

## 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 22<sup>nd</sup>-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. Blur 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



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

Karl...proudly showed them how he jotted down every fact and anecdote onto 3 x 5 cards, which he spread out on his king-size bed when it came time to organize a book or article. 'That way it goes 1, 2, 3. You can't work any other way,' he'd warn, 'or you're going to start procrastinating.

—Franklynn Peterson  
and Judi  
Kesselman-Turkel

There's a block that affects almost every writer we know personally or have read about: that white screen—looking so much like a fallen angel's wing—that you have to fill each day. We all have to devise ways to start or we'll procrastinate forever. Dodi Schultz reorganizes her files first; others file every scrap of paper or make phone calls. We used to write magazine query letters to avoid having to start the day's work on the book. Some friends edit the last page they wrote the day before, or answer a letter to get the mind and fingers moving,. Terry Morris always took a more direct approach: She ended each day in the middle of sentence that demanded an ending the next morning.

—Franklynn Peterson  
and Judi  
Kesselman-Turkel

It's common knowledge that every year a bunch of perfectly mad writers challenge themselves to write 50,000 words in one month—and plenty of them succeed. There are also loads of examples of well-regarded published novels that were composed in face-numbingly short spans of time:

*On the Road* by Jack Kerouac: Three weeks.

*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne: Two and a half days.

*The Gambler* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky: 26 days.

*I, the Jury* by Mickey Spillane: Nine days.

—Jeff Somers

Ian Fleming was a famously fast writer. He wrote the first James Bond novel, *Casino Royale*, in three weeks. But he had a cheat: he wrote the first draft as a skeleton, with only action, dialogue and fundamentals of the story—that's what took three weeks. Then he went back and added details and description. Boiling your novel down to basics is a one way to get huge amounts of story on paper or screen when you only have a few minutes every day.

—Jeff Somers

If there is any secret to my success other than the roll of the genetic dice, it is that I try to write major works that require me to learn something new each time out—German history, linguistics, music composition and technology and so forth.

—Norman Spinrad

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

When I really do not know what I am saying, or how to say it, I'll open these Pentels, these colored Japanese pens, on yellow lined paper, and I'll start off with very tentative colors, very light colors: orange, yellow or tan. ... When my thoughts are more formulated, and I have a sharper sense of trying to say it, I'll go into heavier colors: blues, greens and eventually into black. When I am writing in black, which is the final version, I have written that sentence maybe 12 or 15 or 18 times.

—Gay Talese

I try to keep my space very, very contained, because I feel that inspiration and the spirits and the story and the characters live there for as long as I'm writing.

—Isabel Allende

After any failure or bad thing—when my teeth hurt, or I’m trying to figure something out, or I’m at an impasse in my work, one of the things I do is take a nap. I consider myself one of the world’s great nappers. I’ll set my alarm for ten minutes, and I’m not sure if I fall asleep or not, but I sit there thinking and relax.

—Charles Bock

The only environment the artist needs is whatever peace, whatever solitude, and whatever pleasure he can get at not too high a cost.

—William Faulkner

I wake up around 5am. I have 2–3 cups of coffee. I read and read and read for two hours. I read high quality literary fiction to be inspired, high quality non-fiction about a topic I am fascinated by in order to learn, I read inspirational or spiritual writing to feel that special something inside, and often I will spend some time studying a game. Then I might read the literary fiction some more. At some point, I get the urge or the itch to put the books away. I go to my computer and start to write.

--James Altucher

[My editing] rests on three passes. The first pass is when you write the best chapter you can. The second pass comes later once the whole book (or whole part of the book containing the chapter) is done. During this pass, I come back to the chapter on my computer and cut and tighten. The final pass is when I read through a printed version of the chapter on paper. Reading on paper is necessary if you’re going to root out odd constructions or minor errors.

--Cal Newport

I’m an ‘absolute quiet’ kind of person. If I’m writing at home, and there’s any noise at all, such as my wonderful hubby pattering around and coincidentally clearing his throat, I wear my Peltor Sport Ultimate 10 Hearing Protector Earmuffs. I’m so used to them that when I need to concentrate, I put them on even when there isn’t any noise. Earmuffs are like a signal to my brain—Okay, focus! On planes, I often wear noise canceling headphones.

--Dr. Barbara Oakley

I remember Salman Rushdie telling me how he gives it the first energy of the day. As soon as he gets up, he goes to his office and starts writing. He’s still in his pajamas. He believes there is a ‘little package of creative energy that was nourished by sleep,’ and he doesn’t want to waste it. He works for an hour or two and then goes to brush his teeth. I have a very similar approach. Only I brush my teeth before I start. I guess that’s my pre-writing ritual.

--Cal Fussman

Notebooks have always been big for me, both in the early stages of a new project and as a way to get myself unstuck if I'm struggling. But I have giant, chicken-scratch handwriting, and would always end up jotting down thoughts over half a dozen pages and then never really looking at them again. I have probably fifty illegible notebooks sitting in desk drawers, and I would easily have filled fifty more had I not been introduced to the most elegant solution by a friend, the author Ashley Cardiff: A sketchpad. A 9-by-12-inch artist's sketchpad. This has been my great revelation. It's unlined so I can read my bad handwriting and large enough that I can group several ideas together on the same page. Plus, it gives me an excuse to buy fancy mechanical pencils.

--Liana Maeby

I have never seen anyone outline a book...with roman numerals, the way that we're taught to outline things at school. Some writers use index cards....Some do scene-by-scene outlines which they write out in short paragraphs broken out by chapter. Some make lists of all the events in particular plotlines and then weave the timeline together after. Some start by creating a 'spine' of dialogue which they then fill in and flesh out. Some just know the beginning and the end, believing to know more would be getting in the way of the fun.

—Holly Black

I've got a theory that most writers are either frustrated musicians or painters—and which of them you are depends on whether you write for the ear or the eye. As a former musician and former speechwriter, I definitely write for the ear. I listen to music all the time for inspiration and energy. I tend to make playlists as the sound track for writing different books. They serve as snapshots in time. So, I've got one for Wingnuts—lots of The National, Drive-By-Truckers, Radiohead and Randy Newman—and one for Washington's Farewell that's more classical, jazz, the Americana series by Chris Thile, Yo-Yo Ma and Edgar Meyer and the soundtrack to Hamilton.

--John Avlon

The art of writing involves making as many cups of tea as you can in the time available for writing. Then adding extra time for writing.

—Alan Dapre

Libraries. How I love them. My source of stories. And solitude. Where the musty smell of books greets me like the perfume in our grandmother's embrace. My old branch was two blocks from our London flat, and I went almost daily. The librarian and I both got teary when I said goodbye. And this library is almost as close! I'll get a library card tomorrow and carry back my first installment of books. Maybe I can also find a quiet corner to write in peace.

—Mitali Perkins

There are of writers, the architects and the gardeners. The architects plan everything ahead of time, like an architect building a house. They know how many rooms are going to be in the house, what kind of roof they're going to have, where the wires are going to run, what kind of plumbing there's going to be. They have the whole thing designed and blueprinted out before they even nail the first board up. The gardeners dig a hole, drop in a seed and water it. They kind of know what seed it is, they know if planted a fantasy seed or mystery seed or whatever. But as the plant comes up and they water it, they don't know how many branches it's going to have, they find out as it grows. And I'm much more a gardener than an architect.

