

# Your Biggest Challenge as a Writer

-And What To Do About  
It

Grant P. Hudson

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# THE CHALLENGE

I recently did a large survey of writers, asking them what their biggest challenge was in relation to their writing.

A few answered that they were struggling with marketing, or with story quality or self doubt or even grammar. Each of these categories amounted to 5% or 10% of the total answers.

But by far the largest proportion of writers - over 60% - revealed that their main difficulty was related to two connected things:

## Time and Procrastination.

These writers told me that they were frustrated because they either didn't have the time to write or, when they had it, found that it was swallowed up with distractions and interruptions, most often self-generated.

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 book - 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.

So why do we not expect this from writers? (I could also add 'or other artists', as they also often struggle with this.)

The answer to that question isn't what you might be expecting. It's not quite 'You're not taking yourself seriously enough as a writer', though that's how it manifests itself. I realise that by far the majority of writers take themselves incredibly seriously when it comes to writing - so much so that the frustration of not being able to write can cause them pain ranking with physical distress. They are desperate to write; that they cannot seem to find the time, or get so distracted, is a real concern to them.

I feel their pain.

So why don't writers simply turn up for their jobs like other people? Why do they suffer this apparently self-generated agony?

## Trapped

For most of my life I was in a similar position without realising it. I was working at various professional jobs and tasks and feeling deeply unhappy and unsatisfied because the worlds and words that were spinning around in my head were never able to escape onto a page or screen. And then, in those brief moments when I had a chance to write, my time was entirely consumed by self-generated disturbances, interruptions, intrusions, pastimes, activities, which befuddled and bewildered me until I had to return to whatever it was I was 'supposed to be doing'.

What was at the heart of that?

And how did I deal with it so that, over the last three years I have published about 30 books, written about three million words, generated a daily blog over three years with over 1,000 articles, and put together a writers' group with (at this writing) over 3,000 members?

How did I get to the point where my whole life is structured around my writing?

How did I reach the stage where, instead of 'trying to find the time to write' I now struggle to find the time to do anything else?

See the next chapter.

## **'THE CHALLENGE' POINTS TO CONSIDER:**

- *Your biggest enemies are **Lack of Time and Procrastination.***
- *We should expect writers to show up and perform, like everyone else.*
- ***It is possible to escape** from the non-writing trap that you might be in.*



# THE FALSE IMAGE

I once worked as a management consultant in the heart of London. I had an office just off Berkeley Square in Mayfair, and would occasionally take clients for tea at the Ritz Hotel just down the road. I remember walking across Green Park one spring day - the trees were turning green, the deckchairs were out, and I was on my way to an interview with the BBC regarding a programme that I was involved with which wanted to introduce a post-communist Russia to principles of management from the West. My colleague, whom I was to pick up on the way, was a peer from the House of Lords.

It felt as though I had 'made it': my career had reached a high point. It was indeed the apex of something - but I remember a friend telling me some time afterward that he didn't feel that I was cut out to be a management consultant - I didn't have the passion or enthusiasm, the bright sparkle in the eye, that suggested to him that management consultancy was my life-long dream.

He was right.

## Finding a Purpose

A couple of years later, quite out of the blue, I was approached to teach English Literature at a private school in the countryside. Having had no experience of teaching, or even with children, I attended a

formal interview with some trepidation, mixed with curiosity. When I didn't hear back from the school for some weeks afterwards, I went back to consulting for the wealthy clients that I had built up - then, as the beginning of the English school year approached at the end of August, I thought I'd better check back with the school.

'Oh yes,' they told me, 'you've got the job. Be here on Monday morning.'

Shocked - it was Friday- I made the needed adjustments to various appointments and made my way to the school just in time for the start of term.

Something peculiar then took place: though the routines and activities in which I was suddenly involved were quite foreign to me - calling registers, organising lesson content, the nitty-gritty of dealing with teenagers whose first choice would never have been to study literature, and so on - I knew that I had made a considerable advance towards something about which I did feel that passion and energy which I hadn't felt for management consultancy. There was something going on here, I felt - something that I wanted to be more involved in.

Such was the fire that had been lit in me that I used to get up at 5:00 am, stumble in the dark (the freezing and slippery dark, in winter) down the steep Highgate Hill from my home to Archway Tube Station, catch the Underground train to Victoria train station, then the 7:22 am train to my

destination, stumbling up the road to grab a bite to eat for breakfast from a café before catching the school bus out into the countryside. I would then teach for a full school day before making the entire journey in reverse, getting home exhausted at about 8:30 pm.

I only did this for two or three days a week, as I was still engaged by clients in the middle of London as a consultant - and it shattered me physically each week. But something was happening to me other than physical exhaustion - I was finding a purpose. That purpose grew strong enough over the next couple of years for me to make changes to my whole lifestyle, routine and habits. Within two years, I had worked my way into being a full-time teacher of English Literature to feisty groups of 11 to 18 year olds, and had gradually backed out of management consultancy almost entirely.

I'm not telling you this story to give you a glimpse into my life as much as to show you how to reorientate yourself to a different set of criteria.

## The Writer's Battle

If your biggest challenge as a writer is related to time and procrastination, what I am going to tell you next may put you into a mild rage or it may switch on a light for you.

You are having trouble with time and procrastination because you quite probably have fallen for a false image of what a writer is in this

society. This society says - in various ways, most of them subliminal - that writers are broke, struggling creatures who strive to get noticed by working on their books in between having a 'proper' job. Writers, so goes this image, are usually writing outside the normal schedule set aside for serious work - they 'find time' when they can, usually late at night after the children have gone to bed or whenever they can find peace and quiet, and they slave away at various creative projects without much hope of getting published or even of being noticed by anyone other than a few indulgent family members or friends.

There's no money in the game at all, says this picture: it's all verging on being delusional, especially when you factor in the vast numbers of people doing the same thing and the way in which the world is saturated with works of fiction, pouring out onto the internet and drowning any new writer's attempts to get seen by anyone of importance.

'Of course,' says society, 'the outcome of all this is dismal failure, sooner or later.'

