

BEST QUOTES ON THE HABITS AND ROUTINES OF FAMOUS AUTHORS

Leonardo da Vinci was an ambidextrous workaholic. He sketched with his right hand while he wrote with his left—simultaneously!

--*Executive
Speechwriter
Newsletter*

Handwriting allows you to set aside typed page count and concentrate on what's important: words and story. Stephen King has reported writing *Dreamcatcher* with 'the world's finest word processor, a Waterman cartridge fountain pen.' By slowing down, writers may write more scenes that matter with less conscious effort at style. And once you start writing longhand, you'll be surprised how many words you can scribble.

—Michael Cahlin

I never quite know when I'm not writing. Sometimes my wife comes up to me at a party and says, 'Dammit, Thurber, stop writing.' She usually catches me in the middle of a paragraph.

--James Thurber

Got a queer and most overpowering urge today to write, or typewrite, my whole novel on the pink, stiff, lovely-textured Smith memorandum pads of 100 sheets each: a fetish: somehow, seeing a hunk of that pink paper, different from all the endless reams of white bond, my task seems finite, special, rose-cast.

--Sylvia Plath

A poet told me that when her little boys were small she used to put her typewriter in the playpen and sit there and work while they tore up the house around her. Of course, she is an exceptionally energetic and resourceful person.

--Ellen Gilchrist

Thinking is the activity I love best, and writing to me is simply thinking through my fingers. I can write up to 18 hours a day. Typing 90 words a minute, I've done better than 50 pages a day. Nothing interferes with my concentration. You could put on an orgy in my office and I wouldn't look up—well, maybe once.

--Isaac Asimov

Pencils must be round. A hexagonal pencil cuts my fingers after a long day.

--John Steinbeck

All I needed was a steady table and a typewriter...a marble-topped bedroom washstand table made a good place; the dining-room table between meals was also suitable.

--Agatha Christie

Some authors type their works, but I cannot do that. Writing is tied up with the hand, almost with a special nerve.

--Graham Greene

My bed is my best friend....I type in it, telephone in it, think in it, and stare at the wall from it. Some morning, a long time from now, I hope I will be found peacefully dead in it, lying in a narrow but cozy space between old manuscripts, lost books, empty teacups, misplaced nightgowns, and unsharpened pencils.

--Jane O'Reilly

Poe...was perhaps the first great nonstop literary drinker of the American nineteenth century. He made the indulgences of Coleridge and De Quincey seem like a bit of mischief in the kitchen with the cooking sherry.

--James Thurber

Anyone could write a novel given six weeks, pen, paper, and no telephone or wife.

--Evelyn Waugh

I lived in solitude in the country and noticed how the monotony of a quiet life stimulates the creative mind.

--Albert Einstein

Nighttime is really the best time to work. All the ideas are there to be yours because everyone else is asleep.

--Catherine O'Hara

I write in the seclusion of my attic. I sit at a desk; I face the wall. If you sit facing the wall, the only way out is through the sentences.

--E. L. Doctorow

If you stuff yourself full of poems, essays, plays, stories, novels, films, comic strips, magazines, music, you automatically explode every morning like Old Faithful. I have never had a dry spell in my life, mainly because I feed myself well, to the point of bursting. I wake early and hear my morning voices leaping around in my head like jumping beans. I get out of bed quickly, to trap them before they escape.

--Ray Bradbury

Famous writers often surrounded themselves with quiet if they had the financial means to do so. Usually this meant buying a house in natural surroundings and setting up a study in which to work. Emily Dickinson's reclusiveness makes more sense once you visit her pleasant sun-filled house in the woods in Amherst, Mass. Her bedroom, where she wrote every morning, radiates a serenity that seems to call for verse, even to this day.

--Joy Lanzendorfer

I would work in the shower if I had plastic paper.

—Umberto Eco

He [Jesse Stewart] went back to the hills and taught school and plowed fields and wrote in between. As he guided the mule between rows, he composed poetry and conjured plots for short stories. When he rested his mule at the end of the furrow, he jotted his lines on tree leaves. Later, he transferred his words to paper. They eventually found their way to publishing houses and from there into books and magazines. He wrote for children. He wrote for adults. But most of all, he wrote for himself.

—Dennis L. Peterson

The shed was, Dahl [Roald] said not wholly originally, a kind of womb: 'It's small and tight and dark and the curtains are always drawn...you go up here and you disappear and get lost.' Here, at the top of his garden, hunched in an old winged armchair, in a sleeping bag when it was cold, his feet on a box, a wooden writing board covered in green billiard cloth balanced across the chair arms; here, surrounded by personal relics, totems, fetishes (his father's sliver paper knife, a heavy ball made out of the wrappings of chocolate bars when he was a clerk at Shell Oil, bits of bone from his much-operated-on spine, a cuneiform tablet picked up in Babylon during World War II, a picture of his first child, Olivia, who died when she was 7: a poster for Wolper Pictures, makers of the first *Willy Wonka* film, naming the company's star authors: DAHL, NABOKOV, PLIMPTON, SCHLESINGER, STYRON, UPDIKE—here was where he worked.

—Jeremy Treglown

When I'm writing . . . I get up at about five . . . I get in my car and drive off to a hotel room: I can't write in my house, I take a hotel room and ask them to take everything off the walls so there's me, the Bible, Roget's Thesaurus and some good, dry cherry and I'm at work by 6:30. I write on the bed lying down—one elbow is darker than the other, really black from leaning on it—and I write in longhand on yellow pads. Once into it, all disbelief is suspended, it's beautiful.

—Maya Angelou

The conclusion to be drawn is that I am happiest writing in small rooms. They make me feel comfortable and secure. And it took me years to figure out that I need to write in a corner. Like a small animal burrowing into its hole, I shift furniture around, and back myself into a cozy corner, with my back to the wall...and then I can write.

--Danielle Steel

Your writing room doesn't have to sport a Playboy Philosophy decor, and you don't need an Early American roll top desk in which to house your writing implements. I wrote my first two published novels, *Carrie* and *'Salem's Lot*, in the laundry room of a doublewide trailer, pounding away on my wife's portable Olivetti typewriter and balancing a child's desk on my thighs; John Cheever reputedly wrote in the basement of his Park Avenue apartment building, near the furnace. The space can be humble (probably *should* be, as I think I have already suggested), and it really needs only one thing: a door which you are willing to shut. The closed door is your way of telling the world and yourself that you mean business; you have made a serious commitment to write and intend to walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

—Stephen King

I'm in another place, a basement place where there are lot of bright lights and clear images. This is a place I've built for myself over the years. It's a far-seeing place. I know it's a little strange, a little bit of a contradiction, that a far-seeing place should be a basement place, but that's how it is with me. If you construct your own far-seeing place, you might put it in a treetop or on the roof of the World Trade Center or on the edge of the Grand Canyon.

—Stephen King

Every morning for the next five years, he [John Cheever] would dress in his only suit and take the elevator to a maid's room in the basement, where he stripped to his boxer shorts and wrote until lunchtime.

—*Wikipedia*

Hart Crane tried to evoke the creative process by drink and jazz music, which might hypnotically start trains of verbal association; and so Schiller is reported to have kept a rotting apple in his desk because he found the odor stimulating.

—Cleanth Brooks and
Robert Penn
Warren

As against having beautiful workshops, studios, etc., one writes best in a cellar on a rainy day.

—Van Wyck Brooks

I tend to work in the morning when I have relatively more energy, and I try to stay in my pajamas as long as possible because once I get dressed, I feel sort of empowered, and I'm more likely to go to the grocery store or the gym. I know this makes me sound like a sad, sad person, but it's the only thing that works for me.

—Katherine Heiny

I'm so aware of time running on that I've become quite versatile. Now I can write anywhere—in bed, a favorite nook in the public library; next to the sea seems especially productive. As soon as I get into the story world, it doesn't seem to matter where I am.

—Wendy Robertson

Starting at 11 p.m., he [Fyodor Dostoyevsky] wrote in candlelit solitude, tolerating no interruptions. Around dawn he would retire, burrowing into the bed in his study, with his overcoat laid on top of the sheets. He slept until noon. He adored super-strong tea, scalding coffee, Kiev jam, chocolate, and blue raisins.

—Jeffrey Tayler

I wrote the entire last six chapters of my book on public transportation in Chicago....I found that it was easiest for me to write while on the bus or train. Sometimes I would get on the Red Line at Chinatown and ride it all the way to Howard. It was a way of trapping myself with the story, but also using my surroundings as inspiration.

--Olivia Cole

I found a charming small inn...called the Bee and Thistle, which was officially closed, but the owners kindly agreed to allow me to stay there to get my book done. Every morning, someone would come to make me a delicious breakfast, then leave me alone in a large wing chair by a fire, where I sat for around 10 hours a day, losing myself in my words. I had no wi-fi, no family, no distractions whatsoever and the words flowed freely.

--Jane Green

I've always been suspicious of those people who say they don't read when they're writing. I, on the other hand, have learned that it's really important to be reading as much as possible, to not be afraid of the influence of other writers. In fact, I'll have 10 or 12 books open on my desk and dip into them randomly for inspiration along the way....Reading other people's work helps me as a writer by reminding me that there's always someone better out there. I'll use an analogy. You know in basketball, the only way you get better is when you play against better players, and you have to up your game. So, if you've got Phillip Roth, Lorrie Moore, Hemingway and Kathryn Harrison on your desk with you, you've got to up your game.

--Sherman Alexie

At night, when the objective world has slunk back into its cavern and left dreamers to their own, there come inspirations and capabilities impossible at any less magical and quiet hour. No one knows whether or not he is a writer unless he has tried writing at night.

--H. P. Lovecraft

When I bought my first computer in 1983, the man who installed the word-processing program fixed it so that when I booted up, these words flashed across my screen: 'A writer is someone who has written today.' Those words were a gift to me then, and I'm passing them along to you.

—J. A. Jance

I know a group of young adult writers who rent a hotel room and sit around a table, writing together, but separately, all day long. It's the same principle as group exercise classes: You don't want to be the first to quit.

--Donna Gephart

Don't let technology, which is supposed to help us, hold you back. All you need to start with is a pen or pencil and paper. 'The simpler, the better' usually works for me. When friends know you're a writer, they sometimes give you exquisite leather-bound journals in which to record your thoughts. For me they are so beautiful and intimidating, I can't write in them. I line them up on the shelf and admire them from afar. For actual writing, I prefer a spiral notebook--preferably the steno kind with the flip-top back and pale green paper that's easy on the eyes.

--Valerie O. Patterson

I always stop at a point where I know precisely what's going to happen next. So I don't have to crank up every day.

--Ernest Hemingway

On a wall calendar mark an X every day you get some writing done, gradually creating a chain of X's. Your only job...is to not break the chain.

--Jerry Seinfeld

John Updike used to rent a one-room office above a restaurant, where he would report to write six days a week. John Cheever famously put on his only suit and rode the elevator with the 9-to-5 crowd, only he would proceed down to the basement to write in a storage room. Robert Caro still puts on a jacket and tie every day and repairs to his 22nd-floor Manhattan office. Authors who corral their duties into daily routines help remind us of the industry of writing. A muse does not pour words into someone's skull.

