

## MAKING TIME TO WRITE

It's a familiar complaint. Everything else seems to get in the way - family commitments, work, sport, the need to sleep - and nowhere is there time to sit down and write. Yet we feel we *should* be writing, and guilt or frustration sets in.

*Should* is like the stuff we got told as kids - you should eat your veges because there are starving children in Africa. If we think of writing as a *should* task, where is the incentive to do it? You're trying to work out of a sense of created guilt.

But there's an even stronger sense of we *could* be writing. I know that I waste time. And even more importantly, I know that I procrastinate. Why? Because of fear, I think. Fear that I will have nothing to write and I will sit there for hours producing zilch. Or more often, fear that anything I will produce will be terrible. Despite all I know about rewriting, and how the first draft is nearly always either bad or just not what you wanted (because you wanted to create that miraculous story in your head, and what happened to it between your brain and the page, darn it?), I still have to convince myself anew every time that all I have to do is sit down and write. We also tend to believe that in order to write, we need whole days, or at least several hours, and yet if you write regularly, even half an hour a day can be enough.



I like an analogy I read in Kristi Holl's book *Writer's First Aid*. A professor shows a large jar to his class and fills it with rocks. He then goes

through a process of asking them if the jar is full. Each time, he demonstrates that it's not. To the rocks, he adds pebbles; to the pebbles, he adds sand. Is the jar full now? No. He then adds water. Many of us assume this analogy is about how much we can cram into our day. Kristi says no - think of the rocks as your writing. They have to go in first, otherwise you will never fit them in with the other stuff.

How many of us put writing first? Really and truly? We fill our days with all that other stuff and then try to cram writing into the odd half an hour once a week, or save up for a whole day and then feel pressured, blocked and unable to write a thing.

There are some people for whom life is just too chaotic and busy. You might have five kids, plus an ailing mother, plus you have to work part-time to help feed the family. I see these people put aside their writing, month after month, and yearn for the chance to write.

Then I read stories about writers who have all of that and more to cope with, and they still find half an hour a day to write, even if it means getting up earlier or staying up half an hour later. In half an hour you can write one page. In a week, that's six pages (you may take Sunday off!). In a year, that's 300 pages. A novel.

So here are some tried and true methods that you can use to make time to write:

- Tell yourself that you only have to do one page. What's one page? Even if it's an awful page, just write ONE. This helps with procrastination, and one often leads to two or three!
- Turn off the internet. Disconnect your cable or your modem. Surfing the net or doing emails is a huge time-sucker. Timetable those two things for downtime periods, such as while you're waiting for dinner to cook. Some people do emails while they eat breakfast (multi-tasking!). Get off the net and you'll be amazed how much time you have.
- Focus on regular stints, instead of trying to write for a whole day every once in a while. Writing a large work such as a novel means that if you don't write for a week, you've got to spend a lot of time

rethinking your way back into the story. It's the "showing up at your desk every day" that works and keeps the story in your head. You'll find that it will simmer away and every time you sit down to write, even for half an hour, the words will be ready to come.

- If half-hour blocks don't work for you, make a commitment to write two pages per day, no matter what. If you stick to this every day for three months, it will become an ingrained habit that you can't stop!
- Block out your writing sessions ahead of time, say three one-hour sessions per week or that half-hour every day. *In your diary*. Call it "Writer's Meeting". Call it anything you like, but make sure you're there, backside on the chair, ready to write, at the time you set. Put a sign on the door to say **Keep Out!** And mean it. Mean it for yourself. Do you want to write? Really and truly? Then do it.