Against this, the writer battles, physically and mentally. But psychologically, this picture is powerful and active: it views Time as a precious commodity, to be eked out here and there, between appointments or on train journeys and around the more important 'job'. And then the image goes even deeper, making the urge to write such a precious, coveted impulse that it's almost as though some writers grow afraid to write - the passion and desire is so strong that they are backed off from actually releasing it onto

the page or screen and so unconsciously find anything to do rather than write.

It seems paradoxical at first glance - that something that an individual feels so strongly about actually results in distraction and avoidance. But time and time again this is what happens - the writer approaches the page or screen and diverts into some other activity, precisely because the passion is too intense to confront.

In fact, often the less time that is available, the more procrastination occurs, it seems.

## 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 - who has all day to write, with very few other pressures; whose basic bills, food, shelter and so forth are in some way under control; whose passion now has so much room to breathe that it ceases to panic and can in fact 'take time off' to do other things from time to time without any feeling of insane compulsion haunting it.

‘But... that’s impossible!’ you might protest. ‘I have a house to pay for, children to look after, a job! I can’t just throw those things away!’

My career as a management consultant was a lucrative one. I had clients all over London, some of them millionaires. I had a lifestyle that I enjoyed, a prestigious home in Highgate, and expensive tastes in books. I had ordered everything around those things.

But it was slowly suffocating me.

Painstakingly, over several months, I progressed from that pattern towards a new one. It was not easy - some corners had to be cut, some horrible commuting had to be done, some potentially well-paid jobs had to be walked away from. Indeed, my income dropped considerably for quite a while. But my job satisfaction rose to heights never before dreamed of - and I knew that I had made major strides towards doing something good for my soul.

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.

I haven't entirely given up consultancy. I offer a Lifestyle Consultancy to any writer who feels stuck, unable to write or trapped in a 'procrastination vortex', distracted to the point of fading out as a writer. But the essential elements of that consultancy are to do with building a life around writing, rather than trying to fit writing into an existing life.

It can be done.

I'll help you to do it.

### **'THE FALSE IMAGE' POINTS TO CONSIDER:**

- *Society's image of writers is that they are broke, struggling creatures doomed to fail. It says that Time is a precious commodity, the scarcity of which can lead writers to grow afraid to write, leading to **procrastination**.*
- *What's needed is **reorientation** to a life **entirely structured around writing**.*

## SOME PRACTICAL STEPS

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 writing-centred 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.

Do you need to hand in notice at a job? Find other ways of paying bills? Re-establish contact with supportive family and friends? Sell stuff? Many of these things cannot be rushed.

One thing I would advise against planning for, at least not for some time, is making any money from your writing. This is such an unknown and risky quarter that you'd be better leaving it out of your calculations altogether. Plan to be a writer, not earn an income from it.

Hard to grasp? That's where the next steps come in.

### 3. Set Realistic Expectations

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 money-consuming habit there will be a gain of meaning and purpose.

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?

Part of being realistic is being patient. As you can see, these shifts of lifestyle often take years. Don't rush things, but, like a sailor navigating the oceans, wait for the right winds and weathers and adjust your sails accordingly. Eventually, you will arrive - and you will be so much better for the journey and enjoy the destination so much more.

Navigating using the right winds and weathers until you reach your destination is largely what the rest of this book is about.

The important things are to know where you are going and to persist in getting there.

#### 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 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.

## 5. Get Rid Of Distractions

In many instances, this can translate simply to 'Get rid of your television' and, if you have it, 'Get rid of any kind of cable or internet entertainment service'.

If you're serious about being a writer, you probably need to stop placing yourself at the wrong end of the writing vector: you are supposed to be generating material to hook, glue and guide the attention of millions, not getting hooked and glued and guided by others.

Television is one of the most ridiculously effective methods of killing off writers. Hour after hour can pass by in which a writer, otherwise capable of creating whole universes worth of entertainment and enlightenment, is trapped, hypnotised into immobility and driven deeper and deeper into apathy by an electronic picture box in the corner of a room.

I grew up on television: television was the internet of my generation. Everyone watched it and it didn't seem to matter what rubbish was playing, one simply sat in front of the 'gogglebox' and 'goggled'. Luckily, I developed the habit of drawing pictures while sitting watching the little screen, otherwise that time

would have been even more wasteful. But it was wasteful enough.

Like a drug, television can be hard to do without for a while. But eventually you will feel much better for it, and you will be far more productive.

Should you get rid of social media as well? I would argue that you should keep this, but adopt some firm practices around it. Keep it, because being a writer can be a lonely existence and I have seen hundreds of writers benefit immensely from the two-way communication that can be had so easily through things like Facebook; but adopt some restrictions, because I have also seen a lot of time wasted watching little videos about ducks or cats or people falling over and the like.

My own habit is this: I write like blazes, shutting out distractions and typing as fast as I can for about an hour. Then - or before, if I have reached some kind of natural break or pause - I surface to check social media, reply to messages, add a few posts, and so forth. Then I plunge into writing again.

It's a rhythm that can be developed fairly quickly and which usually generates a ton of words while also maintaining the sense that one is still part of the rest of the world. Hence the three million words, 1,000 blog items, thirty-odd books, etc which this rhythmic approach has generated.



## Cutting Back

You've probably noticed that much of this looks like it is about paring down, cutting back, reducing things to their core. And that's exactly what it is about. If you are a writer and want to build a life around being one, you will probably need to jettison much of the rest of your lifestyle. That looks from one angle like a series of terrible losses - but from another angle, it is a massive gain.

There'll be time to get up (after a good night's sleep), have a decent breakfast, see your children off to school and write to your heart's content all day.

There'll be enough free attention that you won't mind being distracted momentarily by conversations and other bright things on social media.

There'll be so many words being generated that feelings of elation will be commonplace - lifelong goals to do with novels or epics or even series of books will come within reach.

There will be so many things written that the craft of writing itself will be slowly learned over periods of time - and there'll be time to take formal courses, to read books, to practise techniques, to perfect styles.

Who knows? You might even begin making money from your writing. You'll almost certainly gain a reputation as what you always wanted to be: a writer.

**'SOME PRACTICAL STEPS'  
POINTS TO CONSIDER:**

1. *Recognise That You Have A  
**Purpose.***
2. *Don't Dream: **Plan***
3. *Set Realistic Expectations*
4. *Get Practical About Money*
5. *Get Rid Of Distractions*

# GETTING CRAZY

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-I'm-supposed-to-do' and perhaps a few other things.

