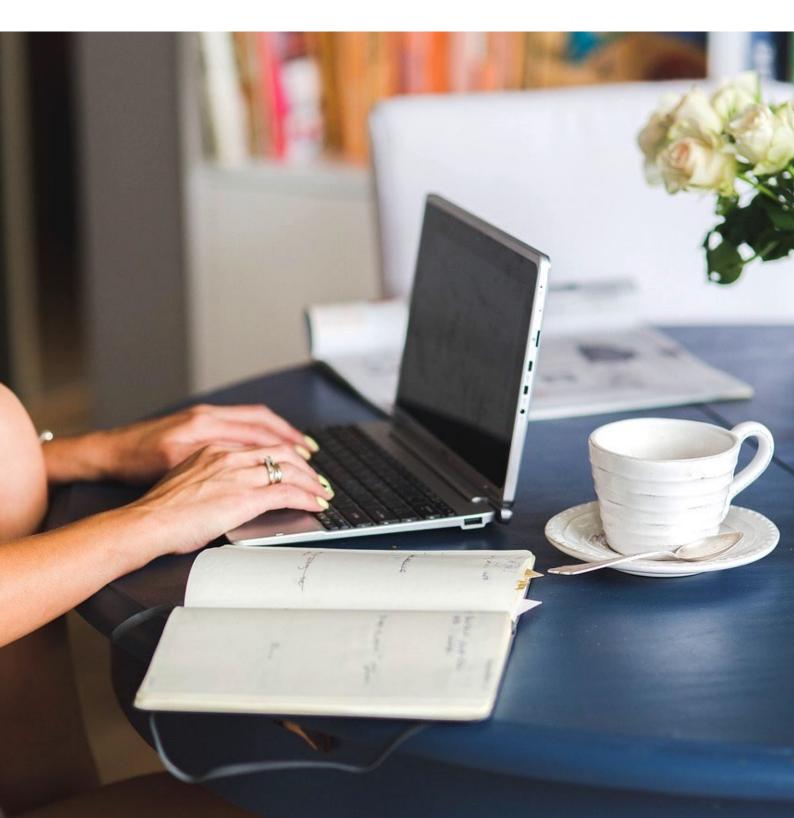
Now all of this advice is important and every point here is worth its weight in cyber-gold, but this is one suggestion which can make or break you as a writer.

On those occasions when you and a laptop share enough time for you to get somewhere, don't waste time by 'going over' what you wrote last time, picking out spelling errors, grammar problems, things you'd like to 'tweak a little'.

Just hit the keyboard and write.

Don't stop until your head hits the space bar with exhaustion. Set yourself high word targets per hour if that works for you. Whatever you do, don't stop - don't even pause - for any editing or 're-drafting' or even basic corrections until you reach 200 pages of writing.

Why?



For several reasons:

i) firstly, and probably most importantly, getting 200 pages written is a tremendous moralebooster. You know that it's far from perfect, you know it will take major editing work, but there it is: 200 pages of your very own writing. That's a decentsized book, right there. Think of the shopping analogy above: writing your first draft is the first step in making a cake - you've been to the shops and bought the ingredients. There they are in the pages in front of you. The second step, re-writing, is making the cake. But until you have the ingredients,

making the cake is just a fantasy.

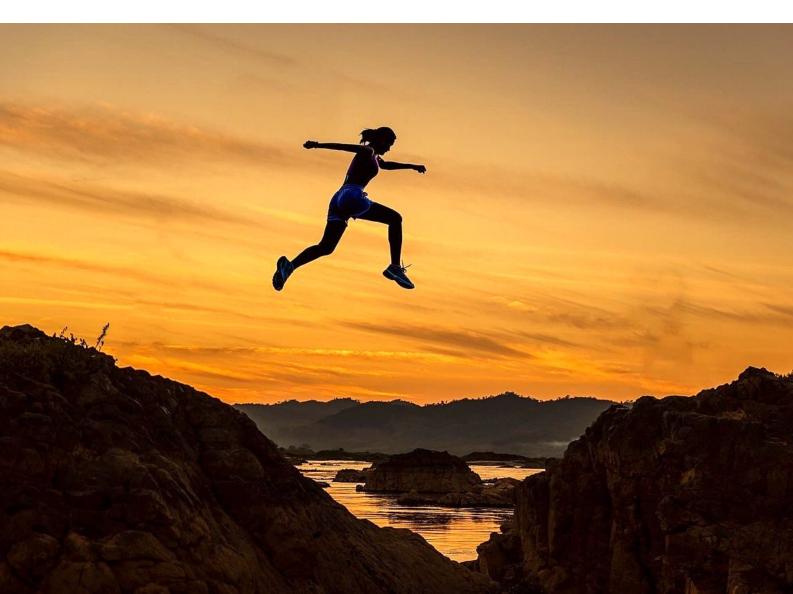
ii) writing flat-out like this will teach you a few things about yourself as a writer. When you read it over, you'll see patterns, strengths and weaknesses, places where you falter and places where you demonstrate real skill. It's a training programme for writers, getting your writing muscles fitter for the real thing: the next draft.

