

Why Am I Procrastinating?

Procrastination doesn't come from laziness. Most writers who have writer's block beat themselves up for being undisciplined. But being a successful writer has absolutely nothing to do with discipline.

There is a huge difference between discipline, which is some internal voice or external voice saying, "You have to do this," and passion, which is some internal voice saying, "I want to do this. I choose to do this."

The passion itself, the desire to be great, can actually undo our ability just to sit down and write.

If you imagine a desert, a barren desert, this is how a lot of us feel about our writing lives. We dream of the time that giant rainstorm of passionate creativity that's going to turn our desert into a wonderful rainforest, or we wait for the moment that inspiration strikes us, and then it's gone.

But unless you actually find the structure in your life that you need to channel all that rain, on the other side of that creative storm, you will be back in the desert. And you'll be wondering, "how did that happen when there was so much rain?"

So, if instead of looking for a rainstorm, you look for just a tiny drip of water, and you just let that water keep dripping, eventually that steady drip of water, will become a little stream, and then a brook, and eventually a mighty river of creativity.

The first thing that we need to do to break through writer's block and procrastination is to get ourselves out of the game of trying to write well.

The best way to do that is to set a page goal for yourself, a certain number of pages that you owe yourself this week regardless of quality. Then break down those goals into even small goals that you can achieve them in 7 minutes: like writing half a page. Schedule the exact times you're going to write that half a page, and keep those times holy. And celebrate your success!

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Each time you achieve a small goal, your brain releases a chemical called dopamine, that makes you want to do it again. You can think of that dopamine as like a little drip into your riverbed.

If you *don't* achieve the goal, a different chemical gets released: a chemical called cortisol. Cortisol will make you fat and depressed and it will make you not want to write. And that means that the next time you set out to write, you will have to fight through that cortisol feeling.

Real writers make their bones in the days when their writing is not flowing.

Keep your focus on achieving your goals, not on writing well. Don't say "one and a half, good pages," say "one and a half pages." As soon as you add the word "good," you're in trouble, because you don't know if your writing is good. You won't know if it is good until many, many, many drafts from now.

Very few people can recognize a good page in an early form (especially most people who try to give notes on screenplays). And most writers don't know how to identify their best work either, because it's the work that makes them feel most vulnerable and uncomfortable. Unless you are working with a highly experienced pro writer, beware feedback!

As you start to achieve these goals you will notice that 7 minutes in the morning turns into thinking about your writing all day.

Soon you start to find more opportunities to write. And it is not discipline that makes you do it, it is passion.

The important thing is to keep stringing those positive experiences together. So if you fall short of your goal, don't beat yourself up, don't punish yourself, don't double your goal.

This is how you get into the cortisol game. Don't discipline yourself, don't yell at yourself.

If you mess up, if you set your goal right, you can fix it in 7 minutes.

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