



The *nearly*  
Ultimate  
Guide  
to  
Better  
Writing

Write to Done

# The *Nearly* Ultimate Guide to Better Writing

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## Introduction

**T**he writer's journey traverses peaks and valleys. There are moments when we are on a high and feel great about writing. There are also times when motivation slumps and inspiration dries up.

This book contains essential nourishment that will help you overcome barriers and find fresh inspiration on your path as a writer.

Most of the articles in this book were originally published on Write to Done. We've chosen the best for you so that you can grow as a writer.

I'm grateful to the Editor, Scott McIntyre of Vivid Ways, for all his wonderful work in creating this book.

I wish you all the best on your journey as a writer.

Mary Jaksch

Chief Editor of Write to Done



## Write to Serve: Giving Deeper Purpose to Your Craft

By Barrie Davenport

## Why do you write?

*If you are a writer, it's an important question to ask yourself.*

**H**ad I asked myself this question a year ago, my answer would have been that I write because it's my clearest form of communication. I can get my point across, tell a story, or relay information more concisely and intelligently in writing than through the spoken word.

For some reason, my thoughts from brain to paper (or computer) emerge more easily and eloquently than they do from brain to mouth. And happily I can edit myself on paper. Oh my, if I had a dollar for every uttered word that I should have stuffed back into my mouth!

Now that I have started a blog, my feelings about why I write have changed forever.

And I have changed as a person in the process. My blog initially was a temporary web site for my coaching practice. I didn't have the time or skill to put together a web site, so I found a simple blogging template and created a platform for writing about coaching issues.

I saw my writing as a marketing forum for my business. But then a funny thing happened on the way to that forum. People started responding to my blog. They were getting something from what I was writing. I was receiving e-mails and calls from people telling me that I had helped them or touched them in some way.

*"Fill your paper with the  
breathings of your heart."*

*~William Wordsworth*

## I was serving them, whether I intended to or not.

Somewhere along the way, *servi*ng people became more important to me than “getting clients.” I switched my intention from getting to giving. I began to view writing not as tool to make money, but as a creative gift that I could share with others. This mental shift was liberating for me, and now I don’t worry about perfection or impressing others with my writing. I just want to make sure my readers take away something valuable and useful for their lives.

## Since my perspective has changed, another amazing thing has happened.

Wonderful gifts have come my way in the form of new friends, new opportunities, new learning, and yes, some new clients too. The best part for me is the feeling of purpose I have around my writing. I feel fulfilled and happy — like I am doing something really good. Getting paid for it will be nice, but at the moment, I see that as secondary. I trust it will come.

## Writing can be a lonely business.

When it’s just you and your fingers tapping away at your keyboard, it’s hard to visualize your readers out there and how your words will impact them. Writers spend a lot of time worrying about deadlines and content and sources of inspiration. It can be a very self-focused activity where the rewards often appear long after the work is finished.

Most other creative types get to enjoy the immediate gratification of their patrons' response and appreciation.

Dancers, musicians, actors, even visual artists can perform their craft and reap the rewards fairly quickly. Writers must plod along, hammering ideas into words with no supportive fans standing behind them shouting, "*Well done, bravo!*"

As a writer, you must create your own motive and reward for doing the work. When inspiration fails you, when you are tired or bored with writing, what is your *raison d'être*? What keeps you going?

If you would like to harness a deeper sense of purpose and fulfillment around your writing work, here are some suggestions you might consider:

1. **Shift your focus.** As you begin to write the very first word, shift your focus away from yourself or the thought process of writing and move it to your reader. Ask yourself repeatedly, "How can I serve, and what can I offer my beloved reader?" See the act of writing, not just the finished product, as a gift of love to the world. When you focus on serving, you create a vision for your writing that provides inspiration and direction.
2. **Write from the heart.** Be real and authentic in your writing. Open yourself to feeling what your readers might be experiencing and respond to their needs as though you were a trusted friend. Put your reader's needs first, and let your emotions around those needs guide your ideas and words.
3. **Share personal stories**, even if you do that through a fictional character. Draw from your own experiences and be willing to reveal some of your flaws and failures. If people can relate to you, they can grow and learn from what you have to say. We all love a great story!
4. **Be a teacher.** People are hungry to learn. Find ways to share new ideas, skills and concepts with your reader without sounding preachy or condescending. Do your research and give them something solid to take away from the experience of reading your writing. Reading for pleasure is great, but reading for pleasure with benefits is even better. I love historical fiction for this very reason.

5. **Lift them up and inspire them.** In a world fraught with bad news, ugly and horrifying images, and mean-spirited commentary, become a source of vision and illumination. If you believe in some form of divine intelligence or in just plain goodness, imbue your writing with a heavy dose of it. People crave sources of inspiration and hope. Be one of those sources. Let your writing reflect the best parts of your psyche and soul.
6. **Make them laugh.** If you have ever read a book by David Sedaris (*Me Talk Pretty One Day* and *When You Are Engulfed in Flames*), you've seen how he can transform the most mundane or pathetic life situation into a laugh-out-loud vignette that is wildly entertaining and fun to read. If you are downright funny or even just a little witty, please share that with the world. We need to laugh and see the humor in the inanities of life. It's good for the soul.
7. **Stay tuned-in and inquisitive.** Get out of the house and step away from the computer. Go out and find your readers. Observe and listen to people. Keep a little notebook in your pocket and write down ideas and inspiration you receive from your observations and interactions with people. Ask your readers thoughtful and probing questions about their interests, their worries, and their hopes and dreams. Your readers are your best resource for topics and inspiration, so go out there and meet them.
8. **Leave a legacy.** Remember Randy Pausch, the professor at Carnegie Mellon University with pancreatic cancer, who wrote *The Last Lecture*? His real last lecture at Carnegie Mellon was part of a lecture series where top academics were asked to think deeply about what matters to them and give a hypothetical final talk. For Randy, knowing he had a short time to live, it wasn't hypothetical. His real motivation was to leave a legacy for his children. I don't mean to sound morbid, but shouldn't we all have that motivation?

## What will be your legacy?

Is your writing part of that? If so, then write every day like it is your last lecture and leave the stamp of your creative service on the world.

## About the Author

Barrie Davenport is a personal and career coach and founder of [Live Bold and Bloom](#), a blog about bold and fearless living. You can download her free guide [7 Key Ingredients for a Meaningful Life](#). She is also co-founder, with Mary Jaksch, of [A-List Blog Marketing](#), a blog about purpose-driven marketing for blogging entrepreneurs. And she is editor-in-chief of [The Daily Brainstorm](#), a blogazine featuring the top bloggers on the net.



## 6 Key Steps to Finding Your Passion As a Writer

By Barrie Davenport

**B**y definition, writers are passionate creatures. Your days are spent huddled over a keyboard, tap tap tapping out portions of your soul and nuggets of your imagination. If you don't truly love writing, it is darn near impossible to be a good writer.

As writers, we are among the fortunate few who are actually doing something we love. Yes there are struggles, both financial and personal. But we have the ability and talent to shape words into tangible expressions that can inspire, educate, and entertain. There is a real fulfillment and joy in that.

As much as we love the craft, part of our calling as writers should be to stretch ourselves beyond the calling to write. You can be a *good writer* by tapping into the passion of being a writer.

*You can be an exquisite writer by tapping into the passion of being yourself.*

Writing may define part of you, but it shouldn't define all of you. You are a complex, multidimensional, ever-evolving individual. You owe it to yourself, to your craft, and to your readers to explore all of the nooks and crannies of who you are.

Let me present this scenario as an example. My daughter is a ballet dancer, and I have been around student and professional dancers for many years. An extremely talented student dancer is enchanting to watch. She is technically proficient and stunningly fluid and graceful.

An experienced professional dancer is rapturous and heart-wrenching to watch. Technical abilities and gracefulness are second nature. What shines through so poignantly is her soul.

You see her life experiences, joys, wounds, loves, and values, all played out before you. You see these emotions in the movements of her body, the myriad of expressions on her face, the subtleties of timing, and her invisible connection with the audience. It is pristine, exquisite, breathtaking.

Dancers and actors spend a lot of time exploring themselves to perfect their crafts. It is one thing to be a *proficient* dancer or actor. It is quite another to be an *inspired and passionate artist*. You must explore what is inside of you, draw it forth, and infuse it into your role.

An inspired and passionate writer must do the same, for writing is an art as well.

*Most of us are so busy with the business of writing that we have little time for rummaging around in our own lives to see what's what.*

However, if you don't make the space and time to do this valuable work, you are tethering your writing to "just good enough." You are walking past an untapped goldmine of inspiration that will buff the bright shine of authenticity, humanness, and raw emotion on your work.

So how does one go about poking around inside to find this passion? It takes a little time and work. It takes stepping away from busyness to look within. The deeper you dig, the greater the reward. In fact, the payoff can be tremendous. Along the way, you might learn things about yourself that will open amazing new doors of possibility and discovery for your work and your life.

From my own experience, I see this discovery work as a very strategic process. It is not always linear, but by following specific steps, you will leave no stone unturned to evolve into the passionate writer you were meant to be. Here are five key steps to finding your passion.

## Know Thyself.

- Understand what makes you tick, what motivates you, where you get your energy, and how you perceive the world. Understanding this about yourself helps you connect with your readers and your characters.
- Learn more about your personality and why you behave and operate in the world the way you do. How you view the world is reflected in your writing, so pursue awareness around this and use the knowledge to direct your writing decisions.

- Use this clarity about yourself to help you focus on what is natural and right for who you really are — not who you wish you were or who others want you to be. Your uniqueness should shine through in your writing.
- Begin this process by taking one or two personality assessments, like the Myers Briggs test. These assessments give you a framework for the process of self-discovery and exploration. They can open your eyes to parts of yourself you haven't acknowledged before.