iii) you avoid the counterproductive 'pottering around' that happens if you do it any other way: write a page, stop and think, change some things, correct spelling, maybe alter the while way the page works, wonder if you could have done better, and so forth. This tortuous pattern has produced one or two successful works, but at the cost of so many more that could have been written in the same time with less bother.

Apply all of the above and before long, you'll be operating at Level 3 of the Ladder to Success. You will have built islands of time in which to write.

To go further than that will take a bigger programme.

Which is what comes up next...





Maybe you have done all you can to adjust your timetable within your existing lifestyle. Now it's time for Level 4, making serious changes.

This programme consist of guidelines which you can implement to the degree that you judge that you need to, in order to accomplish the results that you need.

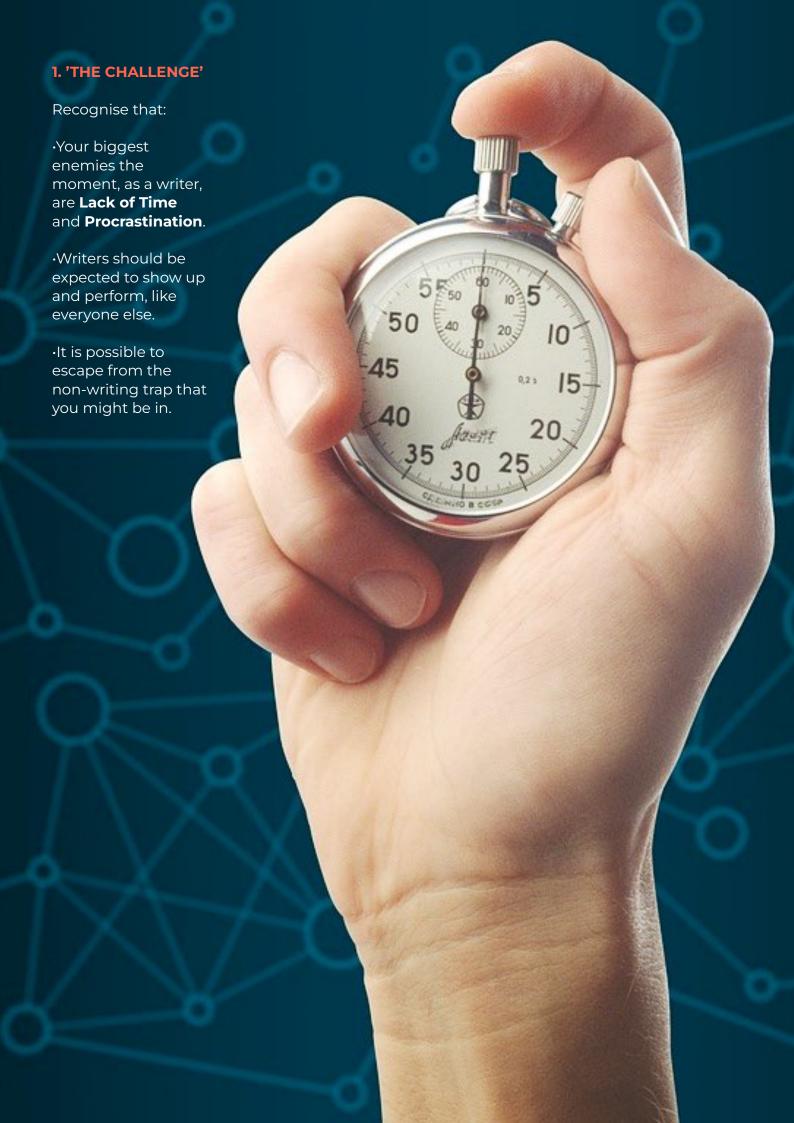
In other words, you can be strict with yourself or not.