--Jimmy So

Edmond Rostand was forced to write Cyrano de Bergerac in his bathtub, because it was the only place where his endless callers would leave him in peace.

--Michael Larsen

All my major works have been written in prison...I would recommend prison not only to aspiring writers, but aspiring politicians, too.

--Jawaharal Nehru

My speed depends on the state of my bank account.

--Mickey Spillane

The fascination of the silent midnight, the veiled lamp, the smouldering fire, the white paper asking to be covered with elusive words; the thoughts grouping themselves into architectural forms, and slowly rising into dreamy structures, constantly changing, shifting, beautifying their outlines,—this is the subtlest of solitary temptations, and the loftiest of the intoxications of genius.

--Henry Adams

I work four hours a day and then usually early in the evening I read over what I've written during the day and I do a lot of changing and shifting around. See, I write in longhand and I do two versions of whatever I'm doing. I write first on yellow paper and then I write on white paper and then when I finally have it more or less settled the way I want, then I type it. When I'm typing it, that's when I do my final rewrite. I almost never change a word after that.

--Truman Capote

I put a piece of paper under my pillow, and when I could not sleep I wrote in the dark.

--Henry David
Thoreau

Wearing down seven #2 pencils is a good day's work.

--Ernest Hemingway

People usually ask after my writing habits, thinking, I suppose, there must be some carefully kept secret that accounts for my prolific production. Actually there isn't. I do all my own typing, but I type 70 words a minute and never slow down. The key characteristic is, I suppose, single-mindedness. I type every day, except when the typewriters are kept forcibly out of reach; I start early each day and continue typing till the number of typographical errors reaches an unacceptable concentration.

--Isaac Asimov

I would say that I like to have a certain amount of time alone every day. I don't take any communication, no telephone calls. Just solitude. There's a need. And solitude is not just because you've got a job on your hands. Solitude is blankness that makes accidents happen.

--Robert Penn Warren

Good books, good painting and sculpture and graphics, good music, have all come from those studios at MacDowell and Yaddo. But other good work has also been produced at dining room tables or at basement desks or in the car parked at the suburban railroad station waiting for the 5:03 from New York or on the lid of the toilet seat. Stay home or go to a colony with its sometimes frustrating perfection. It really doesn't matter as long as your vision is clear, your motivation strong, and you have something important to say.

--Doris Grumbach

Agatha Christie once described to me her own particular method of getting down to work...She would...repair to a very bad hotel. In a bad hotel, there was nothing to do but to write, and plenty of time to do it in. The beds were so uncomfortable that you had no inclination to retire early or to get up late...the meals were so bad that there was no temptation to linger over them....So the book would be done in a matter of weeks and you could pack up the few dull clothes which were all you need bother to take with you, and go off triumphantly home.

--Christianna Brand

The life of the writer is essentially lonely; he has to live among the interest and creations of his own mind, and therefore he has above all things, as a condition of his work, to accustom himself to loneliness.

--Gustave Flaubert

I write all the time, and I think about it all the time, so when I come to the typewriter in the morning that's just the time when I put it down. It's too late to think about it then. This is not uncommon among writers who realize that they're working out a thing when their conscious minds are otherwise occupied by mechanical tasks—shaving, driving a car.

--James K. Feibleman

I'm a back-to-the-wall, deadline-looming, undisciplined-in-time writer whose mind starts functioning toward evening, so when at last there is no escape from the typewriter I write into the small hours for days and weeks at a time, growing ever more tired and miserable. And the more dejected I become, the more easily the words flow! It's a working schedule not to be recommended.

--Sheila Burnford

I almost always write with a pen on typewriter-sized paper, or in a large notebook of that size, am often at a desk, or sitting in an armchair. I save first drafts—as a matter of fact, I am a saver and keep all changes in any poem, whether few or many, and have always been fascinated by the look of the text as it develops.

--Richard Eberhart

Writing is one art form that can be practiced almost anywhere at almost any time. Normally, you cannot paint in the office, or sculpture in the classroom or play the piano in a plane or the trumpet on a train. But, given some paper and a writing element, one can write in any of these places. What emerges will not always be a work of art; yet it could be.

--Theodore M.
Bernstein

I am fortunate as a writer in not being dependent on my surroundings....I have written quite happily on ocean liners during gales, with the typewriter falling into my lap at intervals, in hotel bedrooms, in woodsheds, in punts on lakes, in German internment camps, and in the inspectors' room at the Palais de Justice in Paris at the time when the French Republic suspected me of being a danger to it.

--P. G. Wodehouse

I never write in (a) pokey way....I have to turn loose like the blowing wind. I've got to get going. I've got to roll. I can't halt. When I get started, I'm like a flowing stream or a wind that blows over the meadow. I've got to move....

I never hang up on a word....If I can't find the word I want at that time, I just keep going. I'll hang up when I revise. But I want to get the story down on paper first. I want to get the mood of the poem down. I can think about words later.

--Jesse Stuart

I don't see how it's possible to attempt extended creative work with ink or ballpoint. Pen work is so laborious that it can give you a totally misleading notion of the amount of graft (work) you've done: that pile of ink-scrrawl looks and feels a lot, but it's often very little. With pen and pad you're tempted to write crouched by the fire in an armchair, and slackness comes out in your prose. With a typewriter you have to sit upright and use both hands like a real manual worker—no nonsense about eating lunch with one hand while you scratch away with the other. Most important, the mere fact that you're printing your work while you compose gives that work an objective, separated look: it's not an effluvium from your body, a sort of heart's blood too precious for the harsh world's spilling; it's something you're making, like a chair, and, like a chair, it's for somebody else's use.

--Anthony Burgess

During the long, long haul of work on a full-length play there are periods when I am obliged to read what I've been writing to see how it is or isn't shaping up. Almost invariably I am so disappointed or repulsed by what I read that I am unable, for a while, to continue work on it, to start a second, third, or fourth draft of the pachydermous project, and then, since I can't just stop working, I divert myself with some shorter project, a story, a poem, or a less ponderous play. These diversions are undertaken simply as that, as diversions, and they nearly always have a quality in common, which is experimentation in content and in style, particularly in style. The fatigue I felt before this escapade is lifted. I find myself enjoying my work again. The inside weather changes; even the outside weather seems to get lighter and brighter, and I am easier to live with.

--Tennessee Williams

Hemingway in the late years worked with painful slowness. He wrote mostly in longhand, frequently while standing at a bookcase in his bedroom; occasionally he would typewrite ('when trying to keep up with dialogue'). For years he carefully logged each day's work. Except for occasional spurts when he was engaged in relatively unimportant efforts, his output ran between 400 and 700 words a day. Mary Hemingway remembers very few occasions when it topped 1,000 words. He did not find writing to be quick or easy.

--Robert Manning

Every writer must acknowledge and be able to handle the unalterable fact that he has, in effect, given himself a life sentence in solitary confinement. The ordinary world of work is closed to him—and that's if he's lucky!

--Peter Straub

My own experience has been that the tools I need for my trade are paper, tobacco, food, and a little whisky.

—William Faulkner

Lines, verses, even stanzas come to me at odd moments—perhaps the best when I'm swimming. Swimming frees the mind. There's something about the rhythm of swimming—or running—the body is occupied, the mind is free. Lines come to me, too, in sleeping-waking moments.

The only conscious thing about writing poetry is the veto of some of these lines. It's veto, veto, veto.

--Robert Penn Warren

I like being alone in a room. It's almost a form of meditation—an investigation of my own life. It has nothing to do with 'I've got to get another play.'

--Neil Simon

If you are a writer, you locate yourself behind a wall of silence and no matter what you are doing, driving a car or walking or doing housework...you can still be writing, because you have that space.

--Joyce Carol Oates

I always forget how important the empty days are, how important it may be sometimes not to expect to produce anything, even a few lines in a journal....The most valuable thing we can do for the psyche, occasionally, is to let it rest, wander, live in the changing light of a room, not try to be or do anything whatever.

--May Sarton

I worked on (my memoirs) while I was riding the bus. When I went to the Brooklyn Museum, I wrote on the subway. In the library on 40th Street off Fifth Avenue. In all the cities when I was on the road. In London when I filmed 'Nasty Habits.' I never knew how I would pull it all together. It was a mess. Note pads. I used different pens, different colored ink for each section so I'd know where I was. I had a purple pen to write one, a shocking pink for another.

--Anne Jackson

I began writing my first novel in little notebooks on the train....And then I started making a little bit of money out of (my writing). I also found it obsessive. I found while sitting at my desk that I thought of very little else apart from my book and I quickly knew that I was giving to writing the best part of my life, that the ordinary routine that I was living was really just there to support it.

--David Cornwell

I try to have a couple of books and a TV show in progress simultaneously. I write in a cork-lined room and have two books pinned to the wall at all times. When I hit a snag on one, I go on to another.

--Theodor Seuss
Geisel

I get up around nine and, after a glass of hot water mixed with herbs, try to work immediately while I'm still near to my dreams and intuitiveness, before I've had to think whether to put on a blue frock or a green, or go out and buy tomatoes. When I'm caught up in the spell of a story, I think it becomes my happiest time. I want to induce a trance-like situation, but very lucid. I write out loud. I say the words. Very often I'll get up from the table because the telephone is ringing, and I can't find it.

--Edna O'Brien

I type with my back to the window—always have. Can't afford to be distracted all the time by looking out the window.

--Hal Borland

The best writing is always done at night when you're asleep. You put yourself to sleep reading a book or the transcripts of judicial hearings. You let the facts just pour into your mind and then somehow they magically arrange themselves at night.

There is no sense in trying to bull your way through when you're stuck on a passage—it means that somehow the facts don't fit. You have to knock off and go to bed, and if the subconscious doesn't arrange the facts, then you're nowhere.

--Theodore H. White

I find if I put plain paper in the machine, all ready for the final copy, I'll do it better than if I'm using yellow paper for a draft. You expect more of yourself then.

--Hal Borland

A writer who waits for ideal conditions under which to work will die without putting a word on paper....I just let something simmer for a while in my mind before trying to put it into words. I walk around straightening pictures on the wall, rugs on the floor until I'm ready. Delay is natural to a writer. He's like a surfer. He bides his time, waiting for the perfect wave on which to ride in.

—E. B. White

I hope you take things easy. I failed because I worked too hard. I let myself be driven by that foul witch, an uneasy conscience, which is only another name for Fear—who is the demon of all life, and the great source of almost all its crimes and criminals. Since I came to New York I have taken things easily, never worked at any thing a moment longer than I was interested in it that is the secret—never interest yourself in anything you don't care about. This is not the rule for conduct, but it's the rule for arts, and for artists in their work.

--J. B. Yeats

When I write, I aim in my mind not toward New York but toward a vague spot a little east of Kansas. I think of the books on library shelves, without their jackets, years old, and a countryish teen-aged boy finding them, and having them speak to him. The reviews, the stacks in Brentano's, are just hurdles to get over, to place the books on that shelf.