## Outside The Box

For part of my journey, I went 'off grid' and lived for three years in a motorhome (RV for Americans) without any fixed address or 'land base'. I highly recommend the experience if you have no family commitments (I had none at the time). Disappearing from society's radar almost entirely helped me to see further and clearer than ever before.

One of the things that I saw was that I had no special talents - but neither had anyone else. The great writers and poets whom I admired, everyone whom I admired, had simply seen through, or escaped from, things tangible and intangible which had been holding them back.

There were two 'world wide webs' it seemed to me: one to do with computer networks and the other to do with entangling the potential of human beings everywhere. (Sometimes, as in when we waste time on social media or streaming videos, one web becomes the other.)

Once you can unleash your innate creativity - even a little bit of it - you'll begin to see a deeper truth: that no box can really be built around you without your permission, without your acquiescence in some way.

Sure, circumstances might dictate that you tolerate a 'box' or two for a while - I'm thinking of when you are young and need the care and supervision of grown-ups, or if you are involved in school or taking a course or doing a job you dislike in order to save up some money, or something like that. But tolerating restrictions knowingly for a period of time in order to accomplish a specific goal is one thing: losing sight of the goal and becoming part of someone else's plans in perpetuity is another.

What level of desire or commitment will it take for you to bust out of your boxes and make some serious changes?

## Bigger Inside Than Out

If you are sure that you are Meant To Be A Writer - really sure, 100% solid - you won't necessarily need to 'make a commitment': the sense that something is wrong, that you are not where you are meant to be, that there are steps that you need to take, will live with you and feed on your quiet moments like an invisible and rather voracious pet.

Going about your daily routines, trying to get ordinary things done, you will feel a perpetual discomfiture, a nagging dissatisfaction, a niggling

unease. Sometimes you might put this down to 'being a grown-up'; sometimes you might be able to suppress it altogether for a short period of time; but it will return, keeping you awake at night, whispering to you on the train or in the car, making you grumpy when you least expect it.

It's the writer in you trying to get out.

Like the TARDIS in Doctor Who, you are bigger inside than out.

The universes that wrestle for space inside you are ineluctably striving to escape into the outside world, through any tiny keyhole of 'spare time' that they can find, any quietness, any opening that your boxed-in life presents. You can go on pushing them back, closing the door, sitting on them - or you can yield to the pressure and change your life.

Where do you start?

With one of the most fundamental misunderstandings about writing that it is possible to have, as we will see in the next chapter.

## **'GETTING CRAZY' POINTS TO CONSIDER:**

- *No more excuses, writing takes the driver's seat.*

- *Think outside the boxes.*
- *Unleash your **native creativity**.*
- *Recognise that your sense of nagging dissatisfaction is **the writer inside you trying to get out.***

# WRITING OR COMMUNICATING?

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.

But this isn't a simple pep talk. Whether they are mainly in your head or not, right now you probably have a set of what appear to be pretty serious limitations and you're looking for a practical way of overcoming them, or defusing them, so that you can be free to write.

Your first step might be to make a written declaration about something important: you're a writer, this shouldn't be hard.

## Decide What You Want To Write

I don't mean just something like 'I want to write a best-selling Western novel'. I mean decide what it is you want to communicate.

That might be something quite different.

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 counter-accusations 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 with it 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.

Now it's probably not strictly possible to sum up your fictive output - or your intended fictive output - in a few rational words like that. How do you 'sum up' a Shakespearian play, or a novel by Dostoyevsky, or a Yeats poem? You can't, not really.

But something quite surprising happens when you try.

It's as though, to continue the metaphor, you pick up the reins of the horse that was galloping wildly under you and assert, by giving them a little tug, that you are still there and are actually in control. What you are writing, and where it is leading you, isn't entirely random, or shouldn't be: good writing isn't about giving your imagination total access to the outer world without any supervision at all. In the same way that you wouldn't let a toddler roam at its own discretion through a busy city, you should be guiding and managing where your mind is wandering, at least to some extent.

## Intention

You should have an intention, in other words. Part of that intention might certainly be to adventure where you could never rationally go and where only your imagination can take you, but part of it should be to use that adventure to say something.

Writers who are clearly saying something are in charge of, or at least working in cooperation with, their imaginations and use what that part of their minds shows them to communicate something, whatever it may be: Forster takes us into the Marabar Caves in *A Passage to India* to show us something about the incomprehensibility of the universe; Tolkien takes us through Middle-earth to convey to us the sad beauty of Creation; Dickens takes us to London in many novels to reveal the foibles of human nature.

What is that ‘something’ in your case?

That might take you a while to figure out. But it’s an important first step in making your bid for freedom, so I’ll give you a little time. Hint: don’t try to be too specific, and don’t worry if you can’t come up with coherent sentences. I’ll explain why next.

## ***‘WRITING OR COMMUNICATING?’ POINTS TO CONSIDER:***

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

## HAVING SOMETHING TO SAY

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.

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?

## Genres

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

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.

## Co-operation

When you pick up the reins of your imagination horse, then, you are not going to be trying to pull the beast out of the woods onto some kind of coldly rational highway leading straight to your non-fictional message. Not at all: what you are trying to do is both co-operate with and guide the horse, steering the imagination through the wonderful woods into which the creature has led you, while all the time keeping your eye on the mountaintop of

your message, which you should always keep visible over the treetops.

One sure sign of any truly great piece of fiction is that you can pick it up and open it at any page and you will be immersed in imaginary woods while also being able to clearly see the mountaintop of what the author is trying to say. Don't take my word for it - grab any novel that is considered a 'classic' and see for yourself: the writer will have entranced the reader with images, dialogue, setting, scenes, while at all times hinting at the mountain of meaning in the background.

Developing what you want to communicate as opposed to simply what you want to write instantly lifts you onto the same plane, potentially, as the master authors. Instead of permitting your imagination horse to get lost in the images, dialogue, setting, scenes and so on of your writing, you will be able to nudge the beast along a path which keeps your overall meaning and purpose in view.

If you have that intended end at all times in view as a writer, it's a pretty good bet that the reader will be able to see it too. Now your job as a writer is not just to 'say' it, but to have the reader experience it.