—George R. R. Martin

One can never be alone enough when one writes, why there can never be enough silence around one when one writes, why even night is not night enough.

—Susan Cain

I never waited for my Irish Cream coffee to be the right temperature, with a storm happening outside and my fireplace crackling ... I wrote every day, at home, in the office, whether I felt like it or not, I just did it.

—Stephen J. Cannell

I hope I don't write TOO many books! When I look at authors who have written too many books, I wonder to myself 'When did they live?' I certainly want to write BECAUSE I live! I know I don't want to write in order to live! My writing is an overflow of the wine glass of my life, not a basin in which I wash out my ideals and expectations.

—C. JoyBell C.

The difference between wanting to write and having written is one year of hard, relentless labour. It's a bridge you have to build all by yourself, all alone, all through the night, while the world goes about its business without giving a damn. The only way of making this perilous passage is by looking at it as a pilgrimage.

—Shatrujeet Nath

I do not plan my fiction any more than I normally plan woodland walks; I follow the path that seems most promising at any given point, not some itinerary decided before entry.

—John Fowles

I prefer the pen. There is something elemental about the glide and flow of nib and ink on paper.

—James Robertson

I'm a husband, a father of two, a full-time teacher, and so my writing process mostly involves sitting down and writing, any chance I get, anywhere I am, for as long as life will let me. Music helps. Good light helps. I love quiet and coffee when I can get them. But I can write on a bus, in a dentist office's waiting room, in bed with a clip-on booklight, almost anywhere. And I try to do at least some every single day.

—Glen Hirshberg

Writing became such a process of discovery that I couldn't wait to get to work in the morning: I wanted to know what I was going to say.

—Sharon O'Brien

I'm still in bed writing this, lying on my back like an omelette in a pan.

—Alain Bremond-Torrent

I always feel like I should have really interesting answers to questions about my writing process—and one day I'll make something up involving goat bones and virgin's blood—but the truth is, I get up, make coffee, I sit down, and I start writing.

—Alistair Cross

I look out my window a lot.

It's just one of those things that keeps me grounded in this weird, one-with-nature kind of way. I hate curtains. They only gather dust. And I hate alarms even more. I enjoy the natural light to whisper across my face in the morning with gentle fingers, not some man-made sound that jars me into life with a harsh slap. It is the quiet moments of the morning that I savor most, in bed, looking out my window. It's when I write my best work.

—R. B. O'Brien

The writing process crushes souls, and all writers seek solace in habits and paraphernalia to help them through the struggle....I, as writers everywhere, struggle with choices—an agreeable ambience, ideal illumination, the proper pencil, and music or silence.

—Dan L. Miller

Sylvia Plath wrote on pink, lovely-textured Smith memorandum pads. Me? I prefer to scroll on the backs of rejections printed on finely-textured stationery from all the best publishing houses. E. L. Doctorow wrote in his attic at a desk facing the wall, while John Cheever preferred the darkened basement of his apartment building, writing next to the furnace. I need sunshine through my window and a view of my neighbors schlepping their backpacks and briefcases through the harsh, winter snow, digging out their cars, and starting their office commute.

—Dan L. Miller

John Steinbeck used only round pencils because hexagonal pencils cut his fingers after a day's use. Round pencils shift in my fingers and lack the gravitas of the hexagon I use only hexagonal pencils for notes and outlines—red pencils for revising words and blue pencils for editing grammar and phrases. Edmond Rostand wrote *Cyrano de Bergerac* in his bathtub. I doze, so my manuscripts would be rejected not by a publisher but by bathwater.

—Dan L. Miller

I write also when not in my home office, and it's usually at social gatherings or events—I'm writing in my head. My wife is the one to nudge me and tell me to stop writing. I jot notes on playbills, I wake in the night to record brilliant ideas delivered in a dream, and I dictate to my iPhone while at a ball game the plot for my next story. My world of writing unfolds most effectively, however, in my home office. I thrive in my sanctuary closed to reality and open to the world of imagination.

—Dan L. Miller

Talking aloud to oneself is usually indicative of a mental malady. Self-talk is also the stock in trade of an essay writer.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

Some writers say they find the writing process lonely. I don't. Yes, it's solitary but when you can escape into a world of your own making in the company of potentially great characters, you're not aware you're alone.

—Stewart Stafford

Perfectionism is the enemy of the author. There is a difference between good writing habits and perfectionism. The author who displays good writing habits delivers on time. The aspiring author who is prone to perfectionism will likely never fin....

—Gudjon Bergmann

In the seventies I used to work in the bedroom of my flat at a little table. I worked in longhand with a fountain pen. I'd type out a draft, mark up the typescript, type it out again. Once I paid a professional to type a final draft, but I felt I was missing things I would have changed if I had done it myself. In the mid-eighties I was a grateful convert to computers. Word processing is more intimate, more like thinking itself. In retrospect, the typewriter seems a gross mechanical obstruction. I like the provisional nature of unprinted material held in the computer's memory—like an unspoken thought. I like the way sentences or passages can be endlessly reworked, and the way this faithful machine remembers all your little jottings and messages to yourself. Until, of course, it sulks and crashes.

— Ian McEwan

Dear music,

I'm writing you this letter to thank you.

Thank you for when you're here, you catalyse my imagination.

Thank you for this ineffable thing you bring, which makes the experience of writing so much better.

Thank you for making real and palpable what is not.

Thank you for being generous. Humans rarely are. You give breath to my characters. Moreover you give a mainspring to my tears, my laughs and my heart-bleedings. Actually, you give a purpose to Life, even if it's just the one I created in my head, in the deepest abyss of my fantasies. Thank you for not judging me for that, by the way.

Thank you because you make me wanna love. Life, people, nature... Everything. I can even say that sometimes, you make me fall in love of my own protagonists, my own scenes, my own jokes... I sound mad, I know, but believe me, I'm not. Well, not completely.

Thank you for allowing me to travel without spending a cent. That's pretty cool of you. I've even been in places never visited. Places only you and I will ever know.

Thank you for your loyalty. I know I can rely on you every time, in every places. If I could live forever, I'd stay with you for a thousand year at least, until my dreams, as crazy and odd as they may be, became more authentic than my own reality.

'Cause you know, reality sucks.

Love, a girl who really likes you.

—Alaska Berry

The structured form of an outline helps us to keep track of all plot lines in a series, and of course, this diminishes the chance of plot holes for us.

—Lydia Larue

A writer needs solitude: moments that he can spend in introspection and in reflection. These moments make him pensive and thoughtful and help him write his thoughts with clarity. A life of devotion to one's passion gives us meaning to our life.

—Avijeet Das

You need the devotion to your work that a priest of God has for his.

—Ernest Hemingway



I have written various words, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, and bits of dismantled sentences, fragments of expressions and descriptions and all kinds of tentative combinations. Every now and again I pick up one these particles, these molecules of texts, hold it up to the light and examine it carefully, turn it in various directions, lean forward and rub or polish it, hold it up to the light again, rub it again slightly, then lean forward and fit it into the texture of the cloth I am weaving. Then I stare at it from different angles, still not entirely satisfied, and take it out again and replace it with another word, or try to fit it into another niche in the same sentence, then remove, file it down a tiny bit more, and try to fit it in again, perhaps at a slightly different angle. Or deploy it differently. Perhaps farther down the sentence. Or at the beginning of the next one. Or should I cut it off and make it into a one-word sentence on its own?