--John Updike

What release to write so that one forgets oneself, forgets one's companion, forgets where one is or what one is going to do next—to be drenched in sleep or in the sea. Pencils and pads and curling blue sheets alive with letters heap up on the desk.

--Anne Morrow
Lindbergh

Writers don't have lifestyles. They sit in little rooms and write.

--Norman Mailer

All you need is a room without any particular interruptions.

--John Dos Passos

I need noise and interruptions and irritation: irritation and discomfort are a great starter. The loneliness of doing it any other way would kill me.

--Anita Brookner

The actual process of writing...demands complete, noiseless privacy, without even music; a baby howling two blocks away will drive me nuts.

--William Styron

I like a room with a view, preferably a long view. I dislike looking out on gardens. I prefer looking at the sea, or ships, or anything which has a vista to it.

--Norman Mailer

The ideal view for daily writing, hour on hour, is the blank brick wall of a cold-storage warehouse. Failing this, a stretch of sky will do, cloudless if possible.

--Edna Ferber

It is by sitting down to write every morning that one becomes a writer. Those who do not do this remain amateurs.

--Gerald Brenan

A writer shouldn't be engaged with other writers, or with people who make books, or even with people who read them. The farther away you get from the literary traffic, the closer you are to sources. I mean, a writer doesn't really live, he observes.

--Nelson Algren

My schedule is flexible, but I am rather particular about my instruments: lined Bristol cards and well sharpened, not too hard, pencils capped with erasers.

--Vladimir Nabokov

When I sit at my table to write, I never know what it's going to be till I'm under way. I trust in inspiration, which sometimes comes and sometimes doesn't. But I don't sit back waiting for it. I work every day.

--Alberto Moravia

Loneliness is your companion for life. If you don't want to be lonely, you get into TV.

--William Styron

You write by sitting down and writing. There's no particular time or place—you suit yourself, your nature. How one works, assuming he's disciplined, doesn't matter.

--Bernard Malamud

Writing is the diametric opposite of having fun. All of life, as far as I'm concerned, is an excuse not to write. I just write when fear overtakes me. It causes paralytic terror. It's really scary just getting to the desk—we're talking now five hours. My mouth gets dry, my heart beats fast. I react psychologically the way other people react when the plane loses an engine.

--Fran Lebowitz

When I feel difficulty coming on, I switch to another book I'm writing. When I get back to the problem, my unconscious has solved it.

--Isaac Asimov

Writers are notorious for using any reason to keep from working: over-researching, retyping, going to meetings, waxing the floors—anything.

--Gloria Steinem

Three hours a day will produce as much as a man ought to write.

--Anthony Trollope

The pattern of the thing precedes the thing. I fill in the gaps of the crossword at any spot I happen to choose. These bits I write on index cards until the novel is done.

--Vladimir Nabokov

I rise at first light and I start by rereading and editing everything I have written to the point I left off. That way I go through a book I'm writing several hundred times. Most writers slough off the toughest but most important part of their trade—editing their stuff, honing it and honing it until it gets an edge like a bullfighter's killing sword. One time my son Patrick brought me a story and asked me to edit it for him. I went over it carefully and changed one word. 'But, Papa,' he said, 'you've only changed one word.' I said: 'If it's the right word, that's a lot.'

--Ernest Hemingway

I revise the manuscript till I can't read it any longer, then I get somebody to type it. Then I revise the typing. Then it's retyped again. Then there's a third typing, which is the final one. Nothing should then remain that offends the eye.

--Robert Graves

I believe more in the scissors than I do in the pencil.

--Truman Capote

I always work on two things at a time. When one goes flat, I run to the other.

--Stephen
Birmingham

I write slowly because I write badly. I have to rewrite everything many, many times just to achieve mediocrity.

--William Gass

It's queer for a live human animal, endowed with intelligence, to spend waking hours of a very mortal life cooped up in a room, not talking to anybody, just scribbling words on a page.

--John Barth

Writing for me was and is an assertion of identity. I never feel so much myself, with a great sense of relief and release, as when I stop somewhere in the midst of the daily chaos with pencil and paper. As I grew older I learned to work on top of the dining room table, despite radios blaring, telephones ringing, and people coming, going, talking loudly. It tremendously sharpened my powers of concentration, this exercise in shutting out the world. But it was a great strain on the nervous system.

--Ruth Whitman

I do a lot of rewriting while I'm writing. I get up early, and when I finish four or five hours of writing, I take a little rest. I look at it in the afternoon, and if I don't throw up, I do some more revising. It's a constant process.

--Robert Ludlum

I went neurotically through the whole gamut of contortions to avoid the writing: oversleeping day after day, going through an elaborate ritual of writing out on a slip of paper at night 'I will not oversleep.' Then morning would come, the alarm would go off, and I'd think to myself that this note-writing business was silly—a symptom, in fact, of my need for more sleep. Finally, I'd get up and say to myself that I'd sit down to write just as soon as I read the paper. Around 2:00 P.M., when I still hadn't written a word, I'd set the alarm for a half hour later and tell myself it was okay to do anything I wanted for the next half hour....

Sometimes I would actually begin writing. And when it was going well I can remember literally jumping up and down with excitement, thinking to myself how easy it was. Then the next day the battle would start all over.

--Dick Cavett

I'm an outline man. I think spontaneous writing is a waste of time.

--Tom Wolfe

I'm one of the people who think best in the morning. I like to wake up ready to go and to know that during the whole day the phone wouldn't ring, the doorbell wouldn't ring—even with good news—and that nobody would drop in....At the end of the day, I'd have a drink, watch the evening news...and then I can do anything I want to.

--Eudora Welty

I write down everything everything, everything! Otherwise why should I write?

--Marie

Konstantinovna

The way I work best is to be entirely alone. And during that period your characters are really the only people you can have a conversation with, because no one else is there, and the world you're creating becomes a real world, and the rest, what is supposed to be the most solid and best known, is really only shadows. It's a kind of heightened reality.

--Jeanette Winterson

I once stayed in a hotel, next door to a well-known writer. He never talked about writing. Each night I heard his typewriter, hour after hour, past midnight. Everybody else in the hotel was asleep. The sound of that machine reminds me, still, that what writers do is write.

--Richard Bach

It's hell on your body: There's nothing physical about writing, and no one likes to sit still. And it's hell on your soul. You need to isolate yourself from others, and no one likes to be alone for long stretches of time.

--Kurt Vonnegut

I'd be out five days a week laying pipe and fixing drains. I'm a writer, so five days a week (sometimes seven or eight) I lay words down on paper and try to fix them into stories.

--Jean Brody

I needed to find my way to write. I need about six hours of uninterrupted time in order to produce about two hours of writing, and when I accepted that and found the way to do it—then I was able to write.

--Robert B. Parker

Writing = ass in chair.

--Oliver Stone

Writing should be like breathing. You don't think about breathing, you just do it. I write every day, including all holidays and weekends—for at least two hours a day.
--William F. Nolan

Finish the thing before you start revising. If you're working on chapter 3 and you discover that you have to go back and plant the butler in chapter 1, scribble a note to yourself and keep working on chapter 3. Otherwise, you run the risk of having 20 versions of Chapter 1—and nothing else at all.

--Marta Randall

Before I start to write, I always treat myself to a nice dry martini. Just one, to give me the courage to get started. After that, I am on my own.

--E. B. White

The process of writing a book is infinitely more important than the book that is completed as a result of the writing, let alone the success or failure that book may have after it is written...the book is merely a symbol of the writing. In writing the book, I am living. I am growing. I am tapping myself. I am changing. The process is the product.

--Theodore Isaac
Rubin

A writer and nothing else: a man alone in a room with the English language, trying to get human feelings right.

—John K. Hutchens

Dickens sat down and wrote everything straight off. Somerset Maugham would work over one of his stories for hours and hours. Neither of them could have been any better or any worse if one had been slower and the other faster....I write everything in my head, so that when I sit down to the typewriter it's composed.

--Louise Brooks

For art to exist, for any sort of aesthetic activity or perception to exist, a certain physiological precondition is indispensable: intoxication.

--Nietzsche

The one thing a writer has to have is a pencil and some paper. That's enough, so long as she knows that she and she alone is in charge of that pencil, and responsible, she and she alone, for what it writes on that paper.

--Ursula K. Le Guin

When creative juices flow
Catch them with a pen
Cause if you don't
You may find you can't
Recapture them again.

--June Shanahan

With plays you only have to fill the center of the page. Novels take a tremendous amount of typing.

--Paul Rudnick

I use the Palmer method, and pad on a music stand. I'm not interested in computers, though they're less complex than the human brain—which I also try to use.

--Saul Bellow

Work every day in the reading room at the British Museum....When I lay too late in the mornings (which was most often the case) I did not go to the Museum until after dinner....

...I made a stand against late rising by using an alarm clock and actually succeeded in getting up regularly at 8 every morning until the end of the year, when the clock broke and I began immediately to relapse. I got a new clock, but did not quite regain my punctuality, which by and by, made me so sleepy in the afternoon that I got into the habit of taking a nap in the Museum over my books.

--George Bernard
Shaw

I write in the dark, late at night....I walk about my rooms, sit at my table, and work against the night....I welcome the burning sensation on the surface of my eyeballs which begins at one or two A. M. I pull my shirtsleeves down as the room grows colder. I flex my fingers....I lower my head and swing it from side to side to restore the muscles of my neck. And then little or nothing is left of the demands of will to prevent the opening up of the skull. Images of feeling shake free of their origins to line up in the matrix of an idea which did not exist during the earlier part of the evening. This goes on until a limit has been reached, by which time I am without words and can barely make it into bed. I have succeeded in stamping out my mind. In the morning, the evidence of the page smells like a baby.

--Marvin Bell

Darwin could work only half an hour at a time; but in many diligent half-hours he laid anew the foundations of philosophy.

--H. Kellogg

With a stub pencil I whittled sharp with my teeth, I propped a Red Chief notebook on my knees and wrote my first words. From that moment, a hunger for poetry possessed me.

--Jimmy Santiago
Baca

The great composer does not set to work because he is inspired, but becomes inspired because he is working. Beethoven, Wagner, Bach and Mozart settled down day after day to the job in hand with as much regularity as an accountant settles down each day to his figures. They didn't waste time waiting for inspiration.

--Ernest Newman

I do all my writing in bed; everybody knows I do my best work there.

--Mae West

I sometimes doubt that a writer should refine or improve his workroom by so much as a dictionary; one thing leads to another and the first thing you know he has a stuffed chair and is fast asleep in it.

--E. B. White

If you are in difficulties with a book, try the element of surprise: attack it at an hour when it isn't expecting it.

--H. G. Wells

I have never had so many good ideas day after day as when I worked in the garden.

--John Erskine

Wrote one good poem....Began another big one, more abstract, written from the bathtub.

--Sylvia Plath

Neil Simon writes longhand. He talks out loud when he writes. And he rewrites play dozens of times.

--Doug Elfman

Music makes me feel less isolated from the more physically active world outside my door. Music helps focus my thoughts and aids in getting into a good writing groove.

