

Tip #17. Embracing the Daily Routine

Last time I spoke about making use of writing exercises to take your writing to the next level. On a similar note, this 'Tip' is another concept that is perhaps aimed at the more 'serious' writer. However, in much the same way as writing exercises can benefit all writers, so too can developing a writing routine. And it's not just me waxing lyrical about this fact. A quick Google search will confirm just how seriously the famous writers out there take their writing routines: from Hemmingway to Picoult, Housseni to Vonnegut, most of them credit some form of daily routine as being critical to their success. In fact, an analysis of successful people in other disciplines ranging from commerce to sport to politics will once again highlight the part routine plays in their success. Presidents (some!) will start their day with an early morning jog, come what may. Our rugby players don earphones and psych themselves up with loud, energetic music before every game. Business execs will get to the office at the crack of dawn and kill as many emails as possible before plunging into the commercial warzone.

So, why does daily routine work so well in the creative writing sphere? Here are a few of the reasons.

1. It trains us to write on cue: It's all well and good carving out a chunk of time for yourself in which to write, but your efforts will be in vain if all you manage to achieve in that precious time is to sit and stare at a blank page! In much the same way as we can train ourselves to sleep on cue by religiously hitting the sack at the same time every night, so we can train our brains to produce words on cue. (They may not be pretty words to start with, but, in the words of Jodi Picoult, "You can't edit a blank page.")
2. It takes the often painful decision on whether or not to try and write out of the equation: no dithering, no squirming out of it – the decision has already been made for you. You WILL sit down to write, at said time. End of argument. Excellent! One less decision to make, more brain-power freed up for creativity.
3. According to Haruki Murakami 'The repetition itself becomes a form of mesmerism': The very act of sitting down at the same time every day is a form of meditation, a way to free the mind, a mechanism to reach a deeper mental state.

It's also interesting to note that many successful writers, even if they feel they're on a creative role and should just keep going while the going is good, will stick to the allocated writing time in their routines religiously! Many report that calling a halt at the designated time, regardless of the gushing flow of creative juice, is remarkably helpful in restarting the writing engine, on cue, the next day. In effect it maintains interest and excitement in your work when you're not writing! You find yourself mulling over characters and scenes throughout the rest of your day. Tweaking, improving. By the time bedtime comes, you just can't wait to get back to your desk and pour those words onto the page.

Of course, everyone's routine will be different. What works for one writer may not work for another. The crucial thing is not what goes into the routine, or when, but that there IS a routine. When coming up with your own routine, as a starting point until you find what works for you, I would advocate consistency. i.e. apart from keeping to the same time, keep to the same place, use the same 'tools' (from the same desk, PC, notebook etc. to the same coffee mug). The more consistency you have, the stronger your instinctive 'writing reflex' will become. I would also advocate building some form of physical exercise into your day as well, however mild. If for no other reason than it gets the blood flowing and sends more oxygen to the brain!

I'll leave you with a pertinent quote attributed to Peter De Vries.

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