I stand up. Walk around the room. Return to the desk. Stare at it for a few moments or longer, cross out the whole sentence or tear up the whole page. I give up in despair. I curse myself aloud and curse writing in general and the language as a whole, despite which I sit down and start putting the whole thing together all over again.

—Amos Oz

There is one myth about writers that I have always felt was particularly pernicious and untruthful—the myth of the ‘lonely writer,’ the myth that writing is a lonely occupation, involving much suffering because, supposedly, the writer exists in a state of sensitivity which cuts him off, or raises him above, or casts him below the community around him. This is a common cliché, a hangover probably from the romantic period and the idea of the artist as a Sufferer and a Rebel.

Probably any of the arts that are not performed in a chorus-line are going to come in for a certain amount of romanticizing, but it seems to me particularly bad to do this to writers and especially fiction writers, because fiction writers engage in the homeliest, and most concrete, and most unromanticizable of all arts. I suppose there have been enough genuinely lonely suffering novelists to make this seem a reasonable myth, but there is every reason to suppose that such cases are the result of less admirable qualities in these writers, qualities which have nothing to do with the vocation of writing itself.

—Flannery O’Connor

Why isn’t the manuscript ready? Because every book is more work than anyone intended. If authors and editors knew, or acknowledged, how much work was ahead, fewer contracts would be signed. Each book, before the contract, is beautiful to contemplate. By the middle of the writing, the book has become, for the author, a hate object. For the editor, in the middle of editing, it has become a two-ton concrete necklace. However, both author and editor will recover the gleam in their eyes when the work is completed, and see the book as the masterwork it really is.

—Samuel S. Vaughan

I treat my writing life like a fabulous, enchanting lover, because that is what it is to me. Something that is terribly time consuming, delicious and time-stopping. I have missed important meetings for love, and I will continue to put my writing life in the same position. My writing life is the lover at the center, not the neglected cranky demanding millstone, my ball and chain.

When you are in love, truly and passionately, you don't have to write down in your daily schedule 'Spend quality time with Lover today.' You can't not.

—Heather Sellers

I turn sentences around. That's my life. I write a sentence and then I turn it around. Then I look at it and I turn it around again. Then I have lunch. Then I come back in and write another sentence. Then I have tea and turn the new sentence around. Then I read the two sentences over and turn them both around. Then I lie down on my sofa and think. Then I get up and throw them out and start from the beginning. And if I knock off from this routine for as long as a day, I'm frantic with boredom and a sense of waste. Sundays I have breakfast late and read the papers with Hope. Then we go for a walk in the hills, and I'm haunted by the loss of all that good time. I wake up Sunday mornings and I'm nearly crazy at the prospect of all those unusable hours. I'm restless, I'm bad-tempered, but she's a human being too, you see, so I go. To avoid trouble she makes me leave my watch at home. The result is that I look at my wrist instead. We're walking, she's talking, then I look at my wrist—and that generally does it, if my foul mood hasn't already. She throws in the sponge and we come home. And at home what is there to distinguish Sunday from Thursday? I sit back down at my little Olivetti and start looking at sentences and turning them around. And I ask myself, Why is there no way but this for me to fill my hours?

—Philip Roth

I write in complete silence using only two fingers so I can't type faster than I edit at the same time, saving me from having to go back. Although it does create a lot of capitalization issues. And punctuation problems. I didn't say it was a good routine.

—Dan Alatorre

I do not put in long hours at the keys—or very seldom. Instead, I snatch time. I write in the crannies of my life.

—Julia Cameron

I get up at 4am or 5am and write for a few hours before the rest of the world wakes up. And I don't drink caffeine. That combination is basically a deal breaker for every other author I know. I don't usual check email, Facebook or Twitter until at least 6:30am, either, another killer for most authors.

—Dan Alatorre

The art of writing involves making as many cups of tea as you can in the time available for writing. Then adding extra time for writing.

—Alan Dapre

I've found my productive-writing-to-screwing-around ratio to be one to seven. So, for every eight hour day of writing, there is only one good productive hour of work being done. The other seven hours are preparing for writing: pacing around the house, collapsing cardboard boxes for recycling, reading the DVD extras pamphlet from BBC *Pride & Prejudice*, getting snacks lined up for writing, and YouTubing toddlers who learned the 'Single Ladies' dance. I know. Isn't that horrible? So, basically, writing this piece took me the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

—Mindy Kaling

I have learned how I work best, and that is something that, if you're going to be a professional writer, you should be noticing: under what circumstances you work at your best, and to not get yourself cornered into writing in a way that doesn't let you do your best.

—Ursula K. Le Guin

Every few weeks she would shut herself up in her room, put on her scribbling suit, and 'fall into a vortex' as she expressed it, writing away at her novel with all her heart and soul, for till that was finished she could find no peace. Her 'scribbling suit' consisted of a black woolen pinafore on which she could wipe her pen at will, and a cap of the same material, adorned with a cheerful red bow, into which she bundled her hair when the decks were cleared for action. This cap was a beacon to the inquiring eyes of her family, who during these periods kept their distance, merely popping in their heads semi-occasionally, to ask, with interest, 'Does genius burn, Jo?' They did not always venture even to ask this question, but took an observation of the cap, and judged accordingly. If this expressive article of dress was drawn low upon the forehead, it was a sign that hard work was going on; in exciting moments it was pushed rakishly askew; and when despair seized the author it was plucked wholly off, and cast upon the floor. At such times the intruder silently withdrew; and not until the red bow was seen gayly erect upon the gifted brow, did any one dare address Jo.

—Louisa May Alcott

So much of a novelist's writing ... takes place in the unconscious: in those depths the last word is written before the word appears on paper. We remember the details of our story, we do not invent them.

—Graham Greene

When I write, I write obsessively. I try to pace myself, but some fires are too hot to put out.

—Carla H. Krueger

Coffee, my delight of the morning; yoga, my delight of the noon. Then before nightfall, I run along the pleasant paths of the Jardin du Luxembourg. For when air cycles through the lungs, and the body is busy at noble tasks, creativity flows like water in a stream: the artist creates, the writer writes.

—Roman Payne

I usually get the title for a book first, and I type it up immediately. I sit there and look at it and admire it, and I think to myself, I just need four thousand sentences to go with this and I'll have a book. It is such a pleasurable moment that I type many more title pages than I could ever use.

—Betsy Byars

The Russian-born novelist's writing habits were famously peculiar. Beginning in 1950, he composed first drafts in pencil on ruled index cards, which he stored in long file boxes. Since Nabokov claimed, he pictured an entire novel in complete form before he began writing it, this method allowed him to compose passages out of sequence, in whatever order he pleased.

—Mason Currey

Pencil. Paper. Forget the world.

—Shaun Hick

A writing day is like any other day. Except I live in my pajamas, I forget to eat, and I suddenly look up, wondering when day turned into night.