-Mark Harris

Writers, and particularly female writers, have to fight for the conditions they need to work.

--Doris Lessing

I write in a room filled with books, tchotchkes and family snapshots. Over the desk, a poster of Georgia O’Keeffe at 90, wrinkled and fierce, shames me out of my sloth. A chair has a heating pad on it as incentive for the cat to keep me company. For first drafts, four to five hours and a minimum of five pages and then my brain is fried. During revision, I work longer hours.

My ideal routine is: exercise, make tea, write five pages, have lunch, take care of e-mail, etc., then curl up with (somebody else’s) good book. Five days in a row. Real life almost never works out that way, but I keep hoping anyway.

--Gillian Roberts

A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.

--Virginia Woolf

In a hyperactive world, the writing of fiction—and perhaps the reading of it—must seem slow, dull, even pedestrian and oldfangled. I think there is only one way to write fiction—alone in a room, without interruption or any distraction. Have I just described the average younger person’s room? I don’t think so. But the average younger person is multitasking. The rare, unusual, solitary, passionate younger person is writing a poem or a story.

--Paul Theroux

Jonathan Franzen claims such affectations as writing in an ear-muff-and-blindfold-equipped sensory-deprivation chamber.

--Jennie Yabroff

Which brings us to the white page. Mallarmé spoke of the uncertainty with which we face a clean sheet of paper and try, in vain, to record our thoughts on it with some precision. As long as we were feeding paper into a typewriter, this anxiety was still present to our minds, and was revealed in the pointillism of Wite-Out, or even in the dapple of letters that were darker, pressed in confidence, as opposed to the lighter ones, pressed more hesitantly. A page produced on a manual typewriter was like a record of the torture of thought. With the P.C., the situation is altogether different. The screen, a kind of indeterminate space, does not seem violable in the same way as the page. And, because what we write on it is so effortlessly and undetectably erasable, the final text buries the evidence of our struggle, asserting that what we said was what we thought all along. Wershler-Henry suggests that the P.C.—with some help from Derrida and Baudrillard—ushered us into a world in which the difference between true and false is no longer cause for doubt or grief; falsity is taken for granted. I don’t know if he was thinking about the spurious perfection of the computer-generated page, but it would be a useful example.

--Joan Acocella

Those stay-at-home mothers—like AARP members, they've got time to type.
--Linda Hirshman

Tea & biscuits. List. Tea. Tidy up. Stare at list. Tea. Write. Supper. Cry. Read someone else. Moan. Tea. Write. Sleep deep.

--On Twitter
@shonamain

1. Be in the grip of a devastating crush
2. 10pm run
3. Pot of coffee
4. Song on repeat
5. Work until dawn.

--On Twitter
@amykate75

I don't like neat. If you get too neat, you spend the whole time sharpening pencils and you don't write.

--Garry Marshall

With the second pair of children I had, I made plenty of time for them. When I'm writing in my music room and they come barging into the room the way kids do, I put the pencil down and ask them what they'd like to do. I walk them to school. We make music together, read together, go to the park. I understand now how quickly children grow up, and I've written so much music in my life, it doesn't matter. What I know now is the time that we have to be with the people closest to us is never enough.

--Philip Glass

When you're an artist you have to have that selfishness to be alone and create great things to your satisfaction.

--Robert DeNiro

I needed a plan. I figured out that writing time was when Alex was asleep. So the minute I put him down for a nap or he fell asleep in the baby-swing, I went to my desk and started working on something—footnotes, reading, outlining, writing...I learned to do everything else with a baby on my hip.

--Elizabeth Warren

Each time she (Joan Didion) finished a novel she had done so back in her old bedroom at her parents' house—the one she had painted carnation pink during her first year at college, and that had green vines growing up over all the windows, so that the light was filtered.

--Caitlin Flanagan

My writing is done in railroad yards while waiting for a freight, in the fields while waiting for a truck, and at noon after lunch. Towns are too distracting.

--Eric Hoffer

Wherever you write is supposed to be a little bit of a refuge, a place where you can get away from the world. The more closed in you are, the more you're forced back on your own imagination.

—Stephen King

I write about five thousand words a day, when working on a book, about three thousand a day if I'm writing a short story. I take long periods off between projects, when I read a lot, garden, and think about the next book or stories.

--Eric Brown

In my first draft, I never censor myself. I let everything in my head and heart spill out--raw--onto the page. I let it be a mess. I don't worry about grammar or spelling. I just let the ideas flow until I run out of words. Then, in the second draft, I clean up spelling and grammar. I add whatever I forgot to include in the first draft and take out whatever isn't working. In the third draft, I polish sentences and paragraphs for style. I always need a minimum of three drafts for a story or nonfiction work to approach finished form....My ratio of 'throw away' to 'keep' can go as high as 20 to 1.

--Charles Johnson

I do not revise as I write. I just go and go and go until I finish the draft. If I feel there's something I need to take care of, I make a note on a pad and go back and fix it when I'm done.

--Stuart M. Kaminsky

Write about characters you're interested in and let them come to life. If you can't, you're not getting it. If you can't write one page a day, meaning 365 pages a year, which is a reasonable-length novel, then you shouldn't be doing this.

--Stuart M. Kaminsky

I feel that in revision, the writing really begins. Rewriting is something I enjoy--the fact there is something already on the page to work with grants me a kind of confidence. If something already exists, I feel it can't help but improve. I rewrite constantly and feel that first drafts of scenes or discursive prose only very rarely appear close to what I'm looking for. If I'm trying to get a scene down, I don't edit at all and just try to type as fast as I can, without punctuation or space breaks. On a good day, when I reopen the file, I have no recollection of what I wrote, and I'm excited by what is there. It feels like I've been left a present.

--Sheridan Hay

The secret to writing is knowing your own mind and the way it works. As far as advice goes: Get it down, as much and as quickly as you can, and fix it up later. Write every day. When you can't write every day, read as much as you can and take notes of the things that work in the novels of others.

--Sheridan Hay

I thrive on revision, yet another part of the journey of discovery. By the time I finish a book, I've gone over every word, phrase and sentence hundreds of times. By page 300, I practically know the pages by heart. This is especially helpful when I discover, as I always do, that I need to rearrange a scene or give my main character's early words to her antagonist later in the book. What I'm looking for—listening for—is harmony, echoing and unity. I want my language to evolve, my images to resonate, my characters to progress, my action to resolve.

--Kim Barnes

I write when I'm inspired, and I see to it that I'm inspired at nine o'clock every morning.

--Peter de Vries

An outline is crucial. It saves so much time. When you write suspense, you have to know where you're going because you have to drop little hints along the way. With the outline, I always know where the story is going. So before I ever write, I prepare an outline of 40 or 50 pages.

--John Grisham

I try to write a certain amount each day, five days a week. A rule sometimes broken is better than no rule.

--Herman Wouk

When I leave the novel I'm working on for the day, I never complete the last sentence—I quit mid-sentence, and it seems to kick-start me the next time I get back to the chapter.

--Judy Kimball

Stop mythologizing the life of a writer. Don't wait for the muse to whisper in your ear. Don't cultivate an affected personality. Put your butt in a chair and write. A writer is no different than a plumber, a landscaper or a dental hygienist. We are doing what we are called to do and what we are suited for. You don't need to escape to a cabin and write in a parchment diary with a special pen. Sit at a Starbucks or at home or in the middle of traffic and just write.

--Jonathan Maberry

Avoid the 'what ifs' and get a daily discipline going. I've always written starting at about 3 in the morning. I can't produce a coherent sentence after 2 in the afternoon. Know your limits and edit, edit, edit. Then edit again.

--Andrea Kitay

I prefer to write in the morning. Right now I type on antique typewriters. They are a preference, but not a requirement. I don't want to ever feel like any one thing is my magic feather that can be taken away. The thing that helps me most with my morning writing is if I prepare my writing space before I go to bed. If I get the desk cleaned, the pencils sharpened, the coffeemaker loaded--if I can do a straight line from my bed to my writing desk in the morning--it greatly increases the chances that I have of productive writing.

--Tayari Jones

I sometimes go to a library to write because there are other people there, but it's still quiet. Same with coffee shops, where the noise level may be too frenetic for some and comforting to others. If the ambiance and not the actual people is what you are looking for, stream the sounds of a coffee shop.

--Donna Gephart

I'm a feedback junkie. I usually give a draft to several friends, including a novelist who never hesitates to scrawl 'BORING!' in the margins. The struggle then is how to weigh their reactions while remaining true to my writing self.

--Nancy K. Miller

At some point in the middle of a book, you reach a seriously low point where anything else looks more interesting. Heck, even laundry and toilet cleaning seem appealing. But your job is to finish the one you're working on, however much you want to do something else.

--Donna Andrews

Try writing first thing in the morning, the moment you wake up. The dreamier your mind is, the more creative you'll be. Your brain dreams during the night, but it also thinks. We don't get to make use of that sleep-thinking if we don't turn to our work first thing. Make your coffee in a dreamy way. Then move directly to work. Do not check to see if your husband is still breathing.

--Eric Maisel

Get up early. If I wait until I get home from work, then I'm too tired or too hungry or I just want a glass of wine. But if I make myself get up and do it before I start my day, then I can do it. For me, it's really about discipline and time management.

--Molly Birnbaum

Never write for money. It's a good idea to have a job on the side so that you're not forced to compromise on your writing for the sake of money. If you have a job which is paying the bills, then you can be fearless.

--Mridu Khullar
Relph

I love to hike alone with a specific question in mind, and the deal I make with myself is that I can't go home until I figure out the answer. Inevitably, on these walks, the ideas flood in, and when they do, I take my phone out of my pocket, hit the voice memo button and 'write' the scene.

--Susan Henderson

To truly write well about people, issues and the world around you, get out into life. Roll around in it. Travel. Get dirty. Observe. Talk. Listen. Only then go back to your computer, writing nook, typewriter or coffee shop to do the heavy lifting of putting pen to paper.

--Julia Rappaport

Write in the morning. Edit at night. Write what most scares you. It's supposed to be hard. Just when you reach the point of deepest despair is when you will have a breakthrough. Relish the process. Work hard at your craft. Believe in your writing. Don't give up.

--Melissa Coleman

I threw the thesaurus out years ago. I found that every time you look up a word, if you want some word and you can think of an approximately close synonym of it and look it up, you only get cliché usages. It's much better to use a big dictionary and look up derivations and definitions of various usages of a different word.

--James Jones

In the talk of people, especially of those on the streets, lies an endless wealth of story-stuff. Nor is it necessary to go about haunting street corners with a notebook in your pocket and an amplifier in your ear. It is necessary only that you do not stop your ears with smugness or indifference or indolence. Going about your workaday rounds, assuming you're neither in solitary confinement nor a hermit, you'll hear all the words of which people's lives are constituted. And if you listen long enough, the commonest speech will begin to rhyme like poetry. For people never say anything the same way twice; no two of them ever say it the same. The greatest imaginative writer that ever brooded in a lavender robe and a mellowed briar in his teeth, couldn't tell you, though he try for a lifetime, how the simplest strap-hanger will ask the conductor to be let off at the next stop....It is all for the taking. All the manuals by frustrated fictioneers on how to write can't give you the first syllable of reality, at any cost, that any common conversation can. All the classics, read and re-read, can't help you catch the ring of truth as does the word heard firsthand.