Experience suggests that the stricter you are, the more effectively and rapidly you will achieve greater freedom as a writer - and as you know, if you've read the earlier chapters, freedom as a writer is important not just for you as an individual but for the culture as a whole.

There are different kinds of guidelines. Some require you to do something; others require you only to realise or recognise something. Here we present a summary.

If you hit a snag and need help, please contact me:

grant@clarendonhousebooks.com







3. 'SOME PRACTICAL STEPS'

1. Recognise That You Have A **Purpose**

What is your purpose? Write it down (even in an incomplete or scrambled form if you can't find an exact wording).

2. Don't Dream: Plan

Daydreaming is fine and should be encouraged - but writing those daydreams down and working out how to make them come true, even over a period of years, is better.

Draw up a plan.

3. Set Realistic Expectations

Remove from your thinking any notions that riches will arrive quickly or that you can engineer a writing life in a matter of days or weeks. It will probably take years, and wealth from writing even then is an outside chance.

Sketch this out.

4. Get Practical About Money

Probably the biggest burden for most writers - the one thing which keeps them away from writing more than anything else - is financial obligations. Tackle this head on by making up a comprehensive list of every financial expense over the course of a year.

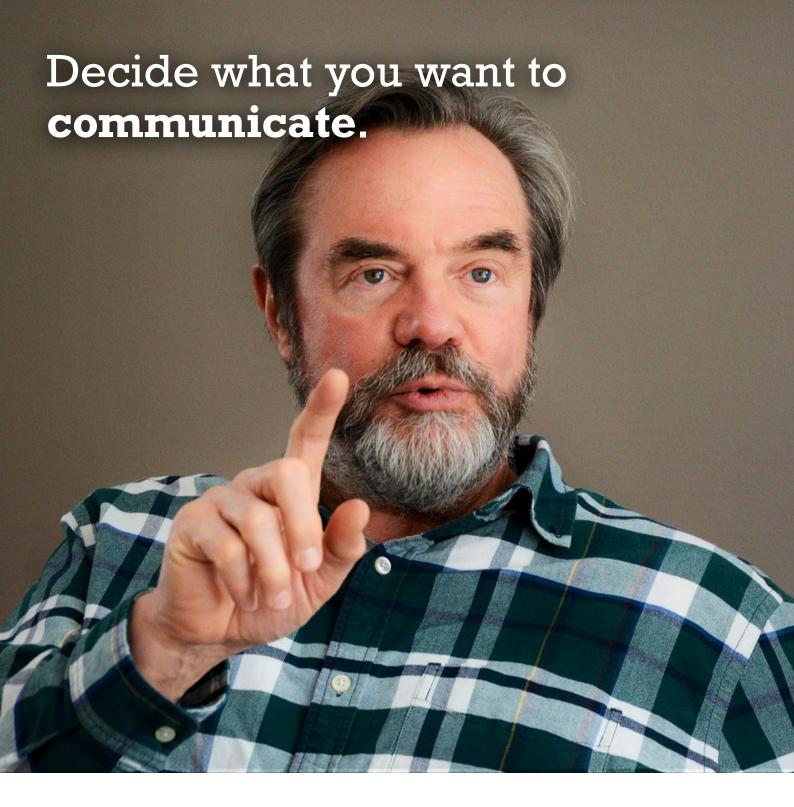
Then set about cutting back and reorganising.

5. Get Rid Of Distractions

Resolve to either get rid of your television or drastically restrict your TV watching.

List out and remove as many other distractions as you can.





5. 'WRITING OR COMMUNICATING?'

- •Recognise the difference between **writing** and **communicating**.
- •Decide what you want to **communicate**.

Write down everything that you consider important, rating from personal to political issues, spiritual matters, things that you would like to change, things that you would like to say.

What would you like your legacy to be for future generations?

Try to reduce this all down to a single statement until you are happy that it is what you want to say to the world. But don't be a perfectionist about it - it might be a bit garbled, it might seem a little incomplete. It doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to have a workability about it.

Let's call this your Workable Statement.

6. 'HAVING SOMETHING TO SAY'

Recognise that

- •Great authors have something to say.
- Not having a clue what you are trying to say leads to weaker writing aimless, padded, meandering.
- Stories fall back on commonplace tropes because **they don't know where they want to go.**
- ·Writers who don't know what they want to say don't manage to build up the **horsepower** to actually get any writing done.

•Procrastination rules those writers who don't know what they want to say.

Take a look over your existing body of work, if you have one, or your story ideas. To what degree is it, or are they falling back on commonplace tropes?