## Define Your Qualities.

- You might have a general idea of your skills, values, and interests, but have you really dug deep to determine which of those are imperative in your life? Are you allowing your writing work to overwhelm other places to explore? These places could ultimately help your writing.
- Determine the values that define you, the skills that you enjoy (not just those that you are good at), and the interests that are fulfilling and fun, so you to be creative, expansive, and focused in your writing and in life.

Commit to finding ways to use these newly defined values, interests, and skills.

Explore new options in life so that you can exploit them in your writing. Jodi Picoult is an author who routinely scrutinizes and employs her values and interests in her novels, and she is quite prolific.

## Create A Vision.

- Once you've gotten to know yourself better and defined what is important to you, begin to create a vision for your life and for your writing.
- By outlining a rough vision based of your personality, values, skills, and interests, you will begin to refine a purpose and mission for your writing and your life. Any passionate endeavor, bolstered by purpose, will have substance and longevity.
- As you explore the many possible details of this vision, your purpose and mission will become more and more clear to you. It will give you a road map for

your writing and what you want to achieve. Use this road map to give direction and meaning to your writing plans.

- Refer to this vision frequently as you write. Draw from it as from a deep well of inspiration for your work. Allow yourself to absorb the feelings your vision evokes so that authenticity shines through in your writing.

## Remove the Roadblocks.

- As you define the elements of your vision and mission, you may encounter emotional roadblocks preventing you from taking the actions you needed to make your vision real.
- If you don't address them, limiting beliefs, life imbalances, unresolved issues, and emotional reactions can prevent you from discovering more about yourself and your passions.
- As you uncover your own roadblocks and work through them, you will uncover more gems of inspiration for your writing. Many people use writing as a way of resolving these issues. When you are vulnerable in your writing, you are revealing your authentic self. Your readers will resonate with that. Elizabeth Gilbert's bestselling book, *Eat, Pray, Love*, is a perfect example of this level of vulnerability.

## Shift Your Mind.

- As you learn about yourself, you will begin having profound "ah ha" moments. Previous ways of thinking will be challenged. Things that you once accepted will no longer be acceptable.
- You will want to address unmet needs and remove tolerations from your life that have been sapping your energy and attention. This will open your mind and your time for writing and for other passions you have discovered.
- Your perspective on what is good and right for you will open up. You sabotage your creativity when you do things you don't want to do because you feel you "should." Laser focus on what you want for your life to create the wide open spaces needed for your best writing.

## Create Your Plan.

- The final part of the process of discovering yourself and your passion is creating an action plan based on all you have learned. You may find there are many passions and options for your life in addition to writing.
- Remember, you may have to do this work several times over the course of your writing career as you continue to evolve as a person.
- Use everything you have learned about yourself to infuse your writing with dimension, substance, and presence. Armed with new self awareness and growth, you will find passion in your writing and in your life beyond your wildest expectations.

## About the Author:

Barrie Davenport is a personal and career coach and founder of [Live Bold and Bloom](#), a blog about bold and fearless living. You can download her free guide [7 Key Ingredients for a Meaningful Life](#). She is also co-founder, with Mary Jaksch, of [A-List Blog Marketing](#), a blog about purpose-driven marketing for blogging entrepreneurs. And she is editor-in-chief of [The Daily Brainstorm](#), a blogazine featuring the top bloggers on the net.



## Blood, Sweat and Words: How Badly Do You Want This?

By Larry Brooks

One of the Oscar nominated films of 2011 is *The Fighter*, conceived by and starring Mark Wahlberg. See it – even if you’re not into boxing – it is a triumph of writing and acting based on a true story known by few outside of the boxing world.

You probably know a thing or two about Wahlberg, that he used to sling his pants just above his butt crack as a lil’ white boy rapper named Marky Mark, and that he went on to become a bonafide Movie Star and become richer than God as the producer of cable hits like *Entourage*, which is loosely based on his acting career.

Here’s what you may not know about Mark Wahlberg. It took him five years to get *The Fighter* made, all of them at the height of his career. It was his baby, and in the face of continued rejection he continued to prepare for the day when someone said *yes*.

And when I say prepare, I’m not talking about taking meetings. I’m talking about blood and sweat... literally.

## There are two lessons here for us writers.

First, when someone says *no* to you (as in, a rejection slip), feel sorry for them. Their loss, they may have just missed out on something wonderful. Then move on with hope, revising and growing as necessary, because each *no* is an obligatory stone in the path that leads you to a *yes*.

*Everybody gets rejected. Everybody.*

Secondly, Wahlberg went into training to become world champion welterweight Mickey Ward, upon whom this true story is based. He trained over the entire five year stretch between the idea and the green light. Even when he was making other films, he would get up two hours early to hit the gym and put in the sweat equity required to be ready when that *yes* moment arrived.

*That’s how badly he wanted this.*

Critics and viewers are swooning over the way Christian Bale morphed into Ward’s crack-addicted brother (it earned him a Supporting Actor nomination, while Wahlberg

was shut out of the nominations), and certainly it was a stellar display of acting chops. But it was Wahlberg's film, because it is drenched in the sweat and blood, any way you want to define those terms, that it took to get this project made.

## The idea for this post hit me today when I was at the gym, sweating profusely.

There's something about taking yourself to the wall, to the point of the sweet pain that signals you've given it everything.

Kinesiologists will tell you that's an endorphin high. Nothing but bio-chemicals kicking in. Funny thing about bio-chemicals, though: they can take you to places you wouldn't go otherwise.

I realized that I have, on occasion, experienced that same exhilarating high about my writing. And then, between sets on a machine inspired by something out of a medieval dungeon, it hit me: I don't do that enough.

I couldn't wait to get home and start writing this post.

I slept until 9:00 am today. Even in the face of no less than 11 blog posts due *now*, two overdue freelance projects and three career-defining letters to a prospective new agent and two publishers I want to get into bed with.

There was a gap between how badly I want success as a writer, and the degree to which I will push myself to get there.

*And now here I am, writing this post instead.*

And sweating profusely, I might add. Because this is an important message for anyone with a writing dream.

Consider it Day One in my new training regimen. Throw it out there to the world – and what better way to do that than to say it here – and you can't look back. Not if you have an ounce of pride and self-worth in you.

I don't know a lot of writers who are also athletes. I'm sort of an odd duck in that regard. I've often used analogies from my own athletic past in the writing workshops I

teach, and they are sometimes greeted by blank stares and the fidgety body language of folks jonesing to get outside for their next smoke.

Not judging. But it's not an athlete's mindset.

But that doesn't dull the shine on this particular truth: success in writing is really no different than success in sports. Or in any endeavor in which only the manically dedicated and self-made world-class achievers see their dream come to fruition.

## Behind closed doors, you have to pay a steep price to make it happen.

We don't hear much about that private agony at awards banquets and profiles in major magazines, but this backstory is almost always there.

Which makes me ask myself, and you, this question: how much blood, sweat and tears are you putting into your writing? Are you casual about this, thinking that if you tinker enough you'll get there? Or are your words drenched with pain and desire? Have you felt the endorphin high of writing something brilliant in the middle of the night, and the fear of suspecting you've not done enough in the face of opportunity?

## A Case Study in Discipline

You've heard of James Patterson, he of the 68 books written (eight in 2010 alone) and 40-some-odd bestsellers and more shelf space in the bookstore than, well, anybody on the planet. But you may not know this guy's backstory, and it's soaked to the bone with blood, sweat and endorphins, all of which were in his life long before those big writing bucks showed up.

Prior to being James Patterson the immortal writing demigod, James Patterson the wannabe novelist held a pretty cool day job. He was the CEO of the largest advertising agency on the planet, J. Walter Thompson. In fact, he was the youngest CEO of a major ad agency, ever.

Patterson's train to get to his Manhattan high rise office every morning left at 6:30 am. He rarely got home before 8:00 pm, and traveled frequently.

How do you manage the dream of writing novels – indeed, how does the dream even endure when you are pulling down seven figures in your day job? – with a schedule like that?

Answer: you get up at 4:00 am and pound the keyboard for two hours. Every day, no matter where you wake up or how bad your head hurts.

He wanted it *that* badly.

## How badly do *you* want your writing dream to come true?

You may not know many athletes, you may not particularly like the ones you do know. But take a closer look at the intangibles of making it big in sports in today's competitive environment, an era in which current high school jocks can out-run, out-strength and out-play professionals of as little as two decades ago.

Now put that into context to today's publishing market, which is tighter and in a greater state of flux and metamorphosis than at any time in history.

You have to want it badly enough to pay the price required. To humble yourself before the high bar you seek to clear. To compete with others who hold their dream just as dearly as you cling to yours, when there are only so many open slots in the chaos of today's collective publishing landscape.

Are you writing hard, or are you writing smart? And do you realize you have to do *both* to make it?

You have to go back to the drawing board frequently to review the basics and test your abilities. Just like athletes go to training camp each and every year to brush up on fundamentals. You need to keep learning, practicing and experimenting. To keep pushing yourself. You need to read everything and everybody in your target niche, and you need to have an insider's take on the industry you are trying to break into.

You need to sweat blood. You need to bleed tears. You need to seek the high that only endorphins deliver after you've taken yourself to the wall.

You need to back your belief with sacrifice and solitary, intense effort. Casual practitioners of the writing craft need not apply.

## Never settle. Never quit.

Never forget that mediocrity is everywhere, but also there is an abundance of quality writers with killer manuscripts out there, too.

You have to be *better* than they are.