--Nelson Algren

While I rewrite heavily as I go along, this is a dangerous procedure for most beginning writers. I have met so many who have spent years rewriting, over and over again, their first 100 pages, so that they never reached page 101, and never will, and have never written a completed book and never will. It is much preferable to write a book through from start to finish, to do it all, and then go back and redo it or revise it, rather than regale one's friends with an eternal work-in-progress.

--Irving Wallace

The most important and hardest thing for any writer to learn is the discipline of sitting down and writing even when you have to spend three days writing bad stuff before the fourth day, when you write something better. If you've been away from what you've been working on even for a day and a half, you have to put in those three days of bad writing to get to the fourth, or you lose the thread, you lose the rhythm. When you are a young writer, those three days are so unpleasant that you tend to think, 'I'll go away until the mood strikes.' Well, you're out of the mood because you're not sitting there, because you haven't had that period of trying to push through till the fourth day when the rhythm comes.

--Joan Didion

I make a very tight outline of everything I write before I write it....By writing an outline you really are writing in a way, because you're creating the structure of what you're going to do. Once I really know what I'm going to write, I don't find the actual writing takes all that long.

--Tom Wolfe

You never have to change anything you got up in the middle of the night to write.

--Saul Bellow

I think that the joy of writing a novel is the self-exploration that emerges and also that wonderful feeling of playing God with the characters. When I sit down at my writing desk, time seems to vanish...I think the most important thing for a writer is to be locked in a study.

--Erica Jong

Nothing's a better cure for writer's block than to eat ice cream right out of the carton.

--Don Roff

The best thing I think a writer can do—a young would-be writer—is to learn to do something besides write, to get some experience in the world, something as romantic, perhaps, as the Peace Corps, or something as practical as being doctor, lawyer, or Indian chief. The American writer is an isolated man; he's morally isolated from other Americans. He needs a sense of cause or responsibility to others. He's caught in a life which, if he make a living by his writing, means that he doesn't run in rush-hour traffic, he had no responsibility to staff. While he is undoubtedly doing something of importance, something socially useful, he has a sense of isolation. The result can become, as one novel follows the next, the hollow echo of words, not the resounding echo of life.

--Herbert Gold

I have a cheat-sheet for each one of my characters about their personality, the way they look, etc. So there is no possible way that I could have writer's block.

--R. L. Stine

The thing that impacts my work the most is the 'micro.' I had a 1958 Sears catalog and if I would get stumped with a scene or with a character, I could flip through it and notice that the ladies were all wearing gloves, and they carried handbags and they wore hats. And if I wondered if people had big metal garbage cans in their garages in 1958, I could go to a Sears catalog and see that, yes, they did, and this is what it costs.

--Lori Roy

His [William Styron] prose, laid down in an elegant hand on yellow legal pads with Venus Velvet No. 2 pencils, came at a trickle. He labored over every word, editing as he went, to produce manuscripts that, when he placed the final period, needed very little in the way of revision.

--Alexandra Styron

Benjamin Franklin took morning 'air baths' in the nude while reading and writing.

--*The Writer*

I'm writing in the van as we drive. These guys are playing music and watching television. It doesn't bother me that much. I put headphones on and tune it out and go to work. I'm not one of these people who needs birds tweeting and beautiful lakes.

--James McBride

Sometimes that's a year, sometimes it's 18 months, where all I'm doing is taking notes. I'm reconstructing the story from the back to the front so that I know where the front is.

--John Irving

Can you love a typewriter as you love a pen? They save time and trouble, which is true, but a book needs time and trouble.

--Rumer Godden

The hardest part about being a writer is that you don't have to do it ever. You're not going to a factory. There's no time clock. It's just you and your computer, and you could walk away any time and make a peanut butter sandwich or 10. The best way to deal with that is to not have peanut butter in your home. The truth is the fundamental discipline that is just as important as any specific writing skill, [and that] is the discipline of sitting down and doing it. That's where most people fail at becoming a professional writer.

--Dave Barry

Write every day without fail, even if it's only for half an hour, even if you're savagely hung over and your grandmother has just fallen out of a third story window.

--Tom Robbins

If I could I would always work in silence and obscurity, and let my efforts be known by their results.

--Emily Bronte

For me, inspiration isn't a fount constantly bubbling over—more like a trickling stream, really. I've found that I write best when I give my mind the chance to wander and my ideas the time to process. And I'm often at my most creative when I'm knitting. Something about the rhythmic, comforting sound of clicking needles, the graceful motion of looping yarn—up, around, down, through—is conducive to my creativity.

--Rachel Randall

Being a good writer is 3% talent and 97% not being distracted by the internet.

—Ashi Labouisse

If I can rip my lips off on a chili lime pistachio while sniffing a lemon ginger soap and toying with the sleeves of my biggest cardigan, the words come roaring out.

--Lydia Netzer

While it's important to write every day if possible, writers should also be flexible and roll with life's punches. It's true that if you have a set schedule, there's more of a writing flow, but I think it's necessary to write at other odd times during the day (or night) so that you don't get boxed in by your schedule and can write no other time. Don't restrict yourself to your own cozy writing corner. Be able to write on the go, on the back of napkins, late at night, on lunch breaks and days and weeks apart, if necessary. Train yourself to write anywhere and everywhere, so you're not tied to a single muse.

--Eleanor Hyde

I knew I was living 'the writer's life' when I watched a neighbor digging his car out to drive to work after a snowstorm—and all I had to do was walk to my home office and turn on my computer.

--Penny Thomas

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once described how he composed an entire 300-line poem about Kubla Khan while in an opiate-induced, dreamlike state, and began writing it down when he awoke; he said he then lost most of it when he got interrupted and called away on an errand—thus the finished poem he published was but a fragment of what originally came to him in his dreamlike state.

--Nancy C. Andreasen

It is during this nap that I get a lot of my work done. I find that when the ideas come to me, they come as I'm falling asleep, they come as I'm waking up, they come if I'm sitting in the tub. I don't normally take baths...but sometimes I'll just go in there and have a think.

—Unknown

Alright, let's establish one firm rule: from when I get up—at 7 or 7:30—until, say, 12:30...allowing one break for a modest, circumscribed, abrupt meal of porridge or eggs at about 10:30, nothing else will be allowable—no cooking, no cleaning, no walking, no talking or playing, etc.

--Lydia Davis

I've always found it best to have a routine. I go to my study at the same time every day and climb into my bay window. I may not be inspired every day, but on the days I am, I need to be in place to write. If I'm not particularly inspired, I'll revise or do research or correspondence.

—Diane Ackerman

In a nervous frenzy, I fling words as if flinging mud at a wall. Blurt out, heave out, babble out something—anything—as a first draft.

—John McPhee

I am writing in the garden. To write as one should of a garden one must write not outside it or merely somewhere near it, but in the garden.

—Frances Hodgson
Burnett

You must write every single day of your life. You must read dreadful dumb books and glorious books, and let them wrestle in beautiful fights inside your head, vulgar one moment, brilliant the next. You must lurk in libraries and climb the stacks like ladders to sniff books like perfumes and wear books like hats upon your crazy heads. I wish you a wrestling match with your Creative Muse that will last a lifetime. I wish craziness and foolishness and madness upon you. May you live with hysteria, and out of it make fine stories—science fiction or otherwise. Which finally means, may you be in love every day for the next 20,000 days. And out of that love, remake a world.

—Ray Bradbury

Enjoy writing late into the night/morning while the rest of the world feels like it's sleeping. There's peace in it.

—Sofia Fionda

I have this little litany of things they can do. And the first one, of course, is to write—every day, no excuses. It's so easy to make excuses. Even professional writers have days when they'd rather clean the toilet than do the writing.

—Octavia Butler

Before I start writing, I always take down a book by E. B. White, and I read a few paragraphs to get in the mood. White has the sound, the attitude that I aspire to.

—Barry Newman

I'm a rude guest, I'm rude to friends, I drift off a lot, I just ignore people because all of a sudden I get caught up in an idea. My friends are used to it—*Oh, Harlan's going off to la-la land.*

—Harlan Coben

I tend to revise each day's writing the day after, and then to revise each chapter before going on, and then, finally, to revise the entire book.

—David C. Taylor

At the end of every writing day, I put everything down, then I start the next day, going back about 10 pages or looking at what I wrote the day before, and making minor edits to reacquaint myself with the work. I always do that. And then I'll do some minor polishing before I move on to the next section.

—Cynthia Bond

I do most of my writing in coffee shops—there are too many distractions at home. I tend to sit for two-to three-hour stretches and write. I start by reading over the previous day's work, which I tweak a bit before moving on. I'll go home to eat lunch, do office work or household chores, maybe get in a little exercise. If my schedule allows, I'll do another coffee shop session in the afternoon before picking my son up from school.

—Brenda Scott
Royce

Every few days I'll upload my manuscript-in-progress to my Kindle, and use its text-to-speech tool to have the draft read to me while I'm driving, stuck in L.A. traffic. Hearing your work read aloud is really helpful—in catching typos, mulling over word choice or just listening to the flow and pacing of the text. At red lights, I jot notes on what's working and what's not, and start the next day by making those edits.

—Brenda Scott
Royce

Guard your writing time like a dragon's gold. My husband and I live in a one-bedroom apartment, and my studio doubles as our kitchen table. I made a tag that reads 'Stay away from me, and stay way from my desk'...to hang over the back of the chair so that my husband knows not to start a conversation. When that hour is done, I take off my headphones and give him a hug so he knows I'm back in the 'real world.'

—Libby Cudmore

Whenever your friends ask, 'Where do you find the time?' you'll be able to smile and say, 'I *make* the time.'

—Libby Cudmore

I don't believe in inspiration. I believe that you sit at your desk, and you push your pencil around, and you feel lousy about yourself for a while, and eventually, you just start writing. Everyone I know who's lucky in this business is lucky because they're working really hard, and then good stuff happens.

—Dinty W. Moore

When writing your first draft, being busy is key. It may feel frustrating at first, but having daily writing periods curtailed by chores, family and other distractions actually *helps* you get the thing done. This is partly because the hectic pace forces you to type with a fleet-fingered desperation. But it's mostly because noveling in the midst of a chaotic life makes 'book time' a treat rather than an obligation. It's a small psychological shift, but it makes all the difference in the world.

—Chris Baty

My passions drives me to the typewriter every day of my life, and they have driven me there since I was 12. So I never have to worry about schedules. Some new thing is always exploding in me, and it schedules me; I don't schedule it. It says: Get to the typewriter right now and finish this.

—Ray Bradbury

The secret to being a writer is that you have to write. It's not enough to think about writing or to study literature or plan a future life as an author. You really have to lock yourself away, alone, and get to work.