—Christy Hall

The night before a deadline, I usually am in desperate need of a back rub. And new wrists. And candy. And little mice to secretly finish the job while I am sleeping.

—Christy Hall

I just slept for fifteen hours straight. Yes, writing a musical is THAT exhausting!

—Christy Hall

When I write, I fall into the zone many writers, painters, musicians, athletes, and craftsmen of all sorts seem to share: In doing something I enjoy and am expert at, deliberate thought falls aside and it is all just THERE. I think of the next word no more than the composer thinks of the next note.

—Roger Ebert

I'm really just playing when I write. I feel like I'm a kid again. I want my characters to do and say things like when I played with dolls!

—Lori Ann Lesko

I'm writing a book. I'm almost finished. I numbered the pages. Now all I have to do is fill them in.

—Steven Wright

Some writers are the kind of solo violinists who need complete silence to tune their instruments. Others want to hear every member of the orchestra—they'll take a cue from a clarinet, from an oboe, even. I am one of those. My writing desk is covered in open novels. I read lines to swim in a certain sensibility, to strike a particular note, to encourage rigour when I'm too sentimental, to bring verbal ease when I'm syntactically uptight. I think of reading like a balanced diet; if your sentences are baggy, too baroque, cut back on fatty Foster Wallace, say, and pick up Kafka, as roughage. If your aesthetic has become so refined it is stopping you from placing a single black mark on white paper, stop worrying so much about what Nabokov would say; pick up Dostoyevsky, patron saint of substance over style.

—Zadie Smith

A writer has no use for the clock. A writer lives in an infinity of days, time without end, ploughed under.

—Jeanette Winterson

I like what I do. Some writers have said in print that they hated writing and it was just a chore and a burden. I certainly don't feel that way about it. Sometimes it's difficult. You know, you always have this image of the perfect thing which you can never achieve, but which you never stop trying to achieve. But I think ... that's your signpost and your guide. You'll never get there, but without it you won't get anywhere.

—Cormac Mccarthy

I...clean off my desk. I make telephone calls. I know I am avoiding the typewriter. I know that in my mind, where there might be words, there is simply a blankness. I may try to write and then my words bore me. But when the time is right, the waiting will have been worth it. Because each time I write, each time the authentic words break through, I am changed. The older order that I was collapses and dies. I lose control. I do not know exactly what words will appear on the page. I follow language. I follow the sound of the words, and I am surprised and transformed by what I record.

—Judith Barrington

After all, most writing is done away from the typewriter, away from the desk. I'd say it occurs in the quiet, silent moments, while you're walking or shaving or playing a game, or whatever, or even talking to someone you're not vitally interested in.

--Henry Miller

I have written until I fell asleep with my computer on my lap. That can't be normal.

—Christy Hall

I'm always looking further afield, too. I dove into the study of classical music when writing *Sky* and visual art when writing *Sun*. I took courses in stone carving to better understand Jude and Guillermo and have been taking cooking classes for my new novel. For me, one of the best parts of novel writing is getting to learn about things that interest me via my characters.

—Jandy Nelson

I'm wildly superstitious but strangely don't have that many superstitions about the process of writing. I'm in the 'whatever works at the moment' school, which is how I ended up writing *Sun* in a pitch-black room with earplugs in and a sound machine blasting. It was nuts, but it worked!

My mother does send me a lot of ribbons for luck that I must (according to her) tape to my computer, which makes it very embarrassing to work in a café. And I have a writing blanket, which is also quite embarrassing now that I've put it in writing! It's very fluffy, like a pet.

—Jandy Nelson

Between the two windows stood the writing-table, covered with heaps of newspapers, stacks of letters, mountains of ledgers, bound in canvas or leather, and tipped with brass at the corners; a chaos for every eye and every hand but the master's.

—Franz von Dingelstedt  
[1869]

I take joy in what I do. I have a wonderful relationship with my waking self every morning and that hour around 7:30 when your brain is not connected to your ears, when it's floating around inside your head full of metaphors. I lie in bed and I watch the metaphors collect and drift and when they reach a certain point of collision, I jump out of bed and get them down before they go away.

—Ray Bradbury

Writing is something you do alone. It's a profession for introverts who want to tell you a story but don't want to make eye contact while doing it.

—John Green

Writing is a trade, and writers who do not avail themselves of the best tools obtaining for their purpose, must always work at a disadvantage. Few of them try to get along without paper, pen, and ink; but many seem to think that no other tools are necessary. For shears and mucilage, particularly, some writers seem to have an unconquerable aversion. Pinned manuscripts are a common cause of vigorous comment in editorial offices. Along with rolled manuscripts they are the detestation of every editor. Women pin together the palely-written sheets of their scented manuscript when sending a poem to the printer. Men are often guilty of diverting pins from their proper use in the place of missing suspender buttons to their improper use where what the children call 'gum-stickum' would be so much more appropriate.

There is no prejudice against the use of paste and shears. When you want to fasten two bits of paper together, stick the two pieces permanently together with the mucilage-brush. By trimming and pasting you can make the separate sheets of your copy all the same size, and that editors regard as a desideratum. For example, if you want to insert ten lines in the middle of page 19 of your closely-written manuscript, cut the page in two at the place in question, write the addition on a new sheet and paste it on, cutting off the lower portion so as to make the sheet of uniform size with the rest. Then paste the rest of the original sheet 19 on a blank sheet of your copy paper and number it '19½,' or '19A,' then '19B,' '19C,' &c. All this is a very simple matter, of course, but it is just what every editor wishes every one of his contributors would do every time in such a case.

Pencils with red and blue leads, and a bottle of red ink are cheap and handy tools that are seldom found on writers' desks. A blotter, a large pad of blotting-paper, box of rubber bands, a foot rule with bevelled edges, all save time, are always a convenience, and will be constantly appreciated. Scrap-books, pigeon-hole cases, reference books, envelope files, and such helps to writers deserve more special attention.

Stylographic pens, fountain pens, type-writers, manifold books, and such inventions are extremely desirable, of course; but they cost a good deal of money.

—William H. Hills [1887]

I took my paper and ink into the garden, looking up to God for assistance, and wrote freely for two hours. I find all the difference in writing out of doors, with quiet and pleasing objects before my eyes, and within, where I can do nothing without closing my eyes upon the things before me.

—Henry Martyn [1804]

Walt Whitman spent many nights drinking at Pfaff's Beer Hall in Manhattan, a popular spot for New York's young bohemians, freethinkers, and sarcastic literati.

—Zachary Turpin

A catless writer is almost inconceivable; even Ernest Hemingway, manly follower of the hunting trophy and the bullfight, lived waist-deep in cats. It's a perverse taste, really, since it would be easier to write with a herd of buffalo in the room than even one cat; they make nests in the notes and bite the end of the pen and walk on the typewriter keys.