Make some notes about how you would modify things based on your Workable Statement above. Think in terms of characters, plots, settings, images, vocabulary, style and so on - how could you tweak all of these things in order to improve the transmission of your

'message' as contained in your Workable Statement?

Characters

Plots

Settings

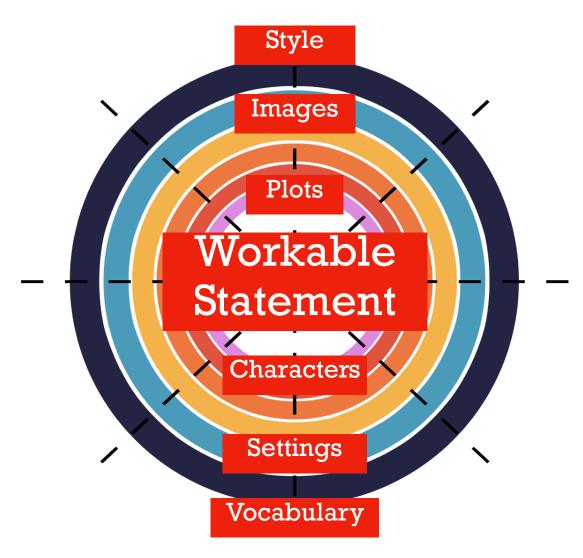
Images

Vocabulary

Style

Other

Writers permit to grow up around themselves dearly held ideas, coveted beliefs, things which have apparently given us support over long periods of time.





List out your dearly held ideas, coveted beliefs and so on

In writing a piece of fiction, writers are usually trying to affect at least one reader.

Writers are usually either trying to leave the reader feeling uplifted, entertained, enlightened in some way, or trying to have him or her feel thoughtful, downbeat, afraid, perhaps giving him or her some insight into the

grimness of the world, bestowing a feeling of sadness or horror or something like that.

Are you trying to leave the reader feeling uplifted, entertained, enlightened in some way?

Or are you trying to have him or her feel thoughtful, downbeat, afraid, perhaps giving him or her some insight into the grimness of the world, bestowing a feeling of sadness or horror or something like that?

Broad genres for uplifting endings are going to be **Comedy** or **Epic**; for downbeat endings, **Tragedy** or **Irony.**

Which genre bests suits each of your works?

What would be the 'mountaintop of your message'?

7. 'WORKING OUT WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY'

Recognise that

•Procrastination is perversely linked to the scarcity of time.

·It's possible to write thousands of words and communicate **nothing**.

Have you written anything which has communicated very little or nothing?

In attempting the impossible task of

reducing a story to a nonfictive statement, writers activate that part of themselves that is above the stream of images, ideas, words, scenes, dialogue, emotions and so forth which they normally consider to be 'writing'.

·Writers who don't do this often end up with hollow parodies, a badly copied sketches, disjointed and meaningless pastiches.

Have any of your works ended up as hollow parodies, a badly copied sketches, disjointed and meaningless pastiches?

·When you know what you want to communicate, what can seem daunting and impossible becomes transparent and actionable. You generate the power to escape the mechanical 'necessities' of your current existence.

What essential message in your work would grant you the power to escape the mechanical necessities of your existence?



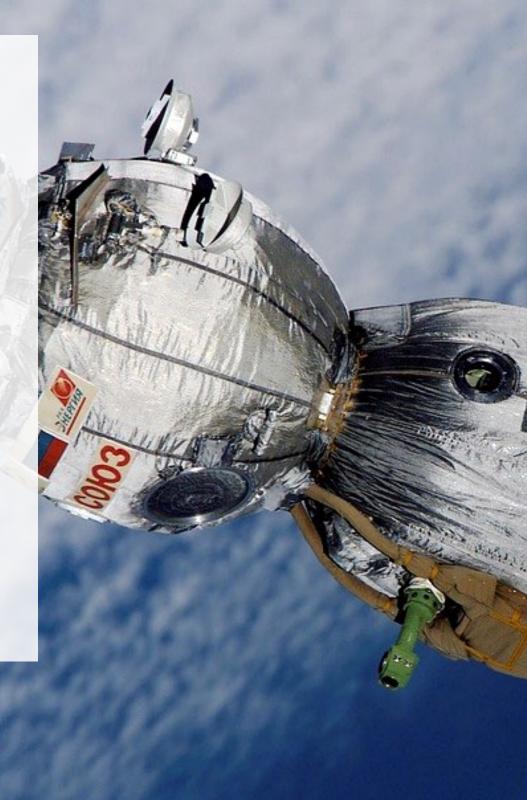
What essential message in your work would grant you the power to escape the mechanical necessities of your existence?