What does this have to do with the greatest challenge of writers, which is dealing with the Lack of Time and with Procrastination?

We'll get to that next.

## **'HAVING SOMETHING TO SAY' POINTS TO CONSIDER:**

- *Great authors **have something to say.***
- *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.
- *In writing a piece of fiction, writers are usually trying **to affect at least one reader.***
- *Broad genres for uplifting endings are going to be **Comedy** or **Epic**; for downbeat endings, **Tragedy** or **Irony.***

- *What you are trying to do is both **co-operate with** and **guide** your imagination while all the time keeping your eye on the mountaintop of your message.*

# WORKING OUT WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY

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 deep-felt 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.

If one has only an hour to get the next chapter of one's masterpiece novel written, checking the latest posts on Facebook can become perversely magnetic - and once 45 minutes has been wasted doing that, then the guilt of wasted time descends, crushing one psychologically; but if one has seven or eight hours to write, the same posts lose their compulsive attraction to some degree. One can indulge a little in 'guilty pleasures' while still being able to get the next chapter written - and perhaps the one after that.

It's a peculiar feature of human psychology that we tend to do things that we know we shouldn't. But we seem to do them more, or more compulsively, when we think that we have less freedom to operate.

However, we had gone further than that: we had journeyed into the land of Reason and started to look at why we write stories at all.

## 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 begun 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.

## Tolkien's Message

I first read *The Lord of the Rings* when I was 15. The teacher had a list of 50 books which he read out to



the class. We were each supposed to pick one as the basis of our reading for that year. As he read each title, he gave a brief one or two sentence summary of the book in order to give us an idea of its content so that we could make up our minds whether or not we would want to read it. He came to *The Lord of the Rings* and said, 'This is a three volume fantasy epic telling the story of a quest to destroy a magic ring, but none of you will be interested in that.'

I looked around the class - it was composed of fellow teenagers, for most of whom, let's say, literature held few attractions. But I knew immediately that this 'fantasy' was the book for me. No one knew back then what a 'fantasy' was - the genre hadn't really hit the culture in the way that it did over the following decades - but there was something about it that instantly attracted me. I rushed to the library to find that they only had the first two volumes and that the map inside had been ripped out, so my first read-through of the story was formulated around a geography that had to be twisted back into shape once I found the map.

In that first read-through, I encountered woods and wizards, rivers and magic rings, fields of grass and fell creatures and everything else that the book's contents displayed to my young imagination - but more than any of these single elements, I encountered a message. On every page, in every scene, in every conversation between every character, I was hearing something being said. How to sum that up? I suppose I might have said that it was something to do with the England from which I

felt exiled at the time, but it was more than that: through the entire trilogy there ran a current of what I would later call 'numinescence'.

Of course, as soon as I could I began to write my own fantasy epic. But what did I end up with? Woods and wizards, rivers and magic rings, fields of grass and fell creatures and everything else that I could copy laboriously from what I had read while trying not to directly plagiarise - but, when I came to read the thing back to myself, not a smidge of 'numinescence' or anything like it.

And this is exactly what happens to many, many writers: they can't see the wood for the trees. They can't see what they are trying to say through the paraphernalia they are putting onto the page. The same thing applies no matter what genre.

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.

I'm not suggesting that to be successful an author has to endure the front lines of a grisly war. But to write a lasting classic, I suggest that an author has to have something that he or she wants to say and is passionate about saying, whether that thing is fully developed consciously or not.

Tolkien wrote later that the whole of Middle-earth was really about Death - the question of human mortality, and all that that entails. Most of the master authors have surprisingly similar messages about life and humanity and the big issues.

But the thing is that they have them. That's largely what makes them master authors.

## 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, re-arranging 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.

### **'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

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 months 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.

But whether the writer is creating a complete fantasy world, a science fiction future, a reconstructed

historical period, simply super-imposing a story over contemporary times or whatever, the crux of the matter is creation. Tolkien called it 'sub-creation', and did it very explicitly by devising an entire world full of races, languages and long histories; most authors fabricate a world not dissimilar to our own and play with it, having characters perform before them like gladiators in a Roman arena, but with much more of a variety of finale.

With these creations, writers then contribute to the wider reality of the culture. Creation, indeed, becomes contribution: the resulting tableaux, along with other forms of art, forms the backdrop of whatever passes for civilisation in any given period.

## 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.

So the first level of the seven levels of becoming a full-time writer is this blind submergence into a kind of 'anti-writer zone': the suppression of any inborn wish to become a writer. This normally takes considerable force and intention, by the way - as we have seen, the powerful drive to become a writer is not a small thing and is not easily suppressed.

The second level is, as we saw right at the beginning of this, that strata of discomfiture which accompanies the awareness that one wishes to be a writer but is trapped by gravity or inertia into a

pattern which prevents actualisation. That's probably where many writers reading this are right now.

'Lack of time' and 'procrastination' are symptoms of this.

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.

**'INERTIA'**  
**POINTS TO CONSIDER:**

- *Writers have to find something which is strong enough to overpower the circumstances holding them back.*
- *Failure to write adds up to failure to **contribute** to the culture.*

# ESCAPE VELOCITY

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.

Next, list those things which place the above under threat.

If you love nature, what gets in your way; if you love your family, what places them at risk; if you love certain activities, what cuts across them. One for one, list the risks, threats, dangers, hazards, lack of opportunities or any kind of barrier or obstacle that might get between you and the things you love.

What's happening here is that you are creating a vacuum: a gap, or hole, or emptiness or loss or risk of loss. You already feel the edges this vacuum - it's what makes life uncomfortable for you when you want to be a full-time writer.

That vacuum has the power to pull out from within you a message, a communication, something that you want to tell the world. It might be to do with self, or loss of self; with love or loss of love; with power or loss of power. It might be to do with any number of things, expressed in your own words. Whatever it is, it will probably be close to what you want to communicate with your writing as a whole.

‘But wait,’ I hear some voices cry. ‘I just want to entertain people - I don’t want to convey some deep theme or anything. What happened to writing to just entertain?’

That’s fair enough. By all means, pursue that if you wish, there’s nothing wrong with that. But ‘entertainment’ alone as a goal is not likely to fire up a powerful enough engine to enable you to change your lifestyle so that you can write full-time. It just doesn’t have the horsepower. The result? You’ll go on operating at the second or third level of this ladder, writing when you can carve out a few minutes or perhaps a few hours, and getting some work done. Many writers operate like this and get books finished and even published.