—Augusten
Burroughs

One of the things I've done as a writer is to learn more words. I do that by reading widely and in all disciplines. I read art criticism. I read science. I read psychology. As I have done that over a lifetime, I know more and more words. One of my anxieties when I first started writing was that my language seemed too plain to address subjects that were complicated. As I have been able to learn more words, it's easier to paint a scene that might seduce the reader into watching that scene, and then more words for the speaker to speak so that the psychology becomes more nuanced.

—Alicia Anstead

If you're waiting to make stuff because you lack the perfect pen or paper or subject or block of time...get over it. We all make crap every day. If we didn't we'd die. Or at least be really cranky.

—Danny Gregory

If you're a plotter, your approach to writing a novel is similar to a military campaign: You set up the logistics and supply lines in advance, and by the time your fingers actually touch the keyboard, you have the entire battle mapped out, blow-by-blow. Pantsers, on the other hand, just start writing. They strap on a pirate costume, shout, 'Avast!' and swing into the story with wild abandon.

—Jeff Somers

A writer's location can greatly affect the final product, and each one has preferences and process. Picture Holzman in her shed-turned-backyard writing retreat. It's a small, comfortable space that her husband...created. No phone, just a computer and her imagination....'What I tend to do these days is a combo platter. I get to a point where I get a little stir crazy, and I don't like to be only in one place. Sometimes I write sitting or lying on my bed. That tends to be a thing I do. A lot...' Or she will visit the freelance writer's trustworthy retreat—the coffee shop...'I'm around people who—hopefully—aren't going to talk to me. They are busy doing their thing. I like to have a quiet buzz around me that doesn't involve me. I like music. Sometimes I'll get obsessed with certain music that I'll play during a project. There isn't any one way.'

—Aubrey Everett on
Winnie
Holzman

The best time to plan a book is while you're doing the dishes.

—Agatha Christie

There is no way that writers can be tamed and rendered civilized or even cured. The only solution known to science is to provide the patient with an isolation room, where he can endure the acute stages in private and where food can be poked in to him with a stick.

—Robert A. Heinlein

I have a pattern of falling into routines that seem to decline in their productivity over time. As a result, I have to revise my routines to maintain productivity. Changing my routines might mean writing at different times of day, shifting from morning to afternoon writing, or shifting the locations where I write. Of course, if you have a routine for writing that works, don't fix what ain't broke. But you may still want to experiment. Perhaps you're not as productive as you think you are, or not as productive as you are capable of being.

—Nate Kreuter

Personally, I find different writing environments suited to different stages of my writing process, particularly when it comes to scholarly writing. I like to do initial drafting amongst the bustle and energy of a coffee shop, and need the solitude and quiet of my home office to undertake revisions and hone my ideas and prose until they are presentable.

—Nate Kreuter

One wants a room with no view, so imagination can meet memory in the dark.

—Annie Dillard

Though Shakespeare never, as far as we know, dreamed up a poem, he apparently did compose with great speed and fluency, and did little revision. Dryden, too, came to have more and more readiness so that, as he says, the thoughts outran the pen. The French poet Bonnard records that when he composed, all the words seemed to crowd in at the same time so that he had the impression of having a thousand voices. But one part of the same poem may be composed in almost a flash and another part may require long and tedious effort. A. E. Housman...was accustomed to compose on his afternoon walk, when he was a little drowsy from lunch and beer and his mind was relaxed and free for the movement of association. Under these circumstances, sometimes stanzas, or even whole poems, would come almost in a flash, sometimes merely the germs of poems which had to be developed later.

—Cleanth Brooks and
Robert Penn
Warren

There's no use just sitting down and waiting for an inspiration, though. You've got to play along. The main thing you've got to do is preserve your vitality. A couple of days of complete rest and solitude helps. Not seeing anybody. I even conserve my emotions. 'I'm not going to get excited about anybody or anything,' I say, 'until I get this gag worked out.' I go along that way, living a quiet and righteous life, and then I stay out late one night, and have a couple of drinks—perhaps all night—and the next morning the reserve pours out. But you've got to have the reserve. Dissipation is no use except as a release. You've been damming it up inside of you, and all of a sudden you say: 'Oh, here it is!' And then you go to work.

—Charlie Chaplin

One of the best accounts of the creative process, of the way in which the parts become related to each other and to an envisaged whole, occurs in a letter sometimes attributed to Mozart: 'My ideas come as they will, I don't know how, all in a stream. If I like them I keep them in my head, and people say that I often hum them over to myself. Well, if I can hold on to them, they begin to join on to one another, as if they were bits that a pastry cook should joint together in his pantry. And now my soul gets heated, and if nothing disturbs me the piece grows larger and brighter until however long it is, it is all finished at once in my mind, so that I can see it at a glance, as if it were a pretty picture or a pleasing person. Then I don't hear the notes one after another, as they are hereafter to be played, but it is as if in my fancy they were all at once. And that *is* a revel (*das ist nun ein Schmaus*). While I'm inventing, it all seems to me like a fine vivid dream; but that hearing it all at once (when the invention is done), that's the best. What I have once so heard I forget not again, and perhaps this is the best gift that God has granted me.'

—Cleanth Brooks and
Robert Penn
Warren

Didion feels that it is necessary to sleep in the same room as her book. In Didion's own words, 'That's one reason I go home to Sacramento to finish things. Somehow the book doesn't leave you when you're right next to it.'

—*The Paris Review*

I even got rid of my typewriter. It was a nice one, but I hate to type. When I started writing I found that I was thinking more about my typing than what I was going to say, so I wrote it long hand.

—Beverly Cleary

The idea that creative endeavor and mind-altering substances are entwined is one of the great pop-intellectual myths of our time. The four twentieth-century writers whose work is most responsible for it are probably Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, and the poet Dylan Thomas. They are the writers who largely formed our vision of an existential English-speaking wasteland where people have been cut off from one another and live in an atmosphere of emotional strangulation and despair. These concepts are very familiar to most alcoholics; the common reaction to them is amusement. Substance-abusing writers are just substance abusers—common garden-variety drunks and druggies, in other words. Any claims that the drugs and alcohol are necessary to dull a finer sensibility are just the usual self-serving bullshit. I've heard alcoholic snowplow drivers make the same claim, that they drink to still the demons. It doesn't matter if you're James Jones, John Cheever, or a stew bum snoozing in Penn Station; for an addict, the right to the drink or drug of choice must be preserved at all costs. Hemingway and Fitzgerald didn't drink because they were creative, alienated, or morally weak. They drank because it's what alkie's are wired up to do. Creative people probably *do* run a greater risk of alcoholism and addiction than those in some other jobs, but so what? We all look pretty much the same when we're puking in the gutter.

—Stephen King

If you want to refurbish your grammar, go to your local used-book store and find a copy of *Warriner's English Grammar and Composition*—the same book most of us took home and dutifully covered with brown paper shopping-bags when we were sophomores and juniors in high school. You'll be relieved and delighted, I think, to find that almost all you need is summarized on the front and back endpapers of the book.

—Stephen King

I like to work longhand, actually; the only problem is that, once I get jazzed, I can't keep up with the lines forming in my head and I get frazzled.

—Stephen King

Anthony Trollope...wrote for two and a half hours each morning before leaving for work. This schedule was ironclad. If he was in mid-sentence when the two and a half hours expired, he left that sentence unfinished until the next morning. And if he happened to finish one of his six-hundred-page heavyweights with fifteen minutes of the session remaining, he wrote **The End**, set the manuscript aside, and began work on the next book.

—Stephen King

My schedule is pretty clear-cut. Mornings belong to whatever is new—the current composition. Afternoons are for naps and letters. Evenings are for reading, family, Red Sox games on TV, and any revisions that just cannot wait. Basically, mornings are my prime writing time.

—Stephen King

When I'm not working, I'm not working at all, although during those periods of full stop I usually feel at loose-ends with myself and have trouble sleeping. For me, not working is the real work. When I'm writing, it's all the playground, and the worst three hours I ever spent there were still pretty damned good.

—Stephen King

You can read anywhere, almost, but when it comes to writing, library carrels, park benches, and rented flats should be courts of last resort—Truman Capote said he did his best work in motel rooms, but he is an exception; most of us do our best in a place of our own.

—Stephen King

I work to loud music—hard-rock stuff like AC/DC, Guns 'n Roses, and Metallica have always been particular favorites—but for me the music is just another way of shutting the door. It surrounds me, keeps the mundane world out. When you write, you want to get rid of the world, do you not? Of course you do. When you're writing, you're creating your own worlds.

—Stephen King

The greatest difficulty is the actual writing. It is always easier to do something else. Dull, awful jobs like laundry, ironing and weeding suddenly feel like an urgent priority when you're looking at a blank page that needs to be filled with a couple of thousand words before you can sit back and breathe deeply....Writing is my joy, but not always; much of the time it's my job, and I have to write whether I feel like it or not, whether inspiration strikes or not.

—Jessica Strawier

Motivated authors sacrifice TV time, sleep, hobbies, and even family time.

—Gudjon Bergmann

The true writer, the born writer, will scribble words on scraps of litter, the back of a bus ticket, on the wall of a cell.

—David Nicholls

What actually happens in a writer's mind when he gets through fiddling and fuming and sits down to tackle the job must always remain a secret between himself and his Demon. Then preliminary horrors and shufflings are a valid part of the human comedy. There are innumerable ways of postponing. Some sit on the floor and begin dusting the books on the lower shelves, where they usually find 'The Pentecost of Calamity' or 'The Cradle of the Deep' and re-read it entire. Others get into pajamas and trim their toe-nails, or lock themselves into an office building with a bottle of Bisquit Dubouce. Homer Croy has remarked that his form of trifling is tinkering with his typewriter. 'I have the best-cleaned typewriter in the world,' he says, rather ashamed.

—Christopher Morley

I prefer working in a small room. We have a family joke about it: In a small room thoughts grow great; in a great room thoughts grow small.

—Lucien Price

My counsel is to force nothing and rather to trifle and sleep away all unproductive days and hours, than on such days to compose something that will afterwards give no pleasure.

—Goethe

Even if I'm happy with the first draft (as happy as anyone can be with a first draft, usually it's just relief at having finished something), I usually rewrite the entire thing, even if I keep the majority of it the same. I print it out, I mark it up and retype everything. It feels terribly inefficient most of the time, but I've found that I can't just jump into a piece and add a scene or change a character's action. I need to write my way up to it, and I find that most of the time any change has a ripple effect across the piece.

—Stephanie Danler

Always carry a note-book. And I mean always. The short-term memory only retains information for three minutes; unless it is committed to paper you can lose an idea for ever.

—Will Self

If you can't stand your own company alone in a room for long hours, or, when it gets tough, the feeling of being in a locked cell, or, when it gets tougher still, the vague feeling of being buried alive--then don't be a writer.

