

# Five Secrets to Prolific Writing

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## 1. Limit your Drug Intake: turn off the Internet

No. I'm not kidding. If you're anything like me you have no self-discipline when it comes to the Internet. Email needs to be answered now. What's happening in the world is important. You're not going to waste time. You just need to do this one thing and... suddenly four hours have passed, your creative window has slammed shut, and you've accomplished absolutely zilch.

Disconnect the distraction. Unplug from your network. Turn off your wireless. Whatever. Go somewhere where you can't do anything except creative work.

While it might take you two weeks to not feel guilty about someone having to wait half a day for your reply to their emails, the feeling will pass. And trust me, if the world's going to end it will happen whether or not you're following its hashtag on Twitter.

Working "Internet-free" will triple or quadruple your output.

## 2. Limit your Time: set an alarm

Seriously, this is so important. The old whysit that work expands to fill the time allowed is especially true of writing. A lot of writers find they're at their most prolific when they have a time limit.

Me too. I'm not talking about a deadline three months away. That just gets me worried. I'm talking about the timer on my laptop that I set for increments of seven or fifteen minutes (depending what I'm doing).

It's a game I can always win. I have to write like crazy for fifteen minutes at which time the pre-recorded voice comes in and tells me "time to change scenes".

Which can mean anything I want it to mean. If I'm doing first draft and just getting ideas and stuff down, then I'll change scenes. If I'm on a roll with the scene I have then I hit the reset and continue on the same scene for another fifteen minutes. But, unless I'm on a major roll, I stop after three resets, and evaluate.

## 3. Limit your Editing: strangle your internal critic

Again, if you're anything like me you can completely hamstring your productivity by indecision, by wondering if you should've used *this* word, or if *that* one would give a better impression. At the first draft stage who cares?

Yeah, I know. You do. But you have to learn to not care. There's a reason it's called a "dirty draft". It's *meant* to stomp onto your screen, mud on its boots, its raincoat dripping blood and icicles. Don't insist on a bath, a shave, and an attitude adjustment before you know why it's there in its current incarnation.

If you're an editor by nature--anal, perfectionist, and all that good stuff--then you're not letting that baby out the door until it shines. In fact, you'll probably buff it up multiple times. But don't do it now! Get the first draft written.

Read my lips. "Don't get it right, get it *written*."

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### 4. Limit your Work Space: train your brain

There are several schools of thought on this, but everyone I've talked to seems to agree: your brain needs help to know when it's time to knuckle down and work. The best way to do this is for you to have a regular place to write. Then, just by walking in and sitting down, you train your brain to switch to "creative" thinking.

Some writers have dedicated offices. Some use the kitchen table. Some write in bed. Some write in the bath. Okay, I'm still not sure about the bath but I'm assured the negative ions in the water are great for stimulating ideas.

I work at my kitchen table or curled up on the bed if I'm home. Otherwise I share an office with my husband. If I'm really having difficulty thinking and getting into it I wander up to one of our local coffee bars. I don't know what it is about the coffee bar (other than the coffee, the noise, and lack of internet) but I can rattle off a thousand words there with very little effort. And the café chef makes fabulous Russian Fudge--which is also very cool.

### 5. Limit your "Time Off": accomplish a creative goal

In other words: "Take time to play, but *write every day*".

Why? Because it's so much easier to stay in the flow than it is to get in the flow. You leave too much time between writing sessions and getting your head back into the plot is a major exercise.

Some people set a target of so many hours a day. Some have a set word-count. Some prefer to work to a predetermined page-count. I'm part of a writers' support group where--when we have deadlines--word counts can be up around the 10,000 a day. But that figure isn't a normal thing. For most of us 1000-2000 is an excellent and sustainable goal during a first draft.

### Bonus Secret: be realistic

Chances are--if you're reading this--you're not Georges Simenon. In fact, I know you're not because he's dead. But, back when he wasn't dead, the guy was a machine; "one of the most prolific writers of the twentieth century, capable of writing 60 to 80 pages per day" according to Wikipedia.

Do the math. Sixty to eighty pages at two-hundred-and-fifty words a page clocks up fifteen to twenty thousand words.

*A day!*

Impressive, huh?

Okay, now here's the hard part. Say after me, "I am *not* Georges Simenon. I am *not* a failure if I don't produce twenty thousand words a day."

It's important you believe this because if you start measuring your worth by someone else's ability, you're screwed. The goal you set has to be something you can achieve relatively easily and sustain over time, otherwise you won't keep to it. So set yourself a reasonable goal that takes your lifestyle and family into account.

And there you have them; five secrets that will help you become a more prolific writer.