But I’m talking about getting rid of the enemies of Lack of Time and its companion Procrastination forever. If you share that aim, you’ll need stronger fuel.

And anyway, even the most ‘entertaining’ of writers often have undercurrents of deeper themes and material. Look at the comedic works of Spike

Milligan: his autobiographical comedy *Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall* is hilariously entertaining, but contains bleak meditations on the horror of war too.

The deeper the theme, the stronger the fuel.

## 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 counter-intuitive 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.

That might strike you as odd. You might rush to disagree, and rapidly search for exceptions. Perhaps you were thinking that great authors - or perhaps even every author - had something entirely original to say, theme-wise. Perhaps you were inadvertently striving to find a unique and original theme for yourself, something that no one else had ever

tackled in quite the same way, something so poetically different and vibrant that it would make your reputation as a writer forever.

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 over-inflate the Self.

What is right?

Protagonists sacrifice Self and 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.

**'ESCAPE VELOCITY'  
POINTS TO CONSIDER:**

- *You need to have a message powerful enough to create **escape velocity**.*
- *The message doesn't have to be unique - **but your voice does**.*

# FINDING YOUR VOICE

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

I've said that there are seven levels in the ladder from where a writer is bogged into current circumstances and unable to write all the way up to having a writing-centric life.

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

Level 2 is becoming aware of one's need to be a writer and struggling to find any time at all - while

battling with procrastination as well. That's where many writers reading this will probably be.

Level 3 is when a writer manages to use some suggested remedies to find some time to write, perhaps in blocks each week, or by using a gadget to record thoughts between meetings or on journeys to scribble down notes, and so on. You'll find some of those remedies in the 'First Aid' programme towards the end of this book.

Level 4 is 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. You are probably reading this in the hope that it will help you to do just that.

But what are the other three levels?

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

Level 6 is '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 7, the ultimate level, is when all of the above 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.

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.

## Steps to Take

### 1. Establish contact with other writers.

Writing can be a lonely business. But it doesn't have to be, especially in today's high tech, social media world. You can join groups of writers all over the planet who are in similar positions to yourself. You can also easily find writers who have overcome some obstacles and get advice from them.

Join a selection of writers' groups. Not the huge tedious groups full of people asking 'How do I get published?' or 'When do I use an apostrophe?' but the small-to-medium-sized groups which have in them professional writers or writers in similar

circumstances to you. You'll soon find out which ones are the most productive for you. (I'd like to think mine is one of them - it might suit you.) Announce that you're there, but rather than dumping your problems on other group members, find out what they are running into and what others are suggesting that they do about it. You won't be alone in your difficulties and will soon make friends.

This is important. It's difficult to escape the gravity of habit without the sense that others are making the same journey.

## 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 in this book.

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.

### 3. Repair any damage.

'Damage'? You might think that is too strong a word, but if you are still looking at all this through the lens of Being A Writer, then whatever else you have been doing rather than writing has probably not been doing you much good.

What have you been doing? Watching pointless television? Playing video games? Wasting time reading newspapers, or sleeping in? They are obvious bad habits which obviously you will need to cut out. But some anti-writer things can be much more subtle than that.

Look for 'advice' you've been taking which has been leading you astray; look for influences upon you which have caused you to doubt yourself; look for mistaken beliefs or ideas which have led to you feeling inadequate or unable.

Get rid of all or even some of those things and you will start to feel 'repaired'.



You are now in Level 4, addressing and changing the central things in your life which are preventing you from living your dream to be a writer full-time.

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

## ***'FINDING YOUR VOICE' POINTS TO CONSIDER:***

- ***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.***
  - ***Repair any damage.***

## THE BEGINNING OF THE FUTURE

OK, 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'.

There's a scene in C. S. Lewis's book, *The Silver Chair*, in which two children, a prince and a creature

known as Puddleglum are trapped in an underworld ruled by a green witch, who is attempting to enchant them. Using beautiful and seductive music and overpowering aromas, she tries to persuade them that the things that they have talked about in the upper world, the world of daylight from which they have come, are all illusions. The sun, she maintains, is but an idea based upon the lantern hanging from her ceiling; and Aslan, the Great Lion, who is the king of the upper world in the story, is nothing more than a projected image of her household cat. Everything that they know to be true, in other words, the witch tries to convince them is a subjective extension of things that they have observed in her world. There is no other world; they have been deluding themselves.

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 one. And that's a funny thing, when 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 past can act like that on us.

Its patterns and procedures, schedules and customs can lull us into a lifestyle which makes our higher senses drowsy. Yes, we have realised that we are supposed to be writers - but then there's the laundry or dishes to be done, and a job to go to, and appointments next week that were booked long ago.

We have been 'pre-programmed' to behave in certain ways by - well, by ourselves, acting upon what we thought was the best at the time. The light of understanding that we are Supposed To Be Writers can seem as weak as a candle in front of the broad sunlight which lies before us, waiting to consume us, as soon as we look up from the page.

This is the gravity of inertia. If it fails to lull, it can swiftly become more forceful: the writer's retreat we booked might have to be abandoned when illness in the family arises; the two weeks we set aside to write might get swallowed up by an unplanned visit from relatives; the annual leave we had organised so that we could make a serious dent in our novel might get cancelled due to some disaster at work.

This is where, like Puddleglum, we must be brave enough to stamp on the fire, despite the pain.

And we have to keep our eyes on what lies beyond the witchery of the present: a new life, orientated around doing what we love; a successful life, perhaps with some lowered expectations as far as material things are concerned, but with far greater satisfactions.

What can we expect next?

## 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.

It's because, in striving to climb the ladder, we have begun a longer process than we thought. At first, it seems as though we just have to shift things around to fit a writing timetable in for real; we only have to procure some cooperation from those around us; we simply have to make sure that our living costs are low enough or arranged in such a way that nothing is going to leap out at us and pull us off track. That's all we have to do, it seems, and it appears to be enough. It might have taken us months to do what has just been summed up in a few sentences.

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 full-time 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.

