

# YOUR CREATIVE COMMUTE

Life is busy and it's hard to fit writing in.

And even when you do make time to write, it can be hard to adjust your brain's settings from 'life out there' to 'life in here' quickly enough to make the most of your writing time.

I call this process 'the commute'.

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Finding the right way to commute from your daily life to your creative life, can make a huge difference to your productivity and happiness.

## **Abrupt Transitions:**

### **Good for Drama, Bad for Real Life**

When my kids were babies and I was adjusting to being alone at home with them all the (very) long day, I really looked forward to their dad coming home.

Unfortunately for him, he had a very short commute. It didn't give him time to transition out of being an orderly scientist in the lab and into being just another one of the

clowns in the three-ring circus that was our toy-strewn living room.

The transition was jarring and, for a while, it didn't go well...

...Until he learned to use his short commute consciously, to shift his mood and expectations. No more mental auto-pilot on the drive home.

Now, he deliberately prepped for his second job, and didn't come in the door until he was ready to be pounced on (often literally, when it came to the kids) by three needy people who were ready for a break from each other.

Likewise, if you try to rush from 'doing all the things in my daily life' to 'I must be creative immediately', it's a jarring transition and your brain will likely go on strike..

It needs a bit of a commute.

## **But What If Your Commute Takes Too Long?**

My commute from my last office job took well over an hour, meaning that I had plenty of time to unwind from the stresses of the day, before spending quality time with my husband...*for the short amount of time we could spend together* before it was time to go to bed, get up early and do it all again.

The long commute cut too deeply into how I wanted to be spending my time. Eventually, I left that job.

Many of us use practices and rituals to help us commute mentally from our daily lives to our creative lives.

Maybe you use Julia Cameron's "Morning Pages" or you journal, or use some other ritual --perhaps involving scented candles, meditation or soothing music.

And while I love the principle behind all these ideas, it becomes a problem if you're using all your time and mental energy to warm up, and leaving nothing for the projects you really want to work on.

And what if, like many busy caregivers and employees <sup>1</sup> you only have 20 minutes here and there in which to get some writing done?

You can't spend the whole time commuting or you'll never get to the good part.

## **My Recent Experiment**

I love some stream-of-consciousness Morning Page writing to floss out my brain, but what would happen, I asked myself, if I didn't have to write three pages?

It's something that was so helpful as a concept when I first tried it out, that I hesitated to embrace the heresy that I might

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<sup>1</sup>and you know, living people,

be able to warm up in less time. But I decided to try it and see what happened.

I started on a morning when I had a 25-minute block of time to work on my fiction. I didn't want to spend the whole 25 minutes warming up, so I set a timer for 8 minutes (I love a deadline, don't you?) and got to work.

- I wrote quickly and continuously until my timer went off and discovered that, after all these years of leisurely morning page rambles, I could do a quick sprint—a High Intensity Interval Training session, you might say -- and get the same benefits.
- I went on to ~~outline~~ 'snowflake' the next section of the story I've been stuck on for ages, which was a my 'real work' for the day. (Important note: sometimes 'writing' doesn't look like 'creating a draft').
- Because I wrote in a very conscious way, it didn't matter that the interval was short. It was all about the intensity, and *that* was what got me in the right frame of mind for fiction.

Some things that worked particularly well for me:

- Set a timer for no more than 1/3 of the time available.
- Write as fast as possible (by hand works really well for me because it slows me down, but your mileage may vary. I wrote as fast as I could so I wasn't staring into space, but slowly enough that I got to choose my words.
- Write about one thing that I noticed or loved, or enjoyed over the past 24 hours (In this case I was reading the book "The Living Mountain"\* by Nan Shepherd before bed last night, and wrote about some of what I'd loved about it.)
- Try to write with as much sensory detail or emotion as I can
- Keep a separate sheet of paper available with "To Do" written at the top of it. As I write, things pop into my head, demanding my attention ("You should make that appointment/fill in your ballot/go to the post office/answer that email! And you should panic about it too!!" screams my brain at regular intervals as I try to write about Nan's ability to capture the exact colors of autumn on the mountain...) I write them on my 'to do' list to worry about later and get back to my commute.

(After all, if I was driving to work, these things would have to wait, right?)

- Stop as soon as the timer goes off.
- Take a breath and notice the change in emotions, breathing, feelings about possibility...

## **EXPERT ADD-ON:**

### **Don't Forget the Evening Commute**

Something that has really helped me shorten my 'morning commute' has been taking some time at the end of the day — or the end of the writing session—to do a similar process:

- Do a little journaling to capture what needs to come out of your brain from today.
- Capture the same 'to do' list brain-calming measures. This is not the same as putting things into whatever task management system you may have. It's just a list to capture random thoughts while you are writing. What you do with it after your writing time is up to you!
- This means that, when you sit down the next day, a lot of the 'But What About That Appointment You Need To Make' things your brain uses to try to distract you is

already on a 'to do' list for today and can simply be waved away. This makes your commute even more efficient!

If you're struggling to get your head in the game when you sit down to write, you may want to look at how you're spending your 'commute' from one reality to the next.

## Now What?

Turn the page and print out (or use as a model) the template pages I've provided to help you create your own shorter, more efficient, creative commute.

Then, let me know what you think.

Keep writing,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Julie'.

Julie Duffy

P. S. If you have a friend who'd like to get hold of this document send them here: [storyaday.org/creative-commute](https://storyaday.org/creative-commute), where they'll also be able to sign up for more StoryADay goodness!