—Barbara Holland

The book's idea or theme or meaning has been stirring about in your consciousness for months and probably years. When the idea first hits you you feel enormously stimulated and heightened. Then you wish you could get away from it, but now nothing but death can separate you from it. It's no use.... Now everything else in your life takes second place or fades out of your consciousness altogether. Clothes are unimportant, letters go unanswered for days or even weeks, parties you regard with a lackluster eye, travel is a lure to be avoided like death, for it is ruin to the sustained rhythm of your work day. Teeth go unfilled, bodily ills run unchecked, your idea of bliss is to wake up on Monday morning knowing that you haven't a single engagement for the entire week. You are cradled in a white paper cocoon tied up with typewriter ribbon. Awake and asleep the novel is with you, haunting you, dogging your footsteps. Strange formless bits of material float out from the ether about you and attach themselves to the main body of your story as though they had hung suspended in air for years, waiting.

—Edna Ferber

Writers don't make any money at all. We make about a dollar. It is terrible. But then again we don't work either. We sit around in our underwear until noon then go downstairs and make coffee, fry some eggs, read the paper, read part of a book, smell the book, wonder if perhaps we ourselves should work on our book, smell the book again, throw the book across the room because we are quite jealous that any other person wrote a book, feel terribly guilty about throwing the schmuck's book across the room because we secretly wonder if God in heaven noticed our evil jealousy, or worse, our laziness. We then lie across the couch facedown and mumble to God to forgive us because we are secretly afraid He is going to dry up all our words because we envied another man's stupid words. And for this, as I said, we are paid a dollar. We are worth so much more.

—Donald Miller

When you're socially awkward, you're isolated more than usual, and when you're isolated more than usual, your creativity is less compromised by what has already been said and done. All your hope in life starts to depend on your craft, so you try to perfect it. One reason I stay isolated more than the average person is to keep my creativity as fierce as possible. Being the odd one out may have its temporary disadvantages, but more importantly, it has its permanent advantages.

—Criss Jami



A man who is not born with the novel-writing gift has a troublesome time of it when he tries to build a novel. I know this from experience. He has no clear idea of his story; in fact he has no story. He merely has some people in his mind, and an incident or two, also a locality, and he trusts he can plunge those people into those incidents with interesting results. So he goes to work. To write a novel? No—that is a thought which comes later; in the beginning he is only proposing to tell a little tale, a very little tale, a six-page tale. But as it is a tale which he is not acquainted with, and can only find out what it is by listening as it goes along telling itself, it is more than apt to go on and on and on till it spreads itself into a book. I know about this, because it has happened to me so many times.

—Mark Twain

You grow ravenous. You run fevers. You know exhilarations. You can't sleep at night, because your beast-creature ideas want out and turn you in your bed. It is a grand way to live.

—Ray Bradbury

I love writing, but hate starting. The page is awfully white and it says, 'You may have fooled some of the people some of the time but those days are over, Giftless. I'm not your agent and I'm not your mommy: I'm a white piece of paper. You wanna dance with me?'

—Aaron Sorkin

It took me years to learn to sit at my desk for more than two minutes at a time, to put up with the solitude and the terror of failure, and the godawful silence and the white paper. And now that I can take it . . . now that I can finally do it . . . I'm really raring to go.

I was in my study writing. I was learning how to go down into myself and salvage bits and pieces of the past. I was learning how to sneak up on the unconscious and how to catch my seemingly random thoughts and fantasies.

—Erica Jong

Schiller needed the scent of apples rotting in his desk in order to write....Mark Twain preferred to lie supinely in bed while composing.

—John Kennedy Toole

I don't ask writers about their work habits. I really don't care. Joyce Carol Oates says somewhere that when writers ask each other what time they start working and when they finish and how much time they take for lunch, they're actually trying to find out, 'Is he as crazy as I am?' I don't need that question answered.

—Philip Roth

The beach is not a place to work; to read, write or to think.

—Anne Morrow  
Lindbergh

As a writer, I need an enormous amount of time alone. Writing is 90 percent procrastination: reading magazines, eating cereal out of the box, watching infomercials. It's a matter of doing everything you can to avoid writing, until it is about four in the morning and you reach the point where you have to write. Having anybody watching that or attempting to share it with me would be grisly.

—Paul Rudnick

The life of a writer is absolute hell compared to the life of a businessman. The writer has to force himself to work. He has to make his own hours and if he doesn't go to his desk at all there is nobody to scold him...A person is a fool to become a writer. His only compensation is absolute freedom. He has no master except his own soul, and that, I am sure, is why he does it.

—Roald Dahl

I write description in longhand because that's hardest for me and you're closer to the paper when you work by hand, but I use the typewriter for dialogue because people speak like a typewriter works.

—Ernest Hemingway

When I face the desolate impossibility of writing five hundred pages, a sick sense of failure falls on me, and I know I can never do it. Then gradually, I write one page and then another. One day's work is all I can permit myself to contemplate.

—John Steinbeck

Listen, Stephen King used to write in the washroom of his trailer after his kids went to sleep. Harlan Ellison wrote in the stall of a bathroom of his barracks during boot camp. Elmore Leonard got up at 5 AM every morning to write before work. Every time my alarm goes off at 5 AM and I don't want to get up, or I would rather sit down after work and play a videogame, I think about those guys. Take care of your family. They need you and love you. Make time for them. Then stop screwing around and finish your damn book.

—Bernard Schaffer

I have forced myself to begin writing when I've been utterly exhausted, when I've felt my soul as thin as a playing card...and somehow the activity of writing changes everything.

—Joyce Carol Oates

Writing—the profession in which you stare at a computer screen, stare out the window, type a few words, then curse repeatedly.

—Drew Goodman

You can write any time people will leave you alone and not interrupt you. Or rather you can if you will be ruthless enough about it. But the best writing is certainly when you are in love.

—Ernest Hemingway

Ideas come at any moment—except when you demand them. Most ideas come while I'm physically active, at the gym, with friends, gardening, so I always carry pen and paper.

My first draft is always written in longhand. But once the first dozen chapters, more like short stories, are written, then momentum builds until I can't leave the project until it's done.

—Chuck Palahniuk

Swoopers write a story quickly, higgledy-piggledy, crinkum-crankum, any which way. Then they go over it again painstakingly, fixing everything that is just plain awful or doesn't work. Bashers go one sentence at a time, getting it exactly right before they go on to the next one. When they're done they're done.

—Kurt Vonnegut

It is what I do with the journal, carrying it everywhere, writing on cafe tables while waiting for a friend, on the train, on the bus, in waiting rooms at the station, while my hair is washed, at the Sorbonne when the lectures get tedious, on journeys, trips, almost while people are talking.

It is while cooking, gardening, walking, or love-making that I remember my childhood, and not while reading Freud's 'Preface to a Little Girl's Journal.'

—Anaïs Nin

Muses are fickle, and many a writer, peering into the voice, has escaped paralysis by ascribing the creative responsibility to a talisman: a lucky charm, a brand of paper, but most often a writing instrument. Am I writing well? Thank my pen. Am I writing badly? Don't blame me blame my pen. By such displacements does the fearful imagination defend itself.

—Anne Fadiman

Rituals are a good signal to your unconscious that it is time to kick in.

—Anne Lamott

I'm a drinker with writing problems.

—Brendan Behan

If you want to concentrate deeply on some problem, and especially some piece of writing or paper-work, you should acquire a cat. Alone with the cat in the room where you work ... the cat will invariably get up on your desk and settle placidly under the desk lamp ... The cat will settle down and be serene, with a serenity that passes all understanding. And the tranquility of the cat will gradually come to affect you, sitting there at your desk, so that all the excitable qualities that impede your concentration compose themselves and give your mind back the self-command it has lost. You need not watch the cat all the time. Its presence alone is enough. The effect of a cat on your concentration is remarkable, very mysterious.