—Graham Swift

Don't panic. Midway through writing a novel, I have regularly experienced moments of bowel-curdling terror, as I contemplate the drivel on the screen before me and see beyond it, in quick succession, the derisive reviews, the friends' embarrassment, the failing career, the dwindling income, the repossessed house, the divorce . . . Working doggedly on through crises like these, however, has always got me there in the end. Leaving the desk for a while can help. Talking the problem through can help me recall what I was trying to achieve before I got stuck. Going for a long walk almost always gets me thinking about my manuscript in a slightly new way. And if all else fails, there's prayer. St Francis de Sales, the patron saint of writers, has often helped me out in a crisis. If you want to spread your net more widely, you could try appealing to Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, too.

—Sarah Waters

Mostly writing requires massive dedication, a whole lot of time spent alone, way too much sitting, countless hours spent thinking hard, and unending and occasionally painful dedication to forming ideas and laboring over the production of sentences, paragraphs, scenes, dialogue, punctuation, and all the elements that go into writing a novel, a play, a screenplay, or a poem. When we're not writing, we're thinking, plotting, imagining, or editing, which can be far more tedious than cranking out first drafts.

—Susan Reynolds

Know something about the world, and by this I mean the world outside of books. This might require joining the Marines, or working on an oil rig or as a hash slinger at a truck stop in Kentucky. Know what it smells like out there. If everything you write smells like a library, then your prospective audience will be limited to those who like the smell of libraries.

—Douglas Wilson

Folding the laundry, completing another project at work, or watching television for the next hour doesn't build your writing muscles. It only leaves them flabby.

—Rob Bignell

You can read in the space of a coffin, and you can write in the space of a toolshed meant for mowers and spades.

—Annie Dillard

There may be a Nurse Ratched-like listing of things that must be done right this moment: foods that must come out of the freezer, appointments that must be canceled or made, hairs that must be tweezed. But you hold an imaginary gun to your head and make yourself stay at the desk.

—Anne Lamott

Don't write in public places. In the early 1990s I went to live in Paris. The usual writerly reasons: back then, if you were caught writing in a pub in England, you could get your head kicked in, whereas in Paris, *dans les cafés* . . . Since then I've developed an aversion to writing in public. I now think it should be done only in private, like any other lavatorial activity.

—Geoff Dyer

Remember, if you sit at your desk for 15 or 20 years, every day, not counting weekends, it changes you. It just does. It may not improve your temper, but it fixes something else. It makes you more free.

—Anne Enright

Find your best time of the day for writing and write. Don't let anything else interfere. Afterwards it won't matter to you that the kitchen is a mess.

—Esther Freud

My imagination is nourished by old books, old bones, fossils, feathers, paintings, photographs, museums of every kind and size, microscopes and telescopes, plants and birds; I like to learn things and...all this information feeds my fiction.

—Andrea Barrett

Starting at 11 p.m., he [Fyodor Dostoyevsky] wrote in candlelit solitude, tolerating no interruptions. Around dawn he would retire, burrowing into the bed in his study, with his overcoat laid on top of the sheets. He slept until noon. He adored super-strong tea, scalding coffee, Kiev jam, chocolate, and blue raisins.

—Jeffrey Tayler

Having deadlines helps because people are constantly breathing down my neck, and tapping their toes waiting for pages. So I just have to work nine to five. If I didn't have deadlines then I might be more of a golden hour kind of guy, writing from eight to noon and calling it a day, but that's just not the way I work right now.

—David Lindsay-
Abaire

Joyce Carol Oates described scribbling tomes in notebooks; when she ran out of blank paper, she'd turn the spiral pad upside down and continued in the other direction.

—Candy Schulman

When you work hard all day with your head and know you must work again the next day, what else can change your ideas and make them run on a different plane like whiskey?

—Ernest Hemingway

I filled loose-leaf pages with my narratives throughout junior high. I crafted my own teen gang-filled version of *West Side Story*...and peppered the prose with steamy romance, gratuitous violence, and a plethora of four-letter words. Aghast, my mother found it, read it, and decreed it as trash. She forbade me from writing, so I spun my yarns surreptitiously while pretending to do homework. I was a closet scribe, unable to stop.

—Candy Schulman

The first American writer to submit a typed manuscript to his publisher was Mark Twain, who was no doubt motivated by the fact that his first published story had appeared in *Harper's* under the byline 'Mark Swain,' a handwritten 'Twain' having been misread by the magazine's typesetter.

—*At Random*

Gertrude Stein wrote for only 30 minutes a day—and had a wonderful career to show for it.

—Debbie Harmsen

On a typical day, Hunter S. Thompson rose at 3 p.m. Throughout the day, he would consume at least four glasses of Chivas Regal, numerous cigarettes, two or three coffees, seven hits of cocaine, enough grass to 'take the edge off,' two beers, two margaritas, two cheeseburgers, two orders of fries, tomatoes, coleslaw, taco salad, onion rings, carrot cake, ice cream, a bean fritter, a snow cone, and some acid. By the time Thompson was ready to write, it would be midnight.

—Emma Bullen

Honoré de Balzac's writing routine went...like this: bed after eight in the evening, get up at two in the morning, work until eight, sleep from eight until nine thirty, work until four, occasionally go out for dinner....50 cups of coffee... to fuel his creativity.

—Emma Bullen

Writing is something that you don't know how to do. You sit down and it's something that happens, or it may not happen. So, how can you teach anybody how to write? It's beyond me, because you yourself don't even know if you're going to be able to. I'm always worried, well, you know, every time I go upstairs with my wine bottle. Sometimes I'll sit at that typewriter for fifteen minutes, you know. I don't go up there to write. The typewriter's up there. If it doesn't start moving, I say, well this could be the night that I hit the dust.

—Charles Bukowski

The monotony and solitude of a quiet life stimulates the creative mind.

—Albert Einstein

These days I like to write by candlelight. When I dip one of my quill pens into an inkwell, I feel like I'm communing through time, sharing the thoughts of others who came before me—medieval monks, maybe. As I sit and write in the relative dark, in the same manner in which they wrote, I gain a better understanding of what it meant to solve the problems of their day.

—Neil deGrasse Tyson

Li Po wrote poems on rice paper and floated them down rivers until they sank out of sight. Contemporary poets publish their poems in little magazines. The results are much the same.

--Louis Phillips

A sculptor once said that the way he creates a statue is to cut away all the excess stone until only the statue is left. When I have a first draft on paper, it usually is long and untidy. I work at it for a year to a year-and-a half, tightening the scenes, sharpening the dialogue, and polishing the language. When I feel I cannot do anything more with it, the publisher sees it for the first time.

--Sidney Sheldon

Writing more and more to the sound of music, writing more and more like music. Sitting in my studio tonight, playing record after record, music a stimulant of the highest order, far more potent than wine.

--Anais Nin

Everything great in the world comes from neurotics. They alone have founded our religions and composed our masterpieces. Never will the world know all it owes to them nor all they have suffered to enrich us. We enjoy lovely music, beautiful paintings, a thousand intellectual delicacies, but we have no idea of their cost, to those who invented them, in sleepless nights, tears, spasmodic laughter, rashes, asthma, epilepsies, and the fear of death, which is worse than all the rest.

--Marcel Proust

After joyfully working each morning, I would leave off around midday to challenge myself to a footrace. Speeding along the sunny paths of the Jardin du Luxembourg, ideas would breed like aphids in my head—for creative invention is easy and sublime when air cycles quickly through the lungs and the body is busy at noble tasks.

—Roman Payne

I need solitude for my writing; not 'like a hermit'—that wouldn't be enough—but like a dead man.

—Franz Kafka

I wrote four hours a day everyday of the week, in the mornings and early afternoon. then I'd go to the gym and run on a treadmill for an hour, which was a very important part of the process....I like air conditioning. After 15 minutes or so, the runner's high would kick in and all kinds of ideas would start emerging in my mind about the next day's writing.

—Jack Smith

...the challenge of finding that perfect word—and many times, there is that one perfect word—which too often eludes us writers until 3 in the morning, when we sit up like a sprung jackknife and claw in the dark for paper and a pen.

—Connie Schultz

No poems can please for long or live that are written by water drinkers.

—Horace

No one, ever, wrote anything as well even after one drink as he would have done with out it.

—Ring Lardner

Knitting is very conducive to thought. It is nice to knit a while, put down the needles, write a while, then take up the sock again.

—Dorothy Day

A work-room should be like an old shoe; no matter how shabby, it's better than a new one.

—Willa Cather

The seasonal urge is strong in poets. Milton wrote chiefly in winter. Keats looked for spring to wake him up (as it did in the miraculous months of April and May, 1819). Burns chose autumn. Longfellow liked the month of September. Shelley flourished in the hot months. Some poets, like Wordsworth, have gone outdoors to work. Others, like Auden, keep to the curtained room. Schiller needed the smell of rotten apples about him to make a poem. Tennyson and Walter de la Mare had to smoke. Auden drinks lots of tea, Spender coffee; Hart Crane drank alcohol. Pope, Byron, and William Morris were creative late at night. And so it goes.

—Helen Bevington

I believe that taking my attention off my writing and putting it elsewhere can benefit the writing. I think that's the subconscious at work. It's why I have epiphanies when I'm driving or riding my horse or taking a shower.

—Susan Mihalic

I always write with music. It takes me a while to figure out the right piece of music for what I'm working on. Once I figure it out, that's the only thing I'll play.

—Kate DiCamillo

Hamlin Garland got up at half past five, brewed a pot of coffee and made toast on an electric gadget in his study and was at work by six. At nine o'clock he was through with work for the day. Then he breakfasted, read the morning paper and attended to his personal mail.

—Lee Shippey

I like quiet. No, I love quiet. But a whole lot of quiet can drive a person mad. So before I lose what precious few social skills I have, I'm trying to dust off the coping mechanisms that sustained me as a work-from-home freelancer. I'm on social media more. I engage with writers more. I take my dog—my favorite coworker of all time—for sunny walks on my lunch break. I keep in touch with friends, I pay close attention to my mental health, and, most importantly, I get the heck out of the house once a week. Coffee shops. Libraries. The local diner. If there's a good Wi-Fi signal, I will be there. As someone who tends to avoid social interactions at all costs, I didn't realize how much time spent with the real, live people is key to sustaining my own mental health. And yes, it's noisy in public. Yes, I get less done when baristas are shouting out orders....But I also smile and thank the baristas when they call out my order.

—Nicki Porter

James Joyce sold tweed jackets to fund his career. William Faulkner worked as a postman and power plant manager. Ken Kesey worked as a night cleaner in a mental hospital. While our civilization has clearly benefited from these individuals using words to express human behavior, our reality demonstrates that this is not always financially compensated. These men needed outside work to create their words.

—K. L. Romo

I'm a longhand drafter. Each day, I open up a dedicated notebook and write, by hand, the first draft of the novel. When I get to the actual typing of that draft into my word processing program, I'm effectively working on my second draft. And that's when the word count really begins to pile up, when I'm revising the first draft on the fly, adding details to make the characters shine, and polishing actions and scenes so they really count, and add causality to each other. And when I get through each longhand-drafted page after copying it into the word processor and adding it on my computer, I take my pen and I cross out the longhand page, with great gusto and cheer and a totally outsized sense of accomplishment.