### **'THE BEGINNING OF THE FUTURE' POINTS TO CONSIDER:**

- *Expect a false dawn.*
- *Something will happen and our apparently secure new writing-centred existence will falter.*
- *Further progress means taking even more seriously our goal to be a **full-time writer.***



# THE RUDIMENTS OF A WRITING LIFE

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.

2. You have finances organised to that the day-to-day routines of your household will hold together without pulling you off writing.

This means reducing your costs and possibly your material expectations of life, probably to a marked degree, as discussed in earlier chapters.

You may also have sold a lot of stuff to get out of debt, or moved into a smaller place, or inherited some money, or called upon a reserve of cash, or persuaded someone (usually a spouse) to support you in your efforts. Or all of the above. However you've done it, two things: firstly, well done - it's not easy, nor is it a mean achievement; secondly, make the most of it, it's quite rare.

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.

#### 4. You have procured allies.

Apart from the above partners, close relatives and friends, this may well include other writers whom you have contacted through social media, people going through much the same kind of thing as yourself. These understanding folk are a bulwark against the wider world, which, let's face it, probably won't understand what you are trying to do at all.

But you don't have to convince the whole world - you just have to have a 'zone' in which you feel secure enough to write.

#### 5. You have made your role known to a wider world.

This isn't trying to convince anyone, but rather just an interaction with others.

It means that, when people ask 'What do you do?' you have said, 'I'm a writer' without flinching. This is easier to think about saying than actually saying. Often, at least at first, it comes with that little embarrassed clearing of the throat, as though you're not quite sure, even as you say it, that you want the other person to hear it: '(ahem) I'm a writer...' you say, letting the words float out in front of you like a butterfly that you hope will be greeted positively but which may well just be swatted away. You then watch the wheels rolling around in the other person's eyes as they try to fabricate a suitable response. They probably want to be polite, but they are almost inevitably running through a series of

prejudices: 'Writing? That's not a proper job, is it?', 'You're probably on benefits, benefits that my taxes are paying for', 'Oh here's someone who hasn't confronted reality', 'Sitting at home watching telly, more like' and so forth.

But it's important to say it out loud. This isn't even especially because you want them to know it - it's because you want yourself to know it.

It gets easier. Eventually you will have no attention on it at all. And when that happens, neither will anyone else, except that some may say, 'Wow! That's great! What sort of stuff do you write?' and things like that.

Those are the rudiments. There may be more, but it's almost a miracle if you've managed to get the above set up, so they will do for now.

But the word 'rudiment' comes from the Latin rudimentum which means 'early training, first experience, initial stage', equivalent to rudi(s) 'unformed, rough' (see rude) + -mentum -ment. You're still in the rough beginning stages of Level 5 of our seven stage ladder.

You're still vulnerable.

Even if you have rock-solid foundations built around the above, the earth can still quake - and the cause of that shaking will probably not be external circumstances, but something from within yourself.

## The Darkness Within

I can almost guarantee that there will still be some trace-impulse left within you even at this stage that will act to undermine your own security, confidence and stability as a writer.

You will still face an enemy, and, like Luke Skywalker in the cave in the Star Wars film *The Empire Strikes Back*, or Ged the young wizard in Ursula K. Le Guin's classic novel *A Wizard of Earthsea*, or countless other protagonists on quests, that enemy will be yourself.

This is the key question that you need to ask yourself at this point:

'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?'

Oh my goodness that can be a hard one to answer.

You're supposed to have gotten rid of or shifted to one side all the procrastination-fodder that was getting in your way, right? You've arranged your life according to your goal, yes? So why should something remain, something deep and dark, to stop you now?

Because that's the way human beings are built.

If you had the goal of being a dentist or being a pilot or being an acrobat with the circus, it would be the same. Human beings seem to be composed of conflicting elements - it's almost what makes us human by definition. Everyone you know is quirky in some way, right? Great authors like Shakespeare are able to capture the spread of possibilities which every human being contains without someone jumping up and saying 'That's out of character!' - because great authors are crafting characters from their raw components, and those components include contradictory aims and actions.

Becoming a full-time writer and reaching the top of this ladder won't make you a perfect human being. You're not going to be able to excise all the contradictions and contrarinesses in your personality. The ladder isn't towards sainthood (and if you look at the saints closely, none of them were perfect either). But you will need to become more self-aware and self-disciplined than you probably thought possible.

## 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 full-time.*

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.*



# ACHIEVING THE QUEST

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 self-sabotage 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 ourselves 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.

## 2. Make further economies.

We might think that, because we've now reached this plateau, we can ease off a little on our austerity regime. If so, we need to think again.

This is the time to tighten up further, reducing expenditure, eking out another hour or two of time, cancelling even further wasteful activities. Time to think of ourselves as Olympic athletes in training and training hard, not wasting a moment or a penny.

### 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, time-wasting 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, [How Stories Really Work](#), 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'.

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

Plan out roughly what you are going to produce in one year.

Then plan out five years.

Then work like blazes to stick to your plan and make the targets you have set for yourself.

### The Long Game

One of the most important lessons that there is to learn in this game is that it is a long-term 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.

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.

Your long-term plan needs to include the production of several books. I usually tell people to think in terms of ten volumes - these can be novels or collections of short stories, or some other kind of book, but ten books on the market creates a 'marketing engine' which can begin to generate self-perpetuating sales: readers find one book in the set of ten, like it and hunt for others; liking those, they seek more, and so forth.

Authors like Rowling or Pratchett had the right idea: write a winning book or two, but follow these with more and more for those readers whose hunger becomes insatiable.

You're now in the upper levels of the writing ladder. Writing becomes your life; the rest of the world recedes.

## Commerce

We have only just touched on the commercial side this, though. You might have written several books and drawn together a fanbase of readers, but you might still be making next to no money.

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 4, heading into Year 5. 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 self-supporting.

Think in decades.

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

What happens when you do?

## **'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**.



**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.**

# THE LADDER TO SUCCESS

Please take a moment to look over the image on the preceding 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.

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.

## Level 7

Money flowing in steadily from book sales; time to indulge in and develop the projects that you have always dreamed of; time to take breaks, to spend days with the family or friends, to do something else without panicking about deadlines or missed opportunities to write; plenty of pleasant, anxiety-free sleep.

Perhaps more importantly than all of the above, though, would be the knowledge that your writings were accepted by a reading public.

