

THE STORY A DAY
“IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL”
WORKSHOP

JULIE DUFFY

STORYADAY.ORG

IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

"We are what we do repeatedly. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."

-Aristotle

MAKE WRITING A PRIORITY

Working whenever you feel inspired, and only then, is a recipe for frustration. In order to progress, you must make writing a priority. Allow it to be important in your life. Commit to doing it regularly at a minimum, frequently if possible.

"What I do every day matters more than what I do once in a while."

– Gretchen Rubin

- Block out time in your calendar for writing
- Use triggers to catapult you into your writing process (wear the same hat, play the same background music, sit in the same place, every time you sit down to write)
- But also cultivate the ability to write wherever you are.
- Keep adapting: use different tricks to motivate yourself --- word counts, time limits, challenges --- until you find what works for you now.
- Analyze your efforts and their results. Adjust your practice to accommodate what you have learned about yourself and about the craft of writing.

- ☑ Remember this is not a race. If this month went badly, can you find ways to improve your output or writing quality next month.

You're never going to stop writing, once you've noticed the itch to do so. Surrender to it and see this as a lifelong learning process.

“Writers are made—-forged, really, in a kiln of their own madness and insecurities—-over the course of many moons. The writer you are when you begin is not the writer you become”

– Chuck Wendig, *The Kick-Ass Writer*

SEEK FEEDBACK AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Remember you are your own worst critic. Having other writers in your life, to read your work and hold you accountable is one of the most empowering things you can do as a writer. Even if it is only one trusted person (as long as it is a person who inspires you to do more, to do your best, not someone who fills you with dread or guilt).

- ☑ Be accountable to someone for a regular output of finished work.
- ☑ Allow other people to read your writing. Ask them what they enjoyed. This reminds you that other people DO enjoy your writing, even when it's not perfect.
- ☑ Occasionally, read autobiographies and blogs by working writers. Notice that they, too, struggle with self-confidence, productivity, getting-through-the-middle. The only differences between you and them

are that they have committed to writing for money and don't have the option to quit (without being sued by their publisher).

LEARN ABOUT THE CRAFT, WITH CARE

I studied piano for 10 years under two different small-town piano teachers. It was only when a good friend of mine took up piano at age 13 and quickly surpassed me that I started to notice the difference between 'banging out the notes' and 'playing music'. When he went off to music college and came back full of inspiration and tips from teachers who were professional performers, I learned more in one year (from listening to him play and talk about what he had learned) than I had learned in my previous nine years of study.

But part of the reason I learned was because I was ready. I had the basics down and now I could absorb more advanced technique. I was ready but I didn't know how to take the next step. I never would have made any more progress if I hadn't been exposed to the lessons of those more experienced pianists. (Incidentally, when I started to apply those lessons to my own playing, my family started stopping by the piano to listen, instead of counting the minutes until I was finished practicing.)

Learning craft and technique matters.

But what also matters is learning it in small, applicable pieces, when you're ready to hear it.

When you read about writing try to confine yourself to learning about one technique and then trying out what you've learned (for example, go looking for good articles and books about dialogue. The first time you go "oh!", stop reading and go and practice whatever it was that caught your attention. Short stories are the perfect vehicle for trying this out).

KEEP READING, KEEP WRITING

Whenever you feel stuck for ideas, read a story. Read an article. Read a poem. You might suffer a pang of envy at the other writers' luck/skill/success, but beat it down and remind yourself that the world needs your stories too. Notice what you like or hate in each story you read. Let it roll around inside you for a while. Think about how you could use these things as a springboard for your own creativity.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Part of the reason I encourage you to make writing a priority is not simply so you can become a highly-productive writing machine. It's because you are a writer. You need to nurture yourself before you can be of any use to the people around you.

As part of this,



Commit to getting enough sleep even if it means going to bed earlier than you're used to.

- Commit to eating healthily even if it's more hassle.
- Commit to getting some physical exercise every day, even if it's just taking a slow walk outdoors (studies indicate that a 15 minute walk in nature can lesson the symptoms of ADHD sufferers for hours afterwards. If it can do that for a nine year old child with a neurological condition, imagine what it can do for you!)
- If you have time, volunteer to help other people in some way. You'll meet fascinating characters and get away from the pressures of dealing with your own issues for a while. For writers, getting out of your own head once in a while can be a great thing :)

SWITCH THINGS UP FROM TIME TO TIME

"Creation is merely the act of forgoing the small and great distractions"

-EB White

Routines are useful for minimizing the number of decision we make, but if you're anything like me, my creative mind starts to balk at routine after a while. It starts to seek out distraction. It is a good idea, therefore, to have some ideas on hand to distract your brain in a positive way when it starts to get twitchy.

From time to time shake up your writing routine with something like:

- Signing up for a challenge (I hear there's a great short story challenge in May...)
- Taking a class (like this. Hooray!)

- Going to a conference (also helps expand your network)
- Perform a story live (is there a workshop or coffee shop near you with a Story Slam or open mike?)
- Release an ebook collection of your best stories
- Submit stories to new markets
- Write something for a themed anthology or competition, even if it's outside your usual style/genre.
- Purposely write outside your usual genre
- Write poetry
- Blog about writing
- Journal
- Write with a partner

Make some notes now on the next few pages about how you will meet each of these challenges. Make a note in your calendar, to come back and look at your answers in three months: both for revision and to remind yourself how far you've come.

"The will to do, the soul to dare."

– Sir Walter Scott