—Yi Shun Lai

I wake up in the morning and my mind starts making sentences, and I have to get rid of them fast—talk them or write them down.

—Ernest Hemingway

I'm not an outliner. I trust the process will take the book where I need to go. You have to really believe you're going to get to that place. It's less efficient than outlining, but it keeps it interesting.

—Julie Buxbaum

I set a schedule for myself: between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m., I'd write aimlessly, no project in mind. But unlike in the past, the rule was: only one mug of black coffee. The refill was the thing I had to look forward to when I was done. The first week, I wrote garbage and knew it was garbage. And then one morning I woke up and wrote a 1,600-word essay, start to finish. That morning felt magical. But the essay didn't emerge mysteriously or suddenly from my unconscious mind. It took a solid week of writing badly. That's an important lesson—about as important, I think, as having a routine; let yourself write badly.

—Jeannie Vanasco

Not too long ago I tried to write a story. I got my name and address on the sheet; a title, which stank; and the first sentence: 'The stranger appeared in the doorway.' Then I had to lie down with a wet cloth on my face.

—Dorothy Parker

First, I clean the typewriter. Then I go through my shelves and return all borrowed books. Then I play with my three children. Then, if it's warm, I go for a swim. Then I find some friends to have a drink with. By then, it's time to clean the typewriter again.

—Budd Schulberg

When F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Beautiful and the Damned*, was published, everybody asked his wife Zelda how closely the heroin was modeled after her own career. 'It seems to me,' replied Mrs. Fitzgerald after some thought, 'that on one page I recognized a portion of an old diary of mine which disappeared shortly after my marriage, and also scraps of letters which sound to me vaguely familiar. In fact, Mr. Fitzgerald—I believe that is how he spells his name—seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home.'

—Bennett Cerf

People have no idea what a hard job it is for two writers to be friends. Sooner or later you have to talk about each other's work.

—Anatole Broyard

I have a real aversion to machines. I write with a pen. Then I read it to someone who writes it onto the computer. What are those computer letters made of anyway? Light? Too insubstantial. Paper, you can feel it. A pen. There's a connection. A pen goes exactly at your speed, whereas that machine jumps. And then, that machine is waiting for you, just humming 'uh-huh, yes?'

—Fran Lebowitz

When you write by hand, you don't have the excessive freedom of a computer. When I write down something, I have to be serious about it. I have to ask myself, 'Is this necessary at this point in the book?'

--Pat Conroy

The creative impulse, the thing that gets deep inside me, goes from the brain to the fingertips. When you're writing by hand, even when you're not consciously thinking about it, you're constructing sentences in the best way possible. And I still get the thrill of the clean pad of notepaper and the pencil all sharpened.

—Anita Shreve

I don't have a daily ritual in terms of when I write. I like to write by a window, to look outside as I think, remember, or daydream. I like to write longhand before I start to work with it digitally. There's something about the physical act of putting pen to paper as a poem reveals itself that is unique. Sometimes I get seized by ideas and write for five or six days straight. I write in squalls. Lately, I notice that I'm waking up with clarity and moving into a phase where I write in the morning.

—Kamilah Aisha Moon

My boyfriend got me a computer three years ago. I'll admit it does make things a lot easier. When I was working on a typewriter and I whited out a line, often I would choose a word to go in the space just because it fit. Now I don't have to do that.

—David Sedaris

First, I look to get inspired. For me, I like to read short quotes from famous and respected people, whether current or from hundreds of years ago. These short words of wisdom cause my brain to recharge, and I'm motivated to create.

—Len Saunders

Even in the driest times, I can trigger a nearly uncontrollable flow by thinking of a specific person to whom I'm writing. When I don't know someone personally who can benefit from what I have to say, I imagine a person who needs what I have to say. The more clearly that I imagine the person and his or her life circumstances, the more details and color I can add to my writing.

—Rhonda Sciortino

I walk while I'm working, letting my mind wander as my legs go on autopilot. This is a tactic used by many great thinkers throughout the centuries including Charles Darwin, Ludwig van Beethoven, and even Steve Jobs. Anecdotally, I've found that just by simply taking a reasonable stroll (often just down the corridors of the office and back) it becomes a little easier to think, and a longer walk during lunchtime can really help unblock the brain. Studies back this up as well—Stanford University found creative output increased by an average of 60 percent while walking.

—Jordan Harling

I...listen to video game music or movie soundtracks. These types of music open up my imagination when I'm writing dramatic scenes.

—J. F. Garrard

John Steinbeck....carried bricks for the new Madison Square Garden building.... later he took a winter job as watchmen for an estate seven thousand feet high in the Sierras. There he finished his first novel, *The Cup of Gold*....Frank Yerby, whose *Foxes of Harrow* was on the bestseller lists for a solid year, wrote most of it while serving as a porter in an aircraft factory. 'To put it bluntly,' he says, 'I got many of my best ideas in the washroom.' William Faulkner wrote *Sanctuary* while serving as clerk in the Oxford, Mississippi, post office.

—Bennett Cerf

The fastest writer on record was the late Edgar Wallace, who kept two competent stenographers busy at the same time. He would dictate all morning to one of them, and after lunch, while she went scurrying off to type the material, he would proceed full-steam on an entirely different book with his other secretary. When a lady friend called once to invite him to dinner, his butler is reputed to have answered, 'Mr. Wallace has just begun a new mystery story. Won't you hold on until he is finished it?'

On his way to Hollywood, Wallace pause once in Chicago just long enough to change trains and lunch with a newspaperman. It was the era when the Cicero gangsters were in their heyday, and Wallace had exactly two hours to hear about their most lurid exploits. Aboard 'The Chief' he hauled out his typewriter, and by the time he reached Los Angeles he had completed the script of a three act play called *On the Spot* that was based on the stories the newsman had told him. It ran a solid year in London and made stars of Charles Laughton and Anna May Wong.

—Bennett Cerf

Everyone hates to outline—when I tell kids that I outline every book, they hate it! No one likes to outline—but I can't work without one. I think that's one reason I'm so prolific—I take a week and I plan everything. I do all the thinking beforehand.

—R. L. Stine

Alexandre Dumas undoubtedly was the most prolific [writer of his time]. He wrote and published, according to his own testimony, 12,000 volumes. He once turned out sixty full-length novels in a single year. He said, 'It should be as easy for a novelist to make novels as for an apple tree to make apples,' and he proceeded to prove his point by writing nearly 70,000 pages of fiction in addition to sixty-four plays and innumerable volumes of travel and essays. He was the first and, so far as I know, only famous author to hire a core of ghostwriters and put the production of books on an assembly-line basis. One day he met his son (the author of *Camille*) and asked, 'Have you read my new novel yet?' 'No,' said the son. 'Have you?'

—Bennett Cerf

Hunter S. Thompson once transcribed *The Great Gatsby* just so he could experience what it felt like to write a masterpiece.

—Don Vaughan

I really like to get something done in the morning. You remember those commercials about the army—'we do more by 7 a.m. than most people do all day'—something like that? I want that kind of smug completion. What were you doing at 6 am? Sleeping? I was crying over a blank sheet of copy paper. Game, set, match. Clearly, I am not a morning person, but I force myself to get up and at 'em. Writing early makes me feel virtuous all day and I am all for the illusion of virtue.

—Stephanie Powell
Watts

From the youngest possible age [the Brontë sisters] wrote, at all hours of the day and night, in every corner of the house, on every scrap of paper. They wrote together. They wrote of reach other. The domain of their imagination was a shared space brimming with emotion and fantasy, laid over the everyday world like an invisible map.

—Vanessa Porteous

If you are an incarcerated writer in the state prison library where I work, you know a lot about typewriters. While I haven't used a typewriter since 1979, you are an expert. You understand how to choose the right print wheel, how to install the ribbon, how to change the correction tape. You get stressed when the typewriters act up and make a mess of your work. I don't have the heart to tell you that, no matter how carefully composed, your type written submissions must appear to editors like they surfaced from a mailbag lost in the last century. Writing in prison is like time traveling 40 years into the past. Here, typewriters are in use, not artifacts in a museum.

—Valerie Schultz

I spend about eight months researching and outlining my book.

—Jeffery Deaver

I'll be writing as long as I can hold a pen in my curled, crimped arthritic hands and then I'll dictate it, if it comes to that. They'll have to pry my pen out of my cold, dead fingers—and even then, I'll fight 'em for it. Guaranteed.

—Wanda Lea Brayton

I will go to campus alone dressed in antique silk slips and beat-up cowboy boots and gypsy beads, and I will study poetry. I will sit on the edge of the fountain in the plaza and write.

—Francesca Lia Block

Joy in an old pencil is not absurd.

—May Sarton

Poets write in solitude. I don't, because I have a wife, three kids, and a dog. If you can't write while they are playing baseball, or running around the dining room table, you just never will. Around our house, it is not possible to hope for a quiet day, so I have learned to adapt. You kind of 'extract' your personality while the ironing is being done and the kids are fighting.

—Bruce Cutler

On Saturday morning I settled down at my writing table, a mug of coffee at my side and a wood-cased pencil in my hand. I chose a Blackwing 602, known for its smooth core and fragrant cedar casing. (I'd decided to skip inscribing words on stone or wet clay tablets and start with the next writing technology most closely related to those: graphite.)

Pencil sharpening is an act of beginning. You sit down, you gather yourself, you sharpen. You feel and hear the sharpener working, and you smell that fresh wood. You behold your newly exposed graphite. If the point is sharp, you feel brief anxiety over whether the microscopic, conical top section will break off as you touch it to paper.

I enjoy the deliberateness of the pencil experience. As you write, the point degrades to whatever degree of dullness you feel like tolerating. You rotate the point to take advantage of the wear pattern—every rotation offers a sharper edge.

When you write with a pencil, you are, in a very real sense, drawing. You're laying down the two-dimensional images of words. You can write little or big; with light pressure or heavy; you can print carefully or race along in whatever version of cursive is yours.

—Elizabeth Sims

You don't have to baby a pencil. You can leave it lying around, you can even lose it without too much grief. You can write with in in a canoe or on a mountain ledge, or upside-down while lying in bed. No worries about ink, mechanisms, batteries.

—Elizabeth Sims

The inkstand is full of ink, and the paper lies white and unspotted, in the round of light thrown by a candle. Puffs of darkness sweep into the corners, and keep rolling through the room behind his chair. The air is silver and pearl, for the night is liquid with moonlight.

See how the roof glitters, like ice!

Over there, a slice of yellow cuts into the silver-blue, and beside it stand two geraniums, purple because the light is silver-blue, to-night.

—Amy Lowell

Most of my writing life, to be perfectly honest, is not freaky, old-timey, voodoo-style Big Magic. Most of my writing life consists of nothing more than unglamorous, disciplined labor. I sit at my desk and I work like a farmer, and that's how it gets done. Most of it is not like fairy dust in the least.

—Elizabeth Gilbert

Up in that room I decided that I would write one story about each thing that I knew about. I was trying to do this all the time I was writing, and it was good and severe discipline.

—Ernest Hemingway