—Muriel Spark

Catherine is writing quickly, her light brown hair falling over her face. She is left-handed, and because she writes in pencil her left arm is silver from wrist to elbow.

—Sara Gruen

You try to sit down at approximately the same time every day. This is how you train your unconscious to kick in for you creatively. So you sit down at, say, nine every morning, or ten every night. You put a piece of paper in the typewriter, or you turn on the computer and bring up the right file, and then you stare at it for an hour or so. You begin rocking, just a little at first, and then like a huge autistic child. You look at the ceiling, and over at the clock, yawn, and stare at the paper again. Then, with your fingers poised on the keyboard, you squint at an image that is forming in your mind—a scene, a locale, a character, whatever—and you try to quiet your mind so you can hear what that landscape or character has to say above the other voices in your mind.

—Anne Lamott

You don't know what love is until someone lives with you while you write a book.

—Thulani Davis

There's only one person who needs a glass of water oftener than a small child tucked in for the night, and that's a writer sitting down to write.

—Mignon McLaughlin

I believe one would write better if the climate were bad. If there were a lot of wind and storms for example.

—Aldous Huxley

When I'm deep into something I'm working on, the writing continues in my head long after I've left my desk. Sometimes doing the most mindless activity, like the laundry, actually cuts down the mental noise and helps me toss around answers to the questions I've been struggling with.

—Hester Kaplan

Under deadline and can't afford to slack off? Fake it. Instead of working on your laptop at your desk like usual, bring a notebook and pen to the dog park and draft in longhand while cute pups romp nearby. Instead of writing at a local cafe all Sunday afternoon, prop yourself and your laptop up in bed and make it a low-budget, cozy retreat. Take yourself and your notebook out to dinner and jot notes on your next chapter in between courses. Writing someplace where you don't usually work can help it feel less like work for that day. You might even fool yourself into having fun.

—Anica Mrose Rissi

My main goal is to try to get my friends to understand my need for long periods of solitude. My family totally gets it. My non-artist friends don't. Nor do my needier artist friends. I guess I manage this by disappearing for about three weeks, then emerging for social activities for a week, then I go back into my den.

—Mira Bartók

Writers Are Insane. For months we are lone wolves locked in our caves. Then overnight we become publicity hounds. It's a schizophrenic business.

—Robert Mykle

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

Q: Where and when do you do your writing?

A: Any small room with no natural light will do. As for when, I have no particular schedules... afternoons are best, but I'm too lethargic for any real regime. When I'm in the flow of something I can do a regular 9 to 5; when I don't know where I'm going with an idea, I'm lucky if I do two hours of productive work. There is nothing more off-putting to a would-be novelist to hear about how so-and-so wakes up at four in the a.m, walks the dog, drinks three liters of black coffee and then writes 3,000 words a day, or that some other asshole only works half an hour every two weeks, does fifty press-ups and stands on his head before and after the 'creative moment.' I remember reading that kind of stuff in profiles like this and becoming convinced everything I was doing was wrong. What's the American phrase? If it ain't broke...

—Zadie Smith

Cassandra Clare wrote her first published novel in a closet. That is, in one of those 'cozy' New York City spaces, wherein the bed doubles as an office chair and the desk looks suspiciously like a windowsill.

—Jess Zafarris

Write a little. Read a little. Dick around on the internet. Post something to Pinterest or Facebook. Text a friend. Write some more. Curse it because it's shit. Write some more. Repeat.

—Katrina Monroe

When I started writing I wanted the best tools. I skipped right over chisels on rocks, stylus on wet clay plates, quills and fountain pens, even mechanical pencils, and went straight to one of the first popular spin-offs of the aerospace program: the ballpoint pen. They were developed for bomber navigators in the war because fountain pens would squirt all over your leather bomber jacket at altitude. (I have a cherished example of the next generation ballpoint, a pressurized Space Pen cleverly designed to work in weightlessness, given to me by Spider Robinson. At least, I cherish it when I can find it. It is also cleverly designed to seek out the lowest point of your desk, roll off, then find the lowest point on the floor, under a heavy piece of furniture. That's because it is cylindrical and lacks a pocket clip to keep it from rolling. In space, I presume it would float out of your pocket and find a forgotten corner of your spacecraft to hide in. NASA spent \$3 million developing it. Good job, guys. I'm sure it's around here somewhere.)

—John Varley

A writer must be hard to live with: when not working he is miserable, and when he is working he is obsessed. Or so it is with me. Thus my writing life consists of spells of languor alternating with fits and spasms of mad typing. At all times, though, I keep a journal, a record book, and most everything begins in the form of notes scribbled down on the pages of that journal.

—Edward Abbey

I can't blame modern technology for my predilection for distraction, not after all the hours I've spent watching lost balloons disappear into the clouds. I did it before the Internet, and I'll do it after the apocalypse, assuming we still have helium and weak-gripped children.

—Colson Whitehead

When you travel with your family, you may not get the volume of work done you would if you were alone, but you can still do something while recharging. If nothing else, you can gather your own thoughts, write down ideas, observe people around you, and reflect on experiences. Working doesn't always mean putting words on paper.

—Barbara DeMarco-Barrett

I would walk along the quais when I had finished work or when I was trying to think something out. It was easier to think if I was walking and doing something or seeing people doing something that they understood.

—Ernest Hemingway

I've always loved the night, when everyone else is asleep and the world is all mine. It's quiet and dark—the perfect time for creativity.

—Jonathan Harnisc

I do not write every day. I write to the questions and issues before me. I write to deadlines. I write out of my passions. And I write to make peace with my own contradictory nature. For me, writing is a spiritual practice. A small bowl of water sits on my desk, a reminder that even if nothing is happening on the page, something is happening in the room--evaporation. And I always light a candle when I begin to write, a reminder that I have now entered another realm, call it the realm of the Spirit. I am mindful that when one writes, one leaves this world and enters another.

My books are collages made from journals, research, and personal experience. I love the images rendered in journal entries, the immediacy that is captured on the page, the handwritten notes. I love the depth of ideas and perspective that research brings to a story, be it biological or anthropological studies or the insights brought to the page by the scholarly work of art historians.

—Terry Tempest  
Williams

I rent a shared office space in Louisville and often wear huge noise-canceling headphones so that I can sink into the scene I'm writing completely and forget about where I am. You might be wondering, 'Why not just wear the big headphones at home and save the monthly rental?' Well, there's no laundry at the office, and that really helps me focus.

—Rachel Weaver

I'll sometimes stop at a coffee shop on my way to work and give half an hour to writing. I'll also sometimes schedule time for writing as if it were a meeting—it creates a sense of obligation that's quite helpful. I wouldn't cancel on another person waiting for me at 11 a.m., so why would I cancel on myself?

—Alix Ohlin

I don't work in drafts the way other writers do. I tend to revise sentences as I go, exactly what students are told not to do. I think the way I work is closer to the way painters work on paintings.