9. 'ESCAPE VELOCITY'

Review the following statements:

- Stories that have nothing to say wander all over the place and tend to fall back on tropes.
- ·Writers who don't know what they want to say are easily trapped in 'boxes' and procrastinate more.
- •Recognise that as a writer you are aiming to have an **effect** on a reader.
- •There are only really two kinds of effects: uplifting ones and downbeat ones.
- You need to have a message powerful enough to create **escape velocity**.
- •The message doesn't have to be unique **but your voice does**.





10. 'FINDING YOUR VOICE'

You are meant to be a writer.

If that is so, something is pulling you off that purpose.

Effectively, you have betrayed yourself.

Make a statement to the effect that **you are a writer**.

Establish contact with other writers.

Do something **effective**. (Organise a block of time; set yourself writing goals for this time and accomplish them; sit down with your partner or family and explain that you want to make some changes and that you are starting with a serious commitment to writing; get their cooperation as much as possible.)

Repair any damage.

List out ways that you can 'make amends to yourself' for failing to be a writer up to this point.

11. 'THE BEGINNING OF THE FUTURE'

Recognise the following:

Expect a false dawn.

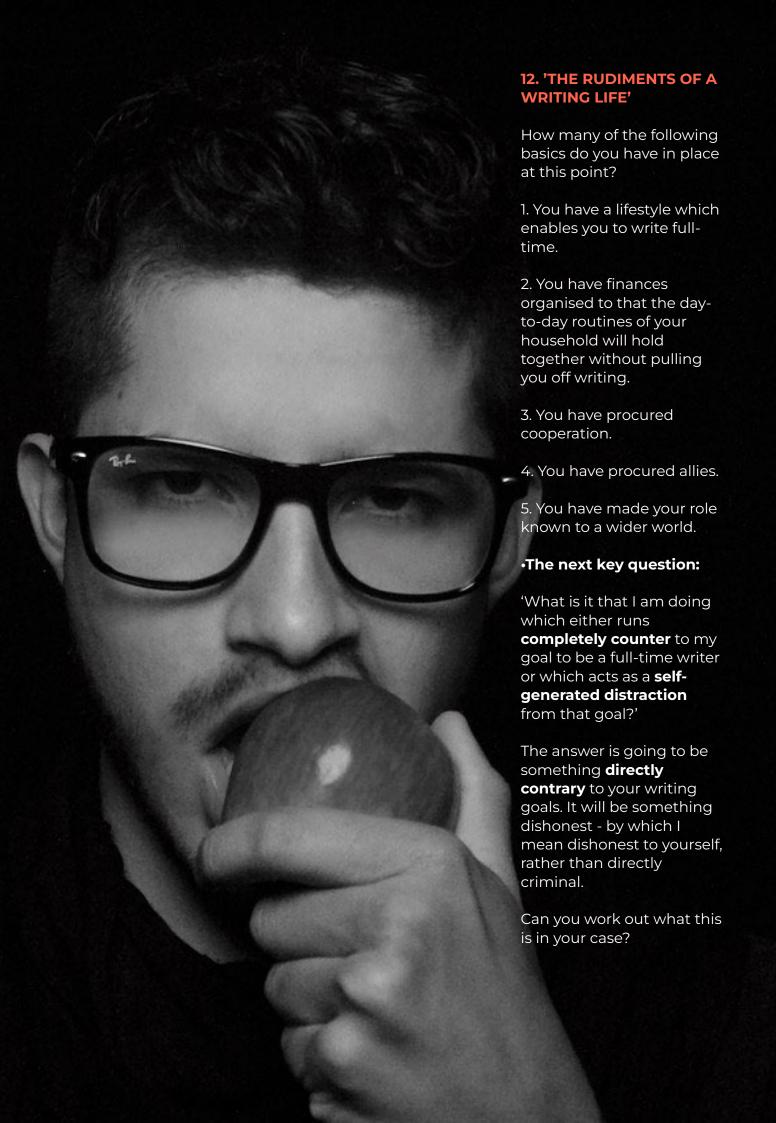
Something will happen and our apparently secure new writing-centred existence will falter.

But also recognise:

This false dawn will not last, though it presents a much better scenario to us than anything we may have managed before.

Further progress means taking even more seriously our goal to be a **full-time writer**.