In the end, most writers seek that, even above commercial viability - though of course the money is gratefully accepted and represents solid commitment and recognition from readers. Writers write in their own little worlds, hoping for acknowledgement and validation from readers, but spending most of their careers, usually, frantic that that acknowledgement and validation will never be theirs.

It's a strange pursuit: delving deeper and deeper into one's psyche for something that will resonate with people further and further away. No wonder many writers are nervous types, liable to self-doubt and panic attacks.

Even when Level 7 is achieved, mental habits may incline the writer to doubt whether he or she can 'do it again'. Perhaps the whole empire will crumble when the sequel being worked on fails to live up to the star quality of the first book? Perhaps the critics will jump all over the next few short stories and show that the writer has 'lost it'?

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.

There are thousands of authors out there, many of them mediocre but a sizeable proportion of them good and more than a few great - and even the mediocre ones are making it.

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.

# 4 TIPS TO HELP YOUR PRODUCTIVITY

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

These have worked for me - they 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 long-term 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.

## 2. Work out a rough guide to the production for each year.

I started by sketching out the publication of about ten books each year. Yes, that would mean 400 books at the end of the forty years - but why think small?

As it happened this last few months mean that I will be approaching 25 books this year alone. Does that mean that I can slack off a little next year? Maybe.

The point is that my production of books sped up due to me becoming more familiar with the process, and the fact that I started publishing anthologies of others' work. But in between those anthologies I have published six books of my own and written over a million words which I will shape into more books in the future.

Obviously, Life happens and some of these plans might have to be changed or modified. But having a guide to your year is better than not having one - you will find that you will get more done.

## 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.

#### 4. Weekly timetabling.

This is where I found that it got interesting. I was trying to fit too much into a week, and constantly misestimating how long things would take, which is why I eventually gave up and flopped back into a monthly schedule.

But then I realised that I was doing it wrong.

Instead of writing out a list of what I wanted to do each week and then not meeting those targets, I decided that I should simply divide up each day of the week into slots, like a school timetable, and set targets for each slot. Having spent nearly 20 years as a teacher, the daily timetable thing appealed to me - I tend to respond to units like that. And it worked here too: by dividing each day into hourly periods, and then filling those periods with different tasks, I found that not only was I getting more done, and getting less distracted on the way, but I also felt that I was getting more done, which is important.

Morale is crucial - if too much time is felt to be wasted, a malaise creeps in and can throttle you. It can be just a feeling of wastage rather than anything measurable. The hourly periods helped to show my 'emotional brain' that I was actually getting quite a lot of stuff done.

How does it work?

Simply draw up a timetable, starting as early as you like each day and assigning each hour to a different activity. The trick is - and this is important - to include everything that you know you will need to do on that day.

For example, my timetable might say '6:00 - 9:00 am: breakfast and school run', followed by '9:00 - 10:00 am social media and emails'. Then '10:00 - 11:00 am writing)' followed by '11:00 - 12:00 am research or more writing)'

Then timetable in lunch, block in the rest of the afternoon with activities, including the school run or whatever non-writing activities you know are going to have to be done, and go as far into the evening as you wish.

Timetable in the things that you know are going to come up as potential interruptions: assigning them a time to be dealt with means they are less likely to jump out at you as annoyances. These can include family matters, appointments, calls that you have to make, boring things that you have to do like household chores.

You can even timetable regular breaks, social media 'interludes' and so on.

One of the things that you may find is that you are getting quicker at getting the other things done too.

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.

# THE 'NO TIME TO WRITE' FIRST AID PROGRAMME

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.

In my course How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published, I argue that the central reason why you're not being a writer right now is that you don't place enough importance on it, and that's true. 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.

This checklist is based on material in my course and 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 Vitaly 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'?

Here they are, taken from my course [How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published](#):

### 1. Timetable yourself into the writing chair.

This sounds obvious, but almost all the wannabe writers I've ever spoken to have the same problem: they are expecting Life to somehow open up a window of a few weeks so that they can 'write the book they want to write'.

Life doesn't usually respond on its own.

And so the wannabes get trampled into apathy by the demands of the world around them, their families, their jobs, their lives, as above.

## 2. Expand on that timetable.

Examine your daily and weekly commitments; work out at least 3 hours a week, preferably contiguous but not vitally so, and block that out for writing. Nothing else - just writing your fiction. Don't include 'checking emails' or 'answering letters' or even 'making notes'. Just the actual task of writing.

## 3. Get everyone's agreement.

Easier said than done, but unless you do, your little timetable won't be worth the screen it's probably written on.

Interruptions are your prime enemy at this point, so work out who is interrupting you the most and get their agreement not to do so, at least at certain times.

## 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...

## 5. Stop 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.

### 7. Use said device at every opportunity.

Every time you find yourself at a loose end, start writing.

Waiting for a bus? Write.

Sat on a train? Write.

In between meetings? Write.

Write notes, write ideas, write chapter headings, write insights. Write whole chapters if you get a chance. It's possible to write the basis for entire novels in this way, chapter by chapter, in the time

that you didn't even realise was 'spare'. Try it. You'll be amazed. And your writing morale will start to go up and up. You won't forget those flashes of genius you had on the way home before you get to your laptop; you won't forget that you even had a flash of genius. It will all be there in some form on your device. Apart from recording stuff, the notes on your gadget will begin to give you confidence that you can actually write. You'll get practice, in small doses.

### 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 morale-booster. 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 decent-sized 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 counter-productive '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 whole 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...

# THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE PROGRAMME

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.

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

[grant@clarendonhousebooks.com](mailto:grant@clarendonhousebooks.com)

# 1. 'THE CHALLENGE'

Recognise that:

- Your biggest enemies the moment, as a writer, are Lack of Time and Procrastination.
- Writers should be expected to show up and perform, like everyone else.
- It is possible to escape from the non-writing trap that you might be in.

## 2. 'THE FALSE IMAGE'

Take a look around at the way a writer's life is portrayed in the media and elsewhere. Recognise that

- Society's general image of writers is that they are broke, struggling creatures doomed to fail.
- Time is a precious commodity, the scarcity of which can lead writers to grow afraid to write, leading to procrastination.

Resolve to make the changes you need to in order to reorient your life so that it is entirely structured around writing, rather than trying to fit writing into an existing life.