—Joan Silber

I once met a writer who told me she wrote her (very good) novel one sentence at a time whenever her car was stopped at a red light. To me it sounded impossible, not to mention dangerous. But her story always reminds me that time is where you find it, and putting one sentence after the next is how every book gets made.

—Alix Ohlin

Balzac...sometimes worked away as many as 18 hours a day, standing up and caffeinated.

—Jack Smith

First drafting is a very different kind of energy. When I'm first drafting, I don't sleep as much. I forget to eat. I live in pajamas. I don't pay attention to anything going on outside the book. First drafting is a state of mind.

—Ryan G. Van Cleave

To understand how radically the situation of the American poet has changed, one need only compare today with fifty years ago. In 1940, with the notable exception of Robert Frost, few poets were working in colleges unless, like Mark Van Doren and Yvor Winters, they taught traditional academic subjects. The only creative-writing program was an experiment begun a few years earlier at the University of Iowa. The modernists exemplified the options that poets had for making a living. They could enter middle-class professions, as had T. S. Eliot (a banker turned publisher), Wallace Stevens (a corporate insurance lawyer) and William Carlos Williams (a pediatrician). Or they could live in bohemia supporting themselves as artists, as, in different ways, did Ezra Pound, E. E. Cummings, and Marianne Moore. If the city proved unattractive, they could, like Robinson Jeffers, scrape by in a rural arts colony like Carmel, California. Or they might become farmers, like the young Robert Frost.

—Dana Gioia

Writers don't make any money at all. We make about a dollar. It is terrible. But then again we don't work either. We sit around in our underwear until noon then go downstairs and make coffee, fry some eggs, read the paper, read part of a book, smell the book, wonder if perhaps we ourselves should work on our book, smell the book again, throw the book across the room because we are quite jealous that any other person wrote a book, feel terribly guilty about throwing the schmuck's book across the room because we secretly wonder if God in heaven noticed our evil jealousy, or worse, our laziness. We then lie across the couch facedown and mumble to God to forgive us because we are secretly afraid He is going to dry up all our words because we envied another man's stupid words. And for this, as I said, we are paid a dollar. We are worth so much more.

—Donald Miller



When I was growing up, I knew that a certain kind of noise was one I needed to avoid. Food blenders in the kitchen, hair dryers in the bathroom, a vacuum cleaner whooshing around—all produced an intense whining sound that, given the specific wiring connections between my ears and my brain, kept me from thinking about anything but the sound itself while it was going on. Over the years I lived by this code: I used high-performance earplugs if I needed to write or otherwise concentrate while sitting in some place that was unusually loud. I added noise-canceling headphones on top of the earplugs in really tough cases. As time went on, the earplugs-plus-headphones protection rig became standard writing gear.

—James Fallows

Take a shower. Wash away every trace of yesterday. Of smells. Of weary skin. Get dressed. Make coffee, windows open, the sun shining through. Hold the cup with two hands and notice that you feel the feeling of warmth.

You still feel warmth.

Now sit down and get to work. Keep your mind sharp, head on, eyes on the page and if small thoughts of worries fight their ways into your consciousness: throw them off like fires in the night and keep your eyes on the track. Nothing but the task in front of you.

Get off your chair in the middle of the day. Put on your shoes and take a long walk on open streets around people. Notice how they're all walking, in a hurry, or slowly. Smiling, laughing, or eyes straight forward, hurried to get to wherever they're going. And notice how you're just one of them. Not more, not less. Find comfort in the way you're just one in the crowd. Your worries: no more, no less.

Go back home. Take the long way just to not pass the liquor store. Don't buy the cigarettes. Go straight home. Take off your shoes. Wash your hands. Your face. Notice the silence. Notice your heart. It's still beating. Still fighting. Now get back to work.

Work with your mind sharp and eyes focused and if any thoughts of worries or hate or sadness creep their ways around, shake them off like a runner in the night for you own your mind, and you need to tame it. Focus. Keep it sharp on track, nothing but the task in front of you.

Work until your eyes are tired and head is heavy, and keep working even after that.

Then take a shower, wash off the day. Drink a glass of water. Make the room dark. Lie down and close your eyes.

Notice the silence. Notice your heart. Still beating. Still fighting. You made it, after all. You made it, another day. And you can make it one more.

You're doing just fine.

You're doing fine.

I'm doing just fine.

—Charlotte Eriksson

While writing my debut novel...I had three books on my desk...Daily, I read a few pages from each novel before I settled down to write. It was ceremonial, much like reading the Bible before one gets on her knees to pray.

—Bernice L. McFadden

I was waitressing and wrote anytime I wasn't working. I mostly worked...at the public library. I liked going there because it was devoid of anything to distract me. I worked from three to six hours each time, five or six times a week. When I went back to West Virginia...I worked in a cabin that my dad and I built together. What's important is being somewhere that I won't be distracted.

—Mesha Maren

...the options poets had for making a living. They could enter middle-class professions, as had T. S. Eliot (a banker turned publisher), Wallace Stevens (a corporate insurance lawyer) and William Carlos Williams (a pediatrician). Or they could live in Bohemia supporting themselves as artists, as, in different ways, did Ezra Pound, e. e. cummings, and Marianne Moore. If the city proved unattractive, they could, like Robinson Jeffers, scrape by in a rural arts colony like Carmel, California. Or they might become farmers, like the young Robert Frost. Most often poets supported themselves as editors or reviewers, actively taking part in the artistic and intellectual life of their time. Archibald MacLeish was an editor and writer at *Fortune*. James Agee reviewed movies for *Time* and *The Nation*, and eventually wrote screenplays for Hollywood. Randall Jarrell reviewed books. Weldon Kees wrote about jazz and modern art. Delmore Schwartz reviewed everything. Even poets who eventually took up academic careers spent intellectually broadening apprenticeships in literary journalism. The young Robert Hayden covered music and theater for Michigan's black press. R. P. Blackmur, who never completed high school, reviewed books for *Hound & Horn* before teaching at Princeton. Occasionally a poet might supplant his or her income by giving a reading or lecture, but these occasions were rare. Robinson Jeffers, for example, was fifty-four when he gave his first public reading.

—Mark Edmundson

Joseph Conrad used to retire to a room to write every day and he would have his wife lock him in so that he could concentrate.

—*Writer's Digest*

The typewriter separated me from a deeper intimacy with poetry, and my hand brought me closer to that intimacy again.

--Pablo Neruda

When writer's block hits, I pack up my computer and go to a coffee shop where I order my favorite tea, put on my headphones, soak up the energy of those around me, and start writing. The change in scenery resets my brain so I can get back in the flow again.

—Kerrie Flanagan

Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper. Over the last few years, writing a novel on tight finances, I came to appreciate the enormous differences in the material demands between poetry and prose. As we reclaim our literature, poetry has been the major voice of poor, working class, and Colored women. A room of one's own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a typewriter, and plenty of time.

--Audre Lorde

When I started out, I was in school and so I would get up at 4:45 and write for two or three hours before I went to school and work. Then I had young children and I would also get up really early and try to do everything in the morning or when they were briefly away. When I was starting out, I thought that I would write for six months and do other things for six months. But it turned out that once you're a writer, you're a writer, and that's what you do, and you can't escape from it. It is who you become and who you are. To tell you the truth, I feel guilty all the time because I feel like I'm not writing enough or not working enough. I have an intense work ethic where I feel like it can never be enough and I can never have enough time to tell all the stories. Whether that's a good thing or bad thing, I don't know.