You may not be the fastest, strongest, most naturally gifted writer in the game. Dare I say, James Patterson wasn't, and isn't. But he *is* a role model we can learn from. (I met him at a book signing once. There were about 300 people waiting for his appearance, and when I got there late I was at the back of the room. I felt a tap on my shoulder, and when I turned, there he was, beginning to thread himself toward the podium. When he saw the recognition in my eyes – the dropping jaw helped, too – he extended his hand and said, “Hi, I’m John Grisham, thanks for coming.”)

Like I said, and like his work or not, the guy's a role model.

Maybe you're not going to win the Pulitzer, but you *can* be the most disciplined and focused of writers. Determination isn't something you claim, it is something you earn through demonstration and performance.

Ask any professional athlete, they'll tell you.

Because more than ever before, in sports *and* in writing, this is something that is *required* to elevate a dream to a career reality.

I feel better now. High on endorphins from writing this.

Let the bloodletting and the sweating begin.

## About the Author:

Larry Brooks is the guy behind [Storyfix](#), and the author of “Story Engineering: Mastering the Six Core Competencies of Successful Writing,” published by Writers Digest Books. He is also the author of five critically-praised thrillers, including a USA Today bestseller and a Publishers Weekly “Best Books of 2004” selection. He can be reached through his website, and his novels are available as ebooks through Kindle and the other usual suspects.



## Why You Should Stop Waiting for Inspiration

By Kat Eden

**H**ow long is it now that you've been a writer? A year? Five years? A decade or more? Perhaps you don't even realize that you are a writer, or maybe you're not sure if you should be claiming such a thing. But here's a tip – if you're reading this blog, chances are you're a writer. Whether you know it or not.

I've been a writer for years. Dating well back into my school days – if not my entire life. It's what I've always wanted to do; in some ways it's what I've always known I'm *meant* to do. Sure, I've dabbled in other ideas, called myself by other names, even made a living doing other things (most of the time, actually). But despite all that, writing is my true passion.

But if you're thinking this means I've been well and truly published and publicized, then you'd be wrong. The truth is that, until recently, the past 15 years has seen me do little more than reach critical acclaim from my school English department, publish a few magazine articles, and maintain fairly regular entries into my journal. Over the past year I've built my blog to the point where I'm now gaining new readers daily, but still – all that combined doesn't really account for **enough**, does it?

How about you? Can you relate? If so, then here's the million-dollar question – perhaps literally if it means you finally get off your butt.

**If you are a writer, then why is that you don't write consistently?** I mean, let's be honest here. I *know* I'm not the only one who has had weeks, even months, pass by with no new material to show.

So how often do you write? Or – more importantly – do you write as much as you'd like to? I'm not talking about issues of time, you understand. After all, we both know that even 10 minutes each day can pay off over the course of a year. No, what I'm asking about is the regularity with which you follow through on a commitment to yourself and put pen to paper (so to speak) despite not having anything in mind to write about.

Despite the fact that you're completely devoid of inspiration.

Because that's what it often comes down to, isn't it? That elusive something which so ruthlessly governs the success or failure of many an artist. When I think about it, I can attribute the vast majority of missed writing time to the fact that I simply did not feel

inspired. And, let's face it; I hate to think of myself as somebody who is controlled by a mere *emotion*. Don't you?

Recently I came across the blog of a rather successful fiction author. Every so often, she'd included a post geared toward fellow writers rather than readers, and one of those posts really spoke to me. The author was talking about writer's block, and she wrote the following –

*Sometimes, you have to sit at the keyboard and really fight tiredness, sometimes it's a case of putting your fingers on the home keys and squeezing out one letter, then another, then another until you have a word, until you have a sentence, a paragraph, a page, a chapter. This often requires you to conquer the demons who say, bugger this, I'm not inspired today, I'll write double tomorrow, I'm off to the shops/ down the pub/ to the sofa for a quick snooze and a bit of daytime TV.*

Nothing profound there, but it sure hits home, doesn't it?

It's time to stop waiting for the creative genius to hit, and to simply start doing. To prove (if to no-one else but ourselves) that we are, in fact, writers. Because like it or not, the truth is that it's not really fair to call ourselves writers unless we are, in fact, writing. Wouldn't you agree?

I've been gradually introducing this concept into my life over the past 18 months, and I'm starting to really notice its power. You see I've discovered something so wonderful, so marvelous, and so very unexpected, that I truly believe it's the key to success. However you might define that. Here it is -

**You don't *have* to wait for inspiration to strike in order to be inspired. When you start writing regularly, without inspiration or even an idea, inspiration gradually finds you.**

Ideas slowly trickle into your mind. And before you know it, you're infused with passion and carried away in that magical state of 'flow' where the world fades away and nothing matters but you and the words in front of you. I guarantee that this will happen for you if you choose to be persistent.

Because the truth is that something as mundane and oft resisted as building a habit actually works. It becomes the fuel to your furnace. When you act as though you're a

writer, you become a writer. Your creative genius has been there all along – as a matter of fact, it's there right now. Waiting for you. It's just that it's a little shy and most of the time you have to tempt it out of hiding.

But here's where you really need to listen up.

I cannot tell you how crucial it is that you don't put this off any longer, because it works the opposite way as well. The longer you spend waiting for the genius, hoping that today will be the day you're hit with a brilliant and unique idea, but in the meantime doing anything but inviting that genius into your life, the less likely the chances of it appearing.

And before you know it, you'll forget that you ever were a writer. You'll convince yourself that writing is unsustainable as a career and not that important even as a hobby. You'll forget what it's like to finish a great piece and bask in the knowledge that you've created something out of nothing. That this is what you were meant to do; that it gives you energy for every other part of your life. And you'll tell yourself that it obviously wasn't right for you.

But the good news? There's still time. You can still be that person. It's never too late, but yet why would you wait any longer? If a writer is who you say you are, then it's time to step up and prove it. It's up to you how you go about doing that, but here are a few ideas that may start you off:

## **1. Writing retreats**

A writing retreat is simply a 2 or 3-day period of time where you lock yourself away from the world and commit yourself to writing and everything writing-related. This could include brainstorming or mind mapping, daydreaming, catching up on blogs such as this one and connecting with other writers, but at least 4-5 solid hours each day should be designated to the art itself. A writing retreat could be as simple as you in your study with the door closed, or as varied as inviting a few like-minded friends to join you for a country getaway. You might also like to consider making a commitment with online friends and touching base every few hours throughout your retreat.

## 2. 30-day challenge

The 30-day challenge is one of my favorite methods for building or rejuvenating any habit. I came across the idea on [Zen Habits](#) at the beginning of this year. Leo's challenge to his readers was to commit to 30 days of doing 'first things first' – for at least 10 minutes. For me, that meant no emails, no text messages, no social networking, nothing except writing for a minimum of 10 minutes as soon as I switched the computer on. I managed to make it 30 days straight and I can't even begin to tell you the impact this made. I'm quite sure the quality of my content improved; certainly my subscribers increased, but most importantly of all I felt incredibly inspired and full of pride at keeping this small commitment to myself. I strongly suggest you instigate a 30-day personal challenge at least twice each year.

## 3. Weekly writing day

The weekly writing day is perfect for maintenance of your writing career when you have another full-time job or equivalent responsibilities. It's all about what works for you, but in this case you may find that rather than frantically trying to squeeze in a few words each day it pays more to set aside an entire day or 2 half days each week to 'batch process' your writing. I've been trialing this for a month now, pre-writing all my personal blog posts on a Saturday. I've found it gives me a great sense of control over the week ahead, and also frees me up to be creative with guest posts and new ideas.

I hope I've given you some small motivation towards harnessing your own inspiration. Even more so, I hope that next time either of us is asked how long we've been a writer, we can answer with truth and with pride and feel pretty darn good about it.

## About the Author:

Kat Eden is a personal trainer of 12 years, a Level 2 Biosignature nutritional and hormone coach, an author, and a motivational speaker. Kat is known as “Australia’s Female Fat Loss Queen”, and is passionate about empowering driven women to transform their bodies from the inside out. You can visit Kat at her blog, [Woman Incredible](#) and sign up for free blog tips on nutrition, fat loss and motivation, plus receive your free copy of Kat’s blueprint guide ‘The Truth About Female Fat Loss’!



## 31 Ways to Find Inspiration for Your Writing

By Leo Babauta

*“You can’t wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.”*

~ Jack London

**N**o matter how much you love writing, there will always be days when you need inspiration from one muse or another.

In fact, I would argue that inspiration is not just a desirable thing, it’s an integral part of the writing process.

Every writer needs inspiration to produce inspired writing. And sometimes, it can come from the unlikeliest sources.

I’ve compiled a list of some of my favorite ways of finding inspiration — some of them obvious, some of them less so. But it’s always good to have reminders, and if you haven’t used a few of these sources of inspiration in awhile (or ever), give them a go.

- **Blogs.** This is one of my favorites, of course. Aside from this blog, there are dozens of great blogs on writing and every topic under the sun. I like to read about what works for others — it inspires me to action!
- **Books.** Maybe my favorite overall. I read writers I love (read about my current loves) and then I steal from them, analyze their writing, get inspired by their greatness. Fiction is my favorite, but I’ll devour anything. If you normally read just a couple of your favorite authors, try branching out into something different. You just might find new inspiration.
- **Overheard dialog.** If I’m anywhere public, whether it be at a park or a mall or my workplace, sometimes I’ll eavesdrop on people. Not in a gross way or anything, but I’ll just keep quiet, and listen. I love hearing other people have conversations. Sometimes it doesn’t happen on purpose — you can’t help but overhear people sometimes. If you happen to overhear a snippet of interesting dialog, jot it down in your writing journal as soon as possible. It can serve as a model or inspiration for later writing.