### 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.

## 4. 'GETTING CRAZY'

Resolve right now that you will have

- No more excuses, writing takes the driver's seat.

Decide to

- Think outside the boxes.
- Unleash your native creativity.
- Recognise that your sense of nagging dissatisfaction is the writer inside you trying to get out.

## 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 best 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 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.

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?



## 8. 'INERTIA'

Recognise that

- Writers have to find something which is strong enough to overpower the circumstances holding them back.

List out everything that you enjoy doing or that you love coupled with everything that places those things under threat.

Recognise that

- That vacuum has the power to pull out a message, a communication.

- The deeper the theme, the stronger the fuel.

Compare your message to that of several other authors and recognise that

- What you have to say is not going to be all that different from what most great writers are saying.

- You don't have to find a unique theme. What you do have to find is a unique voice.

## 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.

## 12. 'THE RUDIMENTS OF A WRITING LIFE'

How many of the following basics do you have in place at this point?

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

Can you work out what this is in your case?

## 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.

### 2. Make further economies.

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

### 3. Invest in things which 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.

## 14. 'THE LADDER TO SUCCESS'

Recognise that

- 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.





# 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.

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Learn:

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- what it is actually doing to and for you and other readers
- the things called 'plots', what they are and how they are actually made
- the four categories of the powerful force that compels readers to turn pages
- the magnetic power that attracts readers even before the introduction of any character
- what the thing called a 'character' actually is, and how to rapidly build a convincing one
- what 'protagonists' and 'antagonists' really are, and what the connection between them consists of
- the 'nuclear reactor' that drives all successful stories through to their conclusion
- how the four basic genres - Epic, Tragedy, Irony and Comedy - are

composed and how they work to create different effects

and much, much more.

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What the experts say:

As with all professionals, I too read craft books every day, to stay on top of my game.

Over the last thirty years, I've read (literally) hundreds of writing books. And, lemme tell ya, the VAST majority of them are garbage. The relative few that are decent still aren't great. Writing instructors usually spend 60,000 words saying what could've been said in 60.

EXCEPT for yours, Grant. Your books are hands down, bar none, exceptional. You get down into the nitty gritty and talk about real stuff that's immediately useful. I especially like How Stories Really Work. You really nailed it with that one.

And, Grant... it's REALLY hard to impress me. But, you had me hooked from the very first sentence. In fact, I've already turned a number of my past clients onto it.

So... thank you for giving the writing world something of merit. Your book is a breath of

invigorating fresh air. May it breathe new life into this great industry of ours so that writers may once again set the world on fire.

-J. C. Admore, Professional Writing Expert

An amazing book. Fascinating application of physics theory to the art of fiction writing. Presents new ways of understanding how stories work. I now look for 'vacuums' everywhere. Excellent case studies covering all genres. Thought-provoking and inspiring. I highly recommend this book to all readers and writers of fiction.

- G. Leyland (B Social Work, Grad Dip Writing, MA Creative Writing)

What the authors say:

I'm reading through How Stories Really Work. I've studied writing books for years but I've never seen anything like this!

I learned about your work after reading an article you wrote. I was intrigued by the premise, but at the time, there wasn't an Amazon review (something I must rectify when I'm finished). I decided it wouldn't hurt to read the preview. . . And promptly bought it.

This book is REVOLUTIONARY. Everything is made so simple and precise that other methods of writing seem clumsy by comparison. It's not just a way of writing, but a way of seeing.

-A. P. (Author)

It's beautiful, informative, essential reading for anyone who wants to write fiction. It's almost a responsibility point, you're committing a crime if you don't get it into peoples' hands!!!

-B.R. (Author)

Loved the book. Have used the principles in many a story. It all makes so much sense. If you want help in drawing readers in - this is the book to get.

-M W-B (Author)

This is a book every author should own. Grant P. Hudson does an outstanding job explaining story structure and the mechanics involved in creating a story or novel that readers will love. His examples are explained in an engaging manner so this book doesn't seem like reading a text book. I have already implemented many of his ideas in building a novel. This book contains great advice and I highly recommend it to all authors.

-D. T. (Author)

After reading this book, I'll never look at stories the same way. This step-by-step how-to book is full of wisdom about how classic stories are structured. You will see how to apply these principles to your own stories and novels, converting them to page-turners.

-P. V. A. (Author)

An essential purchase for anyone wishing to not only improve their writing but understand the art of story telling. You will never read a book the same way again. Nor watch a film or play without seeing the theory, that Grant so eloquently describes. Brilliant, worth every penny.

-D. S. (Author)

-A. C. (Author)

I have had nearly 100 short stories published and thought I knew about writing. This book taught me new ways to look at my own writing as well as other writing. Grant Hudson doesn't recycle old ways to look at the writing process, he invents new ways for a writer to examine almost every aspect of writing fiction, and provides a new vocabulary for how to do it. Very highly recommended for anyone who writes or wants to write fiction.

I wish I had found this book sooner. It was fascinating and insightful. I am now very annoying when watching films as I apply the techniques learned in this book, and quickly guess the twists! Very helpful in planning and forming ideas and I use this technique when writing stories.

-S. C. (Author)

I love the way Grant has approached the whole subject in this excellent book, in a very different and



almost 'obvious' way compared to other books that attempt to teach the craft of writing. As a writer myself I now see in a different light what I am writing. Where was this book 35 years ago when I first started writing? One of those 'I wish I'd known that years ago' books.

-J. W. F. (Author)

I finished this book over two nights and had an epiphany. Such common sense and thought provoking ideas. This should be a mandatory text book for any serious writer. I'm excited to inject more purpose to my writing. This book will become a constant reference book for me now. Highly recommend it.

-R. C. (Author)

Your book is teaching me all the stuff that the other books don't! I can learn all about three-act structures and all that stuff elsewhere -this book is telling me exactly what to put INTO the structure! It makes writing so easy and you can immediately spot where you're going wrong! Excellent!

-L.J. (Professional)

This is an absolutely amazing achievement! I highly recommend it to anyone interested in writing fiction.

-T.R. (Student)

I was extremely impressed. This is not idle flattery. You've done a superb job in uncovering the factors that go into making a great piece of literature.

-B.R. (Executive)

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