—Alice Hoffman

### **THE PERPETUAL POET**

So often with others I write in my mind.  
My wife when she sees me will poke from behind.  
I wake in the night to scribble what seems  
Some clever ideas conveyed in my dreams.  
At ball games I often draft with my phone  
The gist of, to me, the world's greatest poem.  
I find that my writing flourishes best,  
In places I find myself fully obsessed.  
I thrive in that setting,  
While often forgetting  
I've closed out all life—  
Including my wife.

—Dan L. Miller

## THE FOIBLES OF FAMOUS AUTHORS—AND ME

Pink, textured pads were the preference of Plath.  
The backs of rejections are my chosen path.  
On a desk in the attic and facing a wall  
His novels Doctorow tended to scrawl.  
Cheever it was who faced a hot furnace  
Alone in the basement with a pad for his surface.  
For me, it's a window I need with a view  
Of my neighbors to work in the snow they trudge through.  
It's only round pencils that Steinbeck would use.  
The hex cut his fingers on others he'd choose.  
Rounds tend to shift around in my grip.  
The hex gives me service without any slip.  
Rostand often bathed while he wrote,  
But I tub doze, and my stuff just won't float.  
So books in a soapy bathtub I author,  
Rejected they'd be by my tepid bath water.

—Dan L. Miller

## MY WRITING LIFE

My Mac,  
My Dog,  
My Muse,  
And Me.

—Dan L. Miller

Writing...on my commute was tough at first. I had two clear hours a day with a seat and no (decent) Wi-fi, so in theory it seemed like the perfect way to make more space for writing in my day. But trains are noisy, and I struggle to write with background noise....In the end, the thing that changed everything was noise-canceling headphones and music. I'd not really written to music before, but I came to it out of necessity—to block out the background noise—and it ended up being key to my writing process.

—Beth O'Leary

I could create a whole novel going from one end of town to another.

—George Sand

I have these big boards that I use different colored markers with, and I write down every plant, every animal...very detailed. What I'm trying to do is build the world, because I feel if I build the world in the right way, with the right details, the characters can just walk inside of it and appear. It's really important to get those kinds of details. For me, it's also really fun.

—Alice Hoffman

On September 1, 1830, the 28-year-old poet Victor Hugo sat down to write Chapter 1 of a book called *Notre-Dame de Paris*. His wife recalled: 'He bought himself a bottle of ink and a huge gray knitted shawl, which covered him from head to foot; locked away his formal clothes, so that he would not be tempted to go out; and entered his novel as if it were a prison.'

—Ken Follett

I've seen photos of Hemingway's handwritten draft pages, and he even wrote the story [*The Sun Also Rises*] using his friends' real names, not bothering to change them until later drafts. The novel alienated some friends who were portrayed brutally, but Hemingway didn't seem to care much.

—Elizabeth Sims

That book has 26 chapters because there are 52 weeks in the year and I designed it so that I could write a chapter for a week, edit that chapter for a week, then move on to the next chapter, keeping the forward momentum. When I was done with that first year, I revised that book from beginning to end three times.

—Amor Towles

*Winesburg, Ohio*, was an exact picture of Ohio village life. The book was written in a crowded tenement district of Chicago. The hint for almost every character was taken from my fellow lodgers in a large rooming house, many of whom had never lived in a village. The confusion arises out of the fact that others besides practicing artists have imaginations. But most people are afraid to trust their imaginations and the artist is not.

—Sherwood Anderson

I was wandering around the house singing a Bob Dylan song that I knew only one chorus from: 'I was so much older then/I'm younger than that now.' I suddenly had the idea of a character that aged backward, and at first I thought it was a terrible idea for a novel. I [soon] realized the idea would allow me to talk about time and second chances, and I started to see a structure. Sometimes I get flashes of ideas and try to make them into something and they fail, but this worked.

—Andrew Sean Greer

I was reading the third page of a newspaper and came across a little story, a tragic accident—very tiny, so there weren't any details—that I just couldn't get out of mind. I kept thinking, What would happen next? With careful shaping and a nice dose of craft, real-life stories could become the meat of a great work of fiction if you follow the idea down its serpentine path.

—Jean Hegland

I have no facility or speed in writing, and so my secret must be patience. It has always been clear to me that I am slow-witted and slow to please myself, but that a willingness to brood for hours over a phrase or line can result in presentable work... I am meditative to a fault, but I've accepted the fact that there is no other way for me.

—Richard Wilbur

When the writing fit came on, she gave herself up to it with entire abandon, and led a blissful life, unconscious of want, care, or bad weather ... Sleep forsook her eyes, meals stood untasted, day and night were all too short to enjoy the happiness which blessed her only at such times, and made these hours worth living, even if they bore no other fruit. The divine afflatus usually lasted a week or two, and then she emerged from her 'vortex,' hungry, sleepy, cross, or despondent.

—Louisa May Alcott

You could say that he [Hunter Thompson] had some very bad work habits. Or you could say that, over the course of a decade's writing and reporting, he basically donated his nervous system to America. Pre- 1974 Thompson was mostly on Dexedrine; after 1974 he was mostly on cocaine. Booze was constant. Many of the letters have an early-morning-comedown feel: the whitening window, the excess of reality. 'Why bother to make it right when nobody knows the difference anyway?' Drugs have their uses, but he saw with terrible clarity the bargain he was making, 'willfully trading,' as he wrote to the Rolling Stone editor Jann Wenner, 'time Now for time Later.'

—James Parker

I'd think less about how I was writing and more about what I was writing. A lot of writers romanticize the writing process. Some tell you that you have to write in the morning, you have to put on work clothes, or if you don't write every day, you're not a 'real writer.' There were days that I stared at my computer for an hour and produced nothing, and days I wrote for 10 hours. Sometime I had real clothes on and sometimes I was in pajamas.

—Kiley Reid

I work in a tree. I started years ago when I had a house full of kids who needed me to be nearby and our house did not have space for a room of my own. I've kept using my treehouse office every spring, summer, and fall because I love being outside and there's something about fresh air and trees and the company of birds and squirrels that I find very inspiring.

—Roseanne Parry

Any story you can plot beforehand isn't going to be that original. The best ideas come while I'm writing, by going slowly and taking small steps—writing a couple of hours a day and letting it sit overnight, writing again for a couple of hours and letting it sit, and not restricting myself to any preplotted outline.

—Louis Sachar

It's helpful not to work at home, so I write at a co-working space.

—Clare Beams

As a father and husband who works from home, I am on call. I have abandoned the writerly idea that my talent only flourishes in perfect conditions. This isn't a space shuttle launch. I write in whatever pockets I can find. That's why I'm writing this... in the spare bedroom of my parents' house during our holiday visit. There's no desk, but the bed is comfortable—without inducing drowsiness—and it's quiet.

—Pete Croatto

He loved words, and he would admit that he was playing with them all the time. He was obsessive about the rhythm of the sentence, and would add a word, subtract a word. [about Truman Capote]

—Deborah Kerr