13. 'ACHIEVING THE **QUEST'**

·On achieving a life orientated around writing:

1. Focus on **completing** projects.

List out all your incomplete projects and schedule a calendar to get them completed.

economies.

Work out where you might still be wasting time and/or money and reduce your outgoings

teach the craft of writing effectively.

List three top books for learning the craft of writing. (Make sure that mine is one of them!)

4. Think in terms of a long-term schedule.

·Your long-term plan needs to include the production of several books.

·Ten books on the market creates a marketing engine which can begin to generate **self**perpetuating sales.

Schedule out several years worth of production.





WHAT TO DO NEXT

Get a

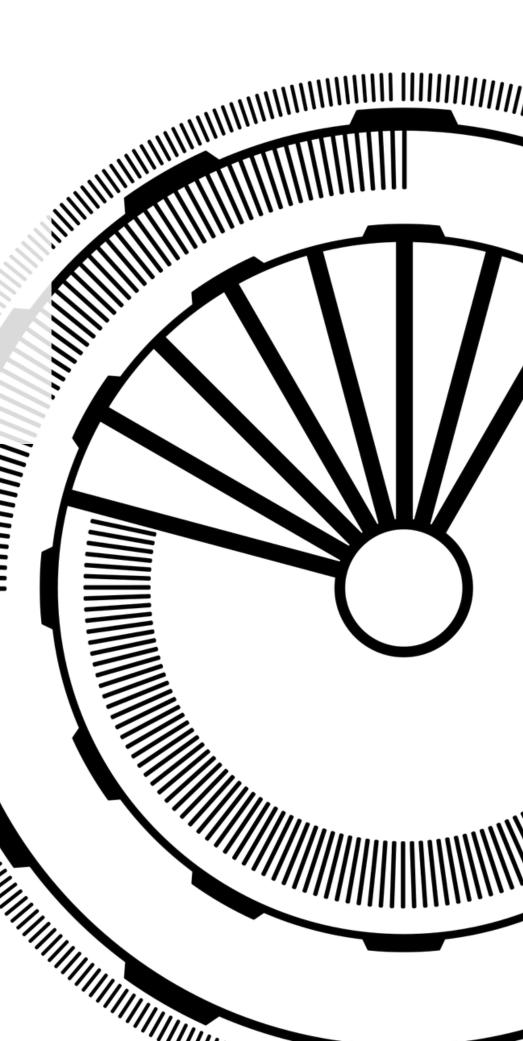
Lifestyle Consultancy

What's the biggest challenge faced by writers?

They don't write.

Their arch-enemies Lack of Time and Procrastination prevent them from making a contribution to the culture around them.

Unless serious changes are made, they will never accomplish their dreams as writers.



What to Do

If you feel that you need help applying the materials given free in this book, please contact me. I work one-to-one with writers to tackle the issues in their lives that cut across their writing time and abilities.

The consultancy includes:

- · isolating exactly where you are on the Seven Stage Ladder to Success
- moving you from a constant struggle to find time to write to having 'islands of time'
- rebuilding your life around writing
- creating conditions in your life where new things are possible

• installing the Rudiments of a Writing Life to ensure continued production as a writer

and much more.

Get an overview of what this would involve for you today, at no obligation.

Visit the website now.





Write Stories That Work and Sell Them Effectively

What people have said about

CLARENDON HOUSE PUBLICATIONS

J. McCulloch, Author

Clarendon House has what the majority of other publishers lack; the personal touch. Grant Hudson draws people into his cosy library (also known as the Inner Circle Writers' Group), sits them down and works his magic. Many new writers lack confidence in their ability, so Grant fine tunes their perspective, boosts their morale and sets them up to win. I have been humbled by his untiring efforts to help us all. We are his people. He is our mentor, our eccentric English professor and our much valued friend.

D. Taylor, Author

As I was scrolling fb, and seeing all these ads from people claiming to help authors do this and do that, I thought to myself, Grant Hudson is the genuine mentor. Thanks for your solid advice.

P. O'Neil, Author

Grant is the model mentor for this new age of writing.

A. Delf, Author

The world is better with all this beautiful work seen at last.

M. Ahmed, Author

A place where good literature is nurtured.

Brandy Metheney Bonifas, Author

Clarendon House Publications is everything publishing should be.
Grant Hudson is a caring editor and mentor who works closely with authors to produce top quality publications, and his writing community, The Inner Circle Writers' Group, is a safe and encouraging environment where established authors share their expertise and new writers are nurtured to spread their wings. I highly recommend!

<u>Learn more</u>

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