- **Magazines.** Good magazines aren't always filled with great writing, but you can usually find one good piece of either fiction or non-fiction. Good for its writing style, its voice, its rhythm and ability to pull you along to the end. These pieces inspire me. And bad magazines, while perhaps not the best models for writing, can still be inspirations for ideas for good blog posts. These magazines, as they don't draw readers with great writing, find interesting story angles to attract an audience.
- **Movies.** Sometimes, while watching a movie, a character will say something so interesting that I'll say, "That would make a great blog post!" or "I have to write that in my writing journal!" Sometimes screenwriters can write beautiful dialog. Other times I get inspired by the incredible camera work, the way that a face is framed by the camera, the beauty of the landscape captured on film.
- **Forums.** When people write on forums, they rarely do so for style or beauty (there are exceptions, of course, but they're rare). Forumers are writing to convey information and ideas. Still, those ideas can be beautiful and inspiring in and of themselves. They can inspire more ideas in you. I'm not saying you have to read a wide array of forums every day, but if you're looking for information, trawling some good forums isn't a bad idea.
- **Art.** For the writer aspiring to greater heights, there is no better inspiration than great art, in my experience. While it doesn't compare to the experience of seeing the art in person, I like to find inspiring works of art and put it on my computer desktop for contemplation (Michelangelo's *Pieta* is there right now). It doesn't have to be classical works, though — I've found inspiration in Japanese anime, in stuff I've found on [deviantart.com](http://deviantart.com), in local artists in my area.
- **Music.** Along the same lines, it can be inspiring to download and play great music, from Mozart to Beethoven to the Beatles to Radiohead. Play it in the background as you write, and allow it to lift you up and move you.
- **Friends.** Conversations with my friends, in real life, on the phone or via IM, have inspired some of my best posts. They stir up my ideas, contribute ideas of their own, and they fuse into something even more brilliant than either of us

could have created.

- **Writing groups.** Whether online or in your community, writing groups are great ways to get energy and motivation for your writing. My best short stories were done in a writing group in my local college (a great place to look for such groups, btw), as we read out our work to the group, critiqued them and made suggestions. The work of the other writers inspired me to do better.
- [The Pocket Muse](#) (affiliate link). A book full of writing inspirations. Can't beat that!

## *Quotes*

I don't know why it's so, but great quotes help inspire me. I like to go to various quote sites to find ideas to spark my writing, turns of phrase that show what can be done with the language, motivation for self-improvement. Try these for a start: [Writing Quotes](#) and [Quotes for Writers](#).

## *Nature*

Stuck for ideas? Go for a walk or a jog. Get away from sidewalks and into grass and trees and fields and hills. Appreciate the beauty around you, and let the inspiration flow through you. Sunsets and sunrises, of course, are two of my favorite uplifting scenes of nature, and anything involving water is also awesome (oceans, rivers, lakes, rain, rivulets, even puddles).

## *History*

It can be unexpected, but great people in history can inspire you to greatness. My favorites include Benjamin Franklin, Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Helen Keller, Leonardo da Vinci, and other greats.

## *Travel*

Whether it be halfway around the world, or a day trip to the next town or national park, getting out of your usual area and discovering new places and people and cus-

toms can be one of the best inspirations for writing. Use these new places to open up new ways of seeing.

### *Children*

I have six kids, and they are my favorite people in the world (my wife and siblings and parents being right up there too). I love to spend quiet time with them, taking walks or reading. I love to have fun with them, playing board games or having pillow fights. And during these times I spend with them, I'm often reflective, about life, about humanity, about love. I suggest that children, with their fresh outlook on the world, can change the way you view things.

### *Exercise*

I get my best ideas most often while running. There's something about the quietness, combined with the increased flow of blood through your brain, combined with being out in the fresh air with nature, that really stimulates the mind.

### *Religion*

Many of you aren't religious (and many are) but it doesn't matter much — the great religions in the world have ideas in them that are beautiful and inspiring. I've studied some of the writings of not only Christianity and Judaism but Islam, Bahai'i, Buddhism, Taoism, and many cultures with multiple nature gods. I can't say I'm an expert at any of these religions, but I can say that any time I've spent reading the ideas of religion have paid off for me in inspiration.

### *Newspapers*

I used to be a newspaper reporter and editor, and I've become jaded to newspapers. The news seems like an endless cycle of the same thing, happening over and over again. However, if you know how to look, you can find human-interest stories that are inspiring. Stories about people who have triumphed over adversity.

## *Dreams*

I'm not very good at this, but at times in my life I've tried keeping a dream journal by my bedside and writing down what I can remember when I wake up. Not because I think it'll tell me something about myself or my future or past, but because dreams are so interesting in their complete disregard for the rules of reality, for their otherworldness and plot twists.

## *Writing journal*

I highly recommend this for any writer. It doesn't have to be fancy, or something you write in every day. Just a plain notebook will do, although a nice journal can be motivating. Write down thoughts and inspirations and quotes and snippets of good writing you find and pieces of dialog and plot ideas and new characters. Then go back to this journal when you need ideas or inspiration.

## *Delicious*

This popular bookmarking site is a treasure trove of great articles and blog posts and resources. I don't do this much, but sometimes I'll browse through these links to find examples of great writing by others. While you shouldn't steal these ideas, you can often adapt them to your particular blog topic, or use the ideas to spark new ones of your own.

## *Poetry*

How can poetry inspire prose? Through its beauty and flow and style and use of rhythm and play on words. Through its use of language and music.

## *Shakespeare*

He's not the only playwright, of course, but he's undoubtedly the greatest, and the greatest master of the English language as well. While his writing can be difficult for

those not used to the language of his time, a study of even one of his plays pays off immensely. The Bard wrote beautifully, used the largest vocabulary of any English writer, invented his own words, made up interesting phrases that are used to this day, had more puns and twists of words than any writer I know. There is no writer more deserving of our study and more inspirational to other writers.

### [Google](#)

Stuck for ideas? The old standby, Google, has often helped me out. I'll just search for the topic I'm writing about and find tons of great resources.

### *Freewriting*

One of the best ways to get unstuck if you're uninspired. Just start writing. Anything. It doesn't matter. Don't edit, don't pause, don't think. Just write and let it flow. You'll end up with a lot of garbage, probably, but it'll help you get out of your rut and you might just write some really good stuff among all that garbage.

### *Brainstorms*

Similar to freewriting, but instead of writing prose you're writing ideas. Just let them flow. Speed and quantity is more important than quality. Within this brainstorm of ideas, you'll most likely find a few nuggets of greatness. One of my favorite ways to get ideas.

### [Flickr](#)

If fine paintings and sculpture inspire you to greater heights, photography of some of the most talented people in the world can show what everyday humans can do if they try. I like Flickr.com, a real wealthy of amazing photography. Just browse through to find some wonderful inspiration.

### *Breaking your routines*

Get out of your rut to see things from a new perspective. If you usually take one route to work, try a couple others. If you usually get up, get ready for work, and leave, try

exercising in the morning or watching the sunrise. If you usually watch TV at the end of the day, try reading or writing instead. Shake things up.

### *Success stories*

Another of my favorites. When I was training for my first marathon, for example, I read all kinds of success stories of people who had run their first marathon. It inspired me to keep going. There are success stories for writing, or anything else you'd like to do, that will inspire your brains out. :)

### *People watching*

This is an interesting activity for any writer. Go to a busy public place and just sit and watch people. They'll amuse you, inspire you, fascinate you. There's nothing more inspiring than humanity.

*"For my part I know nothing with  
any certainty, but the sight of the stars  
makes me dream."*

~ Vincent van Gogh

## About the Author:

Leo Babauta is a simplicity blogger & author. He created Write to Done and [Zen Habits](#), the Top 25 blog (according to TIME magazine) with over 230,000 subscribers, [mnmlist.com](#), and the best-selling books [focus](#), [The Power of Less](#), and [Zen To Done](#).

Together with Mary Jaksch of Goodlife ZEN, he is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Along with Barrie Davenport (Live Bold and Bloom) and Katie Tallo (Momentum Gathering), he also created [The Habit Course](#), a 4-week intensive, interactive online course meant to teach you how to create habits for life.



## How to Touch Your Creative Soul: A Zen View

By Mary Jaksch

*“The soul of creativity arises from an undivided mind.”*

~ Stephen Nachmanovitch

**A**t times each one of us suffers from creative fatigue. Writing can become a joyless activity – if we forget to touch our creative soul. More about that in a moment, but first let’s take a look at what obscures creativity. Nothing can actually block creativity. It’s like a wellspring that never ceases to gush. But any wellspring can become obscured by debris, and we may need to dig down to find the pure water of inspiration. Here is a list of laudable writing skills – each of which obscures creativity.

## What obscures creativity

1. **Utilitarian** writing When the focus is completely on the usefulness of what we write, we become like a tailor who churns out suit after suit, similar in cut but different in texture. Usefulness is great, but too much of it can obscure creativity.
2. **Strategic** writing In order to churn out piece after piece, we learn to use shortcuts and strategies for fast completion. Like mapping out the main section heads and then filling in the detail. Or adding an intro and extro just before hitting the ‘publish’ button. Strategic skills are great, but they can obscure creativity.
3. **Expert** writing Those of us who are non-fiction writers aspire to be experts in our field. In order to cultivate our expert status, we try to write what we know about. Knowledge is great, but it can obscure creativity.
4. **Safe** writing Most of us play it safe when writing. We don’t want to shock or upset our readers or cause a mass exodus from our website. Safety is a great thing and will help your blog grow, but it can obscure creativity.
5. **Predictable** writing Most of our writing is predictable and, well, maybe boring. Writers and readers like to remain in their comfort zone, but predictability can obscure creativity.

## Is your brand a prison?

As bloggers we are encouraged to play it safe, and not rock the blog, or bust our brand. I think we have to take care not to become a victim of success. Because once we actually have established a successful brand, we tend to foster and maintain it – at the expense of adventure and risk. And at the expense of creativity.

## How to touch the soul of creativity

Right. Here now is the nub of this post. The place where I tell you exactly how to grab hold of creativity – and put it to good use. There's just one small problem: creativity isn't like that. At all. We can't grab hold of creativity. It's not an accessory, or something we can possess or horde. It doesn't belong to anyone. It doesn't belong – full stop.

TS Eliot says,

*“If the word ‘inspiration’ is to have any meaning, it must mean ... that the speaker ... is uttering something that he does not wholly understand.”*

In other words, when we are in the grip of inspiration we are somehow unintelligible and unrecognizable to ourselves. Not only do we not know ourselves. Knowing itself stops.

The more we grasp for it, the more creativity seems to evaporate. The more tricks we use to get our creativity under control, the more it seems to vanish – and we are left with a dreary laundry list of laudable writing skills. That's because creativity isn't something that can be manipulated or coerced. Creativity only comes into play when we forget about 'getting' or 'having' it.

We all want to be inspired. More precisely, we want to **have** inspiration. We want to be the master of inspiration and control it. But, do we really want to give ourselves over to inspiration and let it have **us**?

Quite simply...

### **The soul of creativity arises from an undivided mind.**

Sounds good, doesn't it – but what does it actually mean? If you look through the list of five laudable writing skills, they all force us to write with a divided mind. When we use such a mindset, part of our attention is on writing, and – at the same time – part of our attention is on how the reader might react, how we can shape the post to perform well in social media, and so on.

### **Our mind is cut into two.**

The poet Peter Levitt had something to say about this in the following poem:

*Already at birth  
I was parted,  
not just from my mother -  
but body from mind,  
mind from its source -  
that's why I take up  
this soft blade  
of breathe  
to cut me back into one*

### **How to cut yourself back into one**

'The soft blade of breath' helps us to become whole, and touch the source of creativity. [Mindful breathing](#) is a great way to return to yourself. To reconnect with the moment as it is. But this is not yet the doorway to creativity. It's just the preparation.

## The doorway to creativity

To enter creativity is uncomfortable. Because the doorway to creativity is dark. The doorway leads to nothing, nada, nichts. What I mean is this: creativity happens when we embrace darkness and give up knowing. Not knowing means that we need to feel our way in the darkness. Sensing outlines and shapes, but seeing only dimly.

It's uncomfortable, because when we don't know, there is nothing to hold on to. There is no knowledge to support us, and no known outcome of our work. It's like a mute having a dream – but not able to express it. Isadora Duncan said, “If I could say it I wouldn't have to dance it.” It's uncomfortable. But it's also pure adventure. It's a path into the Unknown. As medieval mapmakers said about *terra incognita*, unexplored areas: ‘There be dragons here’.

### *How to open the door*

Here are seven tips that will help you open the door of creativity:

1. Write about a question that is too big and far beyond you.
2. Embrace not-knowing.
3. Allow time to muse and let thoughts and words take shape in the darkness.
4. Write down any stray bits that come to you.
5. Allow the final shape to emerge at its own pace.
6. Let your writing invade your dreams.
7. Let yourself be derailed.

That last point is the most important one. Because we tend to ride on the rail of who we think we are, and who we want to appear as. If we want to touch and reveal our creative soul, we need to allow creativity to derail us. Yes, we'll be faced with something of a crash site with passengers wandering around aimlessly wondering who the hell they are and how they got there. But touching the soul of creativity is worth the chaos and the pain.

If you walk through this dark doorway, you'll renew your love affair with writing. You'll find that you never lost your creativity – it's right there, just waiting for you to let go of knowing, productivity, and usefulness.

Ok, so it's not the kind of writing that productivity gurus talk about. If you're a blogger who has to produce stuff regularly, it may not be a technique for everyday writing, but you may want to use it at least once a month to keep on developing as a writer. It's slow, laborious, heart-rending, and exhilarating – and will remind you why you wanted to become a writer in the first place.

*“The truth does not ride on a clever response, but on something immediate, irrational, torn directly from the soul.”*

~ Stephen Nachmanovitch

## About the Author:

Mary Jaksch is a published author, Zen Master, and psychotherapist. In the last few years, she's turned into a successful blogger and online entrepreneur.

She writes the blog [Goodlife ZEN](#) and is Chief Editor of Write to Done. Together with Leo Babauta of Zen Habits, she is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Her most recent blog is [A-List Blog Marketing](#) which shows bloggers the Good Karma path to online income.



## How to Finish What You Start: A Five-Step Plan for Writers

By Ali Luke

**D**o you have a bunch of first chapters tucked away in a drawer – for seven different novels?

Is there a folder full of abandoned short stories on your computer?

Have you left a trail of abandoned blogs around the internet?

Did your ebook fizzle out after a few pages?

Most writers have been there ... again, and again, and again. When I began writing, I spent plenty of time *starting* stories. The problem was, I pretty much never finished them.

Maybe it's the same for you. You've got plenty of great ideas, and you just can't resist throwing yourself into them. **Unfortunately, your motivation seems to vanish ... and you're left with a bunch of notes, outlines and first drafts that aren't going anywhere.**

No-one's going to buy a half-written novel. No-one's going to read a blog post that stops short after two paragraphs. So whether your writing aspirations involve hitting the New York Times bestseller list or living from the passive income from your ebooks, *you need to finish what you start.*

Here's how:

### **Step #1: Stop Starting New Projects**

Believe me, I know how tempting it is to grab that new idea and run with it. But now's the time to stop. **Resist the urge to begin anything new – however cool it sounds right now.** After a few days or weeks, that shiny new project is going to lose its appeal and end up in the unfinished heap along with everything else.

*Do it:*

Decide, right now, that you won't start anything new until you've finished something off. Find a notebook, or create a document on your computer, to store any awesome ideas that crop up – you can always come back to them in the future.

## Step #2: Assess Your Current Projects

Take a long, hard look at all your current works-in-progress. If your writing life looks anything like mine, you might well need to grab a sheet of paper and make a list – you may even want to hunt through your desk drawers or your computer's folders.

Is there anything that's just not worth completing? Maybe the novel you started ten years ago isn't the one you want to write now. Maybe that blog post draft was never going to go anywhere.

**Rather than keeping old projects hanging around, ditch any that have died on you:**

As with all dead things, holding onto it won't keep it alive or change the fact that it's useful time has come and gone. Hanging onto dead stuff has a higher psychic cost than most of us realize; in time, dead stuff does what trash and dead things do – it stinks.

(Charlie Gilkey, [Don't Leave Your Trash On The Stairs](#), Productive Flourishing)

*Do it:*

Make three lists:

- Active projects that still excite you and have a purpose
- Dead projects that you're ready to let go (*even if you feel a little bit reluctant*)
- Dormant projects that you might come back to in the future

## Step #3: Choose One Project to Focus On

Now it's time to pick one project. Just one. Because, when it comes to down to it, *something* has to be your priority.

This doesn't mean that you can't work on anything else. It just means that this particular project – whether it's a blog or an ebook or a newsletter or a novel or a poetry collection – is the one that's going to win out if you're short on time and energy.

So what should you choose? You might like to start with:

- **Your smallest project:** aim to finish that 2,000 word short story, not that 100,000 word novel.
- **The project that you've put the most time into:** it's probably getting close to finished.
- **The project that will have the biggest impact for you:** if selling an ebook means you can cut down your hours at your day job, that might be a higher priority than getting a brand-new blog off the ground.

*Do it:*

Choose a single project as your priority – one thing that you're going to see through to *finished*. (And tell us about it in the comments.)

#### **Step #4: Decide What "Finished" Will Look Like**

How will you know when your project is done?

This might seem like a rather stupid question – but it's worth thinking about. Many writing projects don't have a totally clear end point.

If you're working on an ebook, for instance, "finished" might mean that you're ready to launch after:

- You've written an ebook that has a start, middle and end
- You've written an ebook that's 50 pages long, and you've proof-read it
- You've got feedback on your ebook and revised it

Any of those could be right for you, depending on your goals. **A short, free ebook is obviously going to require a very different level of polishing from an ebook that you hope to sell for \$49.**

Without a clear definition of "finished", you risk your project dragging on ... and on ... and on ...

*Do it:*

Write down, clearly, what needs to happen in order for you to check off your project as “finished”.

### **Step #5: Set Some Milestones (And Start Hitting Them)**

Some small writing projects don't need milestones: *write a blog post*, for instance, is something that you could realistically accomplish during one or two writing sessions.

Most projects, though – especially ones that have been hanging around unfinished for ages – are more complex. You won't be able to finish them in a day, in a weekend, or even in a week. You'll want to set some milestones to keep you on track.

Good milestones could be:

- Completing a major section of a novel
- Completing the first draft of a short story
- Getting the outline for your ebook finished off
- Writing a certain number of posts before your blog launch

**I'd suggest having between two and ten milestones for your project (though you can break these down further if you want).** It's often useful to set a deadline for the nearest milestone, too, and [hold yourself accountable](#).

*Do it:*

Write down several milestones that will get you from where you are currently to the finished project. Give yourself a deadline for your next milestone – e.g. “Finish first draft of ebook within the next three weeks.”

## About the Author:

Ali Luke is a writer and writing coach from the UK, and has degrees in English Literature (BA) and Creative and Life Writing (MA). She blogs about writing on her own site, [Aliventures](http://aliventures.com), and has a regular writing newsletter (with ebook freebies) available at [www.aliventures.com/newsletter](http://www.aliventures.com/newsletter)



## 10 Simple Ways to Double the Speed of Your Writing ... Right Now

By Henri Junttila

**I**magine being able to produce the same amount of writing you do now in half the time.

Or even producing double the amount of work you do now in the same amount of time. It's not only possible to do, but very simple.

I've written thousands of articles during the period I've been making a full time living online, and I've discovered that the only thing holding me back from writing faster is myself.

You see, we all have beliefs within that tell us what our writing speed limit is. As I've let go of these beliefs and blocks, I've found myself writing faster and getting into the writing zone effortlessly.

With all that said, let's look at ten simple ways you can double the speed of your writing, right now:

## **1. Outline**

The first thing that has proven highly effective for me and my writing is to outline my articles before I start writing.

I know this sounds ridiculously simple. The problem is that most people know about outlining but never use it in their writing properly.

For example, with this article I brainstormed a good headline, and I then wrote down the 10 different ways that you can double the speed of your writing.

It's nothing fancy, but it works wonders for me and as you implement it into your writing, you may notice the same effects.

## **2. Single-Task**

The next step is to single task, and eliminate any and all distractions while you're writing.

I know this is hard with Twitter, Facebook and e-mail beeping for our attention, but I've found that I can significantly increase the speed of my writing by simply doing nothing other than writing.

Another really simple tip, but the magic lies not in complexity, but in simplicity.

So focus on getting your first draft done and then allow yourself to check e-mail or whatever your addiction is.

Or you may want to wait until the end of the day until you reward yourself.

### **3. Destroy Your Inner Critic**

Our inner critic gets in the way of writing the first draft fast, because it wants to have everything perfect before you've even written the article.

You can simply thank your inner critic for caring about the quality of your work and focus on getting the first draft done.

Tell your inner critic that you will edit the article after you've written it. The magic in writing well is not in producing a perfect first draft, but editing and rewriting afterward.

### **4. Voice-to-Text**

Another fantastic way to increase the speed of your writing is to use voice to text software such as Dragon NaturallySpeaking.

In fact, I'm using this very program to write this article. It allows my hands to take a break and it lets the inspiration flow freely.

It is not without mistakes, but it is amazingly accurate, especially when you've used it for a while and it has gotten used to your voice and way of speaking.

### **5. Brain Dump**

Whenever I'm stuck, I set a goal to write as fast as I can. If I run out of things to say or write, I will simply repeat the last word to keep the momentum going.

Brain dumping is a great way to get all your ideas out.

Once you've got the ideas on there, you can pick and choose the ideas that you think are relevant to whatever message you're trying to convey.

## 6. Deadline

If you want to dramatically cut down the time you spend writing articles, I suggest you get an egg timer or a regular clock and set a deadline for each article.

If you're writing a 500 word article, you may want to set a deadline for 10 minutes.

This will force you to get everything out as fast as possible. It will also help to suspend your inner critic and focus on what's truly important.

## 7. Routine

We all have routines and rituals that help us get into the right state for writing.

Mine is often making a cup of green tea and sipping it while I outline whatever I'm going to work on.

Think back to the last time you felt really good about diving into your writing. What did you do? How did you feel? Where were you?

## 8. Place

There are places where you seem to get into the flow of writing effortlessly. For some people this may mean going to a coffee shop, while others like sitting in nature with no distractions at all.

I personally prefer writing at my desk with total silence. I may listen to music from time to time, but often enjoy the silence.

Find your own sacred writing space and spend your time writing there as much as possible.

## 9. Replicate the Zone

Think about a time when you've been in the zone. How do you know when you're entering the zone?

What do you feel inside your body? What is it that tells you that you're now in the zone and your writing is flowing effortlessly onto the page?

You see, when you identify what the zone looks like to you, you can replicate it.

## 10. Passion

This may seem irrelevant at first, but have you ever noticed how much more you get done when you're passionate about the topic you're working on?

I certainly have.

Being passionate is not only important in writing, but in every area of your life. If you constantly do what excites you, you will produce high-quality work while at the same time feeling good about yourself.

As you finish reading this article, I want to remind you that you already have all the resources within you to easily write faster, better, and higher quality articles.

We often get in our own way, and as you become aware of this, you can begin to realize that you can get into the zone whenever you want.

## About the Author:

Henri Junttila writes at his website, [Wake Up Cloud](#), where you can get the free course: [Discover Your Passion in 5 Days](#).



## Recover from Writing Burn Out: 18 Tips for Writing with Gusto

By Tess Marshall

*“We have to look at our own inertia, insecurities, self-hate, fear that, in truth, we have nothing valuable to say. When your writing blooms out of the back of this garbage compost, it is very stable. You are not running from anything. You can have a sense of artistic security. If you are not afraid of the voices inside you, you will not fear the critics outside of you.”*

~ Natalie Goldberg

**B**urnout can be described as severe exhaustion, feeling depleted, running on empty and lack of inspiration and motivation. Frankly, you feel like you don't give a damn.

You begin doubting your capabilities and the value of your work. Your enthusiasm and energy have vanished. Your ideas have dried up and you fear everything you write isn't worth publishing.

Understanding burnout, can help you face your problem and refresh your writing and creativity.

## What causes burnout?

- Lack of down time
- Feeling overworked and undervalued
- Too much responsibility
- Lack of monetary rewards for your work
- Doing unchallenging or tedious work
- Failure to socialize
- Consistently working too many hours
- Lack of support
- Demanding perfection
- A negative view of yourself

- Unwillingness to delegate
- The need to control everything
- Feelings of overwhelm

## Symptoms can be physical, emotional or behavioral

### *Physical*

- Headaches
- Poor sleep patterns
- Feeling tired
- Feeling sick

### *Emotional*

- Depression
- Lack of energy
- Irritability
- Disengagement
- Lack of motivation and productivity
- Loss of meaning and passion

### *Behavioral*

- Isolation
- Coping with alcohol or drug abuse
- Ignoring work and deadlines

## Steps to Enjoyable Writing

Use the following suggestions to bring the joy back to your writing and other areas of your life.

1. **Clear your desk.** A cluttered workspace influences your state of mind. A neat and sparse desk will help you stay focused and clear. Keep only the necessities in the open. Find a place for everything else or get rid of it.
2. **Mind your own business.** Don't allow other writers to drive you. Don't make comparisons. There will always be better and worse writers than you. Focus on improving your writing and enjoy the process.
3. **Learn to accept constructive criticism.** Everyone experiences criticism and rejection. Don't internalize or take things personally. Improve your work and let the rest go.
4. **Read books on writing.** Read books on writing for enjoyment. Skip the "how to" exercises therein. See if you can relate to the author. If the author was sitting across from you at dinner what would you talk about? What advice would you want? What questions would you have?
5. **Free-writing.** If you want to enjoy writing, learn to write for yourself. Find pleasure in your writing, challenge yourself. The purpose of free-writing is to express yourself for your eyes only. It's very liberating.
6. **Chill out.** If you're bored, stressed or tired, deal with those emotions before sitting down to write. Take a walk. Write in your journal. Clear your head. When you are in a relaxed state begin again. You can't do your best work when you don't feel your best.
7. **Connect with yourself.** When you are tempted to fill up bits of free time with texting, checking emails, Facebook or Twitter, take a few moments to pause and breathe. Breathe in "calm" and breathe out, "peace."
8. **Become unreachable.** The world doesn't end when you disconnect. Take 10 minute breaks throughout your work day and walk away from everything digital. Go outside for a breath of fresh air. Sit silently and gaze out a window and daydream. Anything can be put off for 10 minutes.

9. **Decompress and reflect.** Take a mental health day, a vacation day or a sabbatical for personal renewal. Spend a day at the beach. Watch the sunset. Check into a bed and breakfast or a hostel in another city. Spend a day in a museum or attend an art fair. Choose to do something unrelated to writing. It's a great way to silence your inner writing critic.
10. **Empty your brain.** Do a mind dump by writing down everything that comes to mind on paper. Write down dreams, goals, memories, random thoughts, ideas, everything. Do this for fifteen minutes. Next, read over your list and look for future topics and ideas for your writing.
11. **Mix it up.** If you currently like to write essays experiment with list or how-to articles. Write about your personal experiences. Change the tone of your articles, be conversational, revealing, funny, silly or serious. Make experimenting fun.
12. **Communicate.** Seek help and support from a therapist, coach, a friend or family member. Explore your problem area and do what it takes to prevent burnout from happening again. A second party can help you turn things around and prevent future burnout.
13. **Diet and lifestyle changes.** Avoid sugar and caffeine. Drink enough water and get adequate sleep. Take nutritional supplements. Learn to meditate or schedule a massage.
14. **Make exercise fun.** Do what you enjoy. Partner with a friend to dance, walk, or bike. Get outside and move. Hiking to the top of a mountain can feel like you've conquered the world!
15. **Expand your mind.** Learn new things. Study a second language, read about great philosophers, and everyday heroes. Avoid depressing news both online and off.
16. **Find quality time for the important people in your life.** Take your brother out for dinner or attend the symphony with a neighbor. Play board games with close friends. Meet your mentor at a favorite coffee shop on Saturday morning. Never underestimate the power of creating good times with the people you love.

17. **Slow down and be of service to others.** Send a distant relative a hand written note, talk to a lonely neighbor, send flowers to someone special, make a meal for someone who is ill. When you get out of our own story and help others you keep life in perspective.
18. **Change your scenery.** J.K. Rowling wrote her first Harry Potter book in a cafe near her flat in Edinburgh. Natalie Goldberg recommends writing in coffee shops and restaurants. It's easy to get distracted by the household chores, the refrigerator, and television when you work and write from home.

Be gentle on yourself. Remember there is no end to self-care and creativity. When you write for love and with conviction, joy leaps from every page.

## About the Author:

Tess Marshall is a speaker, author, fear shattering, calculated risk taker. Her blog, [The Bold Life](#) is a juicy mix of inspiration, spirituality, and personal development. Download for free her guide, Peace, Love & Connection and follow her on Twitter and [Facebook](#).



## It's Time to Finish Your Book: 9 Productivity Tips for Writers

By Joanna Penn

**L**ife is full of distractions and our writing time can be eaten away if we don't impose some discipline. We find our work in progress or book idea has sat unfinished for too long and that's just depressing. Well, I know how you feel. After twenty years of saying I wanted to write a novel, I finally wrote my first one in just over a year. That's not hugely fast but I had spent so long talking about it that it felt like a breakthrough!

**Here are some of my tips for being productive as a writer** that will help you finally finish your book whether its fiction or non-fiction.

1. **Know yourself.** I first tried to write a novel years ago but spent a lot of time trying to make it sound like Umberto Eco i.e. literary and important. It wasn't easy for me to write this way and I wasn't enjoying it either. If you're not enjoying the process, chances are your readers won't enjoy the book anyway. So I looked at my bookshelves. They are full of books on psychology and religion as well as fast-paced, explosion-filled, high body count thrillers. So I decided to write a religious thriller with a female kick-ass ex-military psychologist for a protagonist. Kind of Dan Brown meets Lara Croft! I had so much fun writing it. It won't win any literary prizes but I'm embracing the thriller genre and loving it! So be realistic. Look at what you like to read and forget what the critics think.
2. **Stop reading and start writing.** Most writers have shelves full of books on writing. Learning the craft is definitely important, but you will actually learn more if you put pen to paper. Definitely keep reading for pleasure and research but don't use reading as a procrastination tactic. Write first, then go find a book that will help when you actually hit a writing problem. This also applies to courses, seminars and events which of course should be done within reason but can also be an excellent way to avoid writing.
3. **Model success.** Ok, I know I said stop reading but I do suggest reading books in your genre and breaking them down into areas you can model. Pick one that has been successful and go through it critically. I used James Rollins' *The Judas Strain* and went through every chapter, noting first and last sentences, point of view, action, length of chapter, character, dialog and exposition. It took me

several days to work out how he put it all together (and Rollins is a master thriller writer!). I then took the principles and worked out how I could apply them, for example, ending every chapter with a cliff-hanger. This is modeling, not plagiarism. You can't use other people's plot ideas but you can look at the 'rules' in your genre and apply them. Some may criticize this as formulaic writing but readers have expectations and if you disappoint them, you run the risk of not selling your book.

4. **Diarize your writing time.** Your family, day job and health will always come before writing but there are pockets of time where you could write if you plan in advance. Go through your diary and identify blocks of at least 30 minutes where you could write. Then mark them down as if they are business appointments and treat them just as seriously. Tell people you're busy at that time. You can't interrupt a business meeting for a phone call, coffee with a friend or Facebook, so don't interrupt your writing.
5. **Use Write or Die for your first draft.** You can't edit a blank page and writing your first draft is just a matter of getting the words down. [Write or Die](#) is cheap and simple software where you set a time or word count limit and then you have to keep writing. If you stop for more than a few seconds, the screen starts going red and violins screech. You can even set it to kamikaze where your words start disappearing. It definitely keeps you writing and even in 15 minutes you'll be surprised at how much you can produce. Of course, you will edit later but at least you have something to work with. This was the key to completing the first draft of my thriller *Pentecost* and also for writing extra scenes later. It works whether you have a rough outline or if you just want to write stream of consciousness.
6. **Ditch your TV.** I hear screams at this suggestion but hear me out! Four years ago, the TV was banished from our house and since then I have written four books, started a business and now have a [Top 10 Blogs For Writers!](#) (as well as a day job and home life). TV is a time suck, the programs you want to watch are padded with adverts and you end up watching other shows just because they're on. I still watch programs I enjoy (*Glee*, *Fringe*, *Bones* and *Castle!*) but I download episodes on iTunes so it takes 45 minutes instead of hours of distraction. This leaves more time to be creative or to spend time blogging/social networking.
7. **Work 4 days a week.** This is seriously life-changing but takes some sacrifice. Just imagine what you could achieve if you had a full day to spend on your writing instead of the day job. When I decided to really focus on blogging and writing, I moved to four days a week and dropped to 80% of my income. That extra day gave me the energy boost I needed to kick-

start my writing and online business. It also meant I could schedule meetings and marketing tasks by batching them together, allowing me more concentrated time for writing at the weekends. This is the one thing I recommend to anyone wanting to start a business/write a book or achieve more in their lives.

8. **Set deadlines.** I always aim to have a book written for my birthday each year which continually keeps me producing. Decide on your deadline for finishing your book and then work backwards from that date and set smaller specific targets. For example, to be publishable by January, the book needs to be professionally edited in Oct/Nov to allow for rewrites, which means a decent draft needs to be finished before then. Assuming that's the third draft, the first draft needs to be finished in August. If I write 5000 words per week in between working and real life, then I need to start the book by the beginning of June. Plan these steps out and then mark them in your calendar for tracking.
9. **Be accountable.** If you set a goal, you need to tell someone in order to make it real. Blogging is fantastic for accountability because you owe it to your readers to walk the talk. Authenticity is critical these days. You can also share with your writing group or a coach. At the very least, write it down in a journal or email it to yourself at [FutureMe](#) which will send an email on a specific date in the future when you should have achieved your goal.

With even some of these methods, you'll be able to boost the speed of your writing and creation time and finally finish your book. **So what are you waiting for?**

## About the Author:

Joanna Penn is the author of [Pentecost](#), an action-adventure thriller. Her blog, [The Creative Penn](#) offers articles, audios and videos on writing, publishing options and book marketing. Connect with Joanna on [Twitter](#).



## How to Write Like an A-List Blogger

By Leo Babauta

I'm often asked, "What's the most important thing I should be spending my time on as a blogger?"

And my answer is always: **Create amazing content.**

While there are lots of things that can contribute to building a successful blog — social media, good design, effective monetizing, marketing, etc. — none of them are nearly as important as content. In fact, content is the best way to do all of the above and more.

Why? The reason goes to the heart of what we're doing as bloggers, and is very simple: we're trying to connect with readers, to attract readers, to share with readers, to help readers. Remember the common word there: "readers".

So the reader comes for content — what makes the reader stick around and subscribe? More great content, and the reasonable expectation (based on the content you already have) that there will be more to come on a regular basis in the future.

Consider a few other elements:

- **Design:** The most attractive design in the world is useless without great content. Readers don't come because of a pretty design. A design is best when it features the content and little else, when it helps the reader find the content he's looking for. A design that gets in the way of content is bad design.
- **Links from other blogs:** Why would another blogger link to you? Because you have a great post that her readers might find useful or interesting. Not because you have nice design or optimized keywords or cool social widgets. Great content builds links. If we remember that the reader is the most important person, the answer to what's most important to a blogger is easy — create something that the reader wants. And that's amazing content. The reader comes to your blog because you have content that's useful, interesting, entertaining. Because you're solving some problem of hers. Not because you have a great design, or you're great at SEO, or have optimized your keywords. Sometimes optimizing keywords will bring in more search traffic, but it won't stick if you don't have great content.

- **SEO:** Search engines might care a little about optimized keywords and other SEO junk, but what they care most about is incoming links (links to your posts from other blogs). That's the plain truth. And you won't get a bunch of links unless you have great content.
- **Social media** – Digg, Delicious, Reddit, Stumbleupon, Twitter ... these kinds of sites can help your traffic tremendously. And sure, it helps to have friends and be active on these sites. But all of that doesn't matter a lick if you don't write a knock-out post.
- **Monetizing** – All the ads in the world won't get you a dime unless you get traffic, and that traffic won't come until you start creating a destination site, with amazing content that attracts the readers and keeps them reading. Actually, the best way in the world to monetize your blog, from my experience, is by selling more of your great content — if readers like your free content, they'll trust you and be willing to pay for more of what you write.

## About the Author:

Leo Babauta is a simplicity blogger & author. He created Write to Done and [Zen Habits](#), the Top 25 blog (according to TIME magazine) with over 230,000 subscribers, [mnmlist.com](#), and the best-selling books [focus](#), [The Power of Less](#), and [Zen To Done](#).

Together with Mary Jaksch of Goodlife ZEN, he is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Along with Barrie Davenport (Live Bold and Bloom) and Katie Tallo (Momentum Gathering), he also created [The Habit Course](#), a 4-week intensive, interactive online course meant to teach you how to create habits for life.



## 12 Essential Blogwriting Tips for Building a Successful Blog

By Leo Babauta

One of the most common questions I get asked over at my other blog, [Zen Habits](#), is this: “How have you become so successful so quickly?”

Newer bloggers are looking for my secret formula or the key to my success, but I’m always sorry to tell them I don’t have any secrets. I do the same things that other successful blogs have done, and that excellent blogs such as ProBlogger and Copyblogger teach you to do.

However, without sounding like I’m bragging, I have learned a few things over the last year of blogging — a year in which my blog went from nothing (literally nothing — it didn’t exist at the beginning of 2007) to a [Top 50 blog](#) with nearly 40K subscribers (Update: since this article was originally published, Zen Habits has now grown to over 230K subscribers). While I don’t claim to have any secrets, it’s hard to come this far without learning a thing or two.

In hopes of sharing some of this knowledge with my fellow bloggers, I’m going to list some of the key things I’ve learned about blogwriting. I hope to develop some of these things in future posts, but I thought a good overview would help.

- **Write from the heart.** Sure, you could write very popular posts without putting yourself into it. You could make calculated decisions on post topics, and write just to have popular posts that spread your blog’s name and build links by the dozens. It can be done, but I don’t recommend it. The best blogs, in my experience, are those that are written with authenticity and soul, that are personal. In my writing, I try to write about topics I’m passionate about, that I’ve experienced myself, and I hope that shows in my writing. A couple of my favorite examples include [Get Rich Slowly](#) and [ProBlogger](#) – both J.D. and Darren write about intellectual topics, but you can tell they’re being authentic as they do so.
- **Be insanely useful.** It’s possible to create a successful blog without trying to be very useful, but it’s not done very often. Of all the most popular and successful blogs, the only one I can think of that doesn’t try to be very very useful is [I Can Has Cheezburger](#). That’s a phenomenon to itself, and it would be hard for you to tap into that kind of sentiment. Instead, go for the usefulness route:

whatever topic you write about, try to be as useful as humanly possible. Seriously. Create a resource like no other. Even if it's being done elsewhere, you can explore new angles, create new resources, give tips from your own experience. One post after another, pound your readers with useful information. They will love it.

- **Keep the reader's problems in mind.** This goes with the tip above, but it's important to stress that you're thinking about the reader's problem, and no one else's. Who are your readers? What is your target audience? And how well do you know them? If you don't know them well, you should start asking them: What do they want to know? What problems do they need addressed? Read other blogs with the same target audience if you don't have an audience yet, and see what problems those readers express. On this blog, for example, many of you seem to be bloggers who want to build a successful blog — and therefore, I would be remiss not to address that problem here. On *Zen Habits*, many of my readers face problems having to do with simplicity, with productivity and organization, with health and fitness, and so on. I address problems related to those topics, and generally they're happy. If they're not happy, I try to address the problems I've missed. Once you've identified the problems, again, try to be as useful as possible in solving them.
- **Don't just write about yourself.** You should always put a piece of yourself into your posts, if you want readers to identify with you. But your blog shouldn't just be all about you, not if you want people to keep coming back. While many blogs start as a personal journal, I have to be honest — most people aren't interested in reading personal journals unless those journals are about people who are doing something they want to do. That kind of journal, then, becomes extremely useful in solving a problem they have. In other words, even if the journal seems to be all about the blogger, to the reader, it becomes about the reader. And that's why it works. You should take that lesson and remember that you're not writing for yourself. You're writing for an audience. Make it about them, and you, in a shared conversation. Incorporate their questions, their stories. Share what you've learned, but also share what they've learned.

- **Interact with readers.** A blog is really a conversation. It starts with your post, of course, but it continues with comments from readers, and with comment and criticism from other bloggers. Get that conversation stirred up a bit by posting questions and polls and contests for your readers — this gets them deeply involved in the conversation that is your blog, and there's no better way. On Zen Habits, I often pose an Ask the Readers question, and I get tons of responses. I then take those responses and pick the best answers and do a Top 10-style resource list, and you know what? The tips from the readers often turn out to be the best tips on the blog.
- **Give them a reason to come back.** Why would a reader keep coming back to your blog? Why would they subscribe, when there are so many other blogs out there to subscribe to? You've got to give them a reason. And the reason is that they can see what amazing content you put out on a regular basis, and they can reasonably expect you to continue to produce that content. They won't want to miss out, so they'll come back or subscribe. Darren at ProBlogger did a great job of talking about this: [How to Build a Sense of Anticipation](#) (and also see [Part 2](#)).
- **Write catchy headlines.** I have to admit, headlines are more important than they should be. Headlines are like advertisements for your posts — if they're not very good, no one will read the posts. And so you could have amazing content, but if the headlines suck, you've got nothing, as far as readers are concerned. Most readers will find your posts in one of three places, and all three rely on the few words of your headlines to draw them to the actual post: in their feed reader, in a link from another blog, or on a social media site such as Digg or delicious. Consider two headlines for the same exact post: **A Guide to Creating a Minimalist Home** or **The Stuff in Your House**. The second headline won't get many readers, but the first is one of my most popular posts ever on Zen Habits. In a few words, it tells people that 1) it will solve the problem of clutter in their homes and 2) it will do so in a very useful guide format. With those two points succinctly conveyed, they click on the headline and read the post. Pay special attention to the popular headlines on other blogs, and try to figure out what works and why.
- **On social media.** Zen Habits would never have found as many readers if it weren't for the social media sites — mostly Digg, delicious and Stumbleupon.

So I can't downplay the importance of these sites. I should tell you, however, that while they can send you tons and tons of traffic, it is also hard to get popular on these sites if you don't already have a lot of readers who will bookmark your posts. For a new or smaller blog, the best way to get a popular post is to get a link from a bigger blog. Lifehacker, Lifehack.org and Dumb Little Man all helped some of my posts get popular early on, and I was extremely grateful for that. How do you get links from bigger blogs? Well, follow the points above to create an insanely useful post that comes from the heart, addresses a common problem, and has a great headline. Then email your link to the editors of bigger blogs — be aware, however, that these editors get hundreds of similar emails and don't appreciate spam, so you should only do this rarely and only when you've got an amazing post that their readers will like. Even then, you probably won't get a link. But you might get lucky. Once you do have a readership, doing the same things I just mentioned will help you get popular posts, but without the need for a link from a bigger blog. It's hit and miss, but it definitely helps to get popular.

- **Guest posting.** Besides social media and the occasional link from a bigger blog, the best way to draw new readers to your blog is to write great guest posts for other blogs, especially bigger ones. This shows a new audience what a great writer you are, and how useful your posts are. I wrote dozens of guest posts for dozens of blogs in my early blogging days, and nothing helped get exposure for Zen Habits more than this. When writing a guest post, write your absolute best stuff, following all of the tips above.
- **Reveal yourself.** This is similar to writing from the heart, but it's going beyond that — readers want to be able to relate to you. That's why they'll look for your about page if they enjoy one of your posts. They need to know who you are, and why they should be reading you. Read [My Story](#) at Zen Habits ... it's gotten dozens of comments, and that's because people can relate to the things I've done, and are trying to do similar things themselves. In your About page, and in your posts, you have to share some of your personal life and personal info. This is difficult at first, to give up some of your privacy, but if you really want to connect with readers, you'll do it to some extent. Of course, only share what's appropriate to your blog. Readers don't need to know about what goes on in your bedroom if you're writing about Indian cooking.

- **Don't be afraid to try new things.** Blogs can get stale if they do the same things over and over. When you sense this is happening to you, break out from your mold. Look at what other blogs are doing different, and try those things out. Find other mediums, such as movies and magazines and books, and see if you can get ideas from them. Don't be afraid to experiment, and to fail. It's from this failure that you'll find success.
- **Focus on the essential.** A blogger could spend every waking hour on his blog, not only writing posts but formatting them, finding photos and links, reading and responding to comments, checking stats, seeing how much money he's made on different ad systems, tweaking the blog's layout and design, keeping updated with the social media, reading feeds, checking and responding to email, keeping up with Twitter ... and so on, ad nauseum. It's not worth it. It doesn't help your blog to grow. Figure out what's essential, what you really need to do, what actions pay off ... and spend your time doing these things. Let the other stuff fade to the background, and do them infrequently. For me, writing and interacting with readers are the two essential activities. Sure, I still do most of the other stuff, but I try to minimize the time I spend on them, and place most of my emphasis on the essentials.

## About the Author:

Leo Babauta is a simplicity blogger & author. He created Write to Done and [Zen Habits](#), the Top 25 blog (according to TIME magazine) with over 230,000 subscribers, [mnmlist.com](http://mnmlist.com), and the best-selling books [focus](#), [The Power of Less](#), and [Zen To Done](#).

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## 11 Ways to Write an Irresistible Intro to Your Blog Post

By Mary Jaksch

Imagine that you've been invited to a party where you don't know anyone. You've come through the door, grab a drink, and stand there feeling like a pony with five legs.

Nobody seems to pay any attention to you. After a while you start sidling to the door in order to escape. Or maybe you tough it out and start 'making conversation'.

**Ok, so this scenario isn't much fun.**

Here's another scenario: You go to the same party. But this time the host spots you hovering on the doorstep, guides you into the room, hands you a drink and shows you around, introducing you to the other guests. That would feel a lot better, right?

**The difference lies in the introduction.**

In the first scenario, you didn't feel welcome. Whereas in the second scenario, your host connected with you. When you think of visiting a blog and reading a post, the experience is quite similar. If there is no introduction to the post you're about to read, you may feel unwelcome and leave. Why? Because the headline promised a wonderful experience, but the start of the post didn't match up.

What makes the introduction to your blog post irresistible?

## **1. Invite the reader in**

The reader will feel at home if he or she feels that their concerns will be met here. And that your blog is a friendly place to visit. One way is to address the reader directly.

*Example 1:*

What motivates you? Do you respond best to intrinsic motivation, or to extrinsic motivation?

From: [How Motivation Works](#) | *Goodlife ZEN*

*Example 2:*

Do you sometimes feel like you're in a rut with writing? We all do from time to time.

From: [Energize Your Writing](#) | Copyblogger

## 2. State a commonality

When you state something that you have in common with your readers, you create an immediate bond.

*Example 1:*

We all seem to be waiting for something to come to us before we can move on in life: ‘Waiting for a perfect partner before I can be truly happy’.

*From:* [Sitting in Life’s Waiting Lounge](#) | *Steve Aitchison’s Blog*

*Example 2:*

Everyone agrees that fitness is good. It boosts your health, brightens your soul, calms your mind, and allows you to do more with your life.

*From:* [Want to Be Fit – or Even Ultra-Fit?](#) | *Goodlife ZEN*

## 3. Be personal

Address your reader like a friend. A great way to do this is to tell a personal story.

*Example 1:*

When I was a young girl, I climbed trees, built forts, and swam fast. I didn’t shave my legs, wear make-up, sit on the sidelines or wait to lead the charge over a snowbank.

*From:* [How to Be a Girl](#) | *Momentum Gathering*

*Example 2:*

I’m a big subscriber to using whatever you can find to work out: pullups on trees, throw big boulders, flip logs or big tires, jump over things, sprint up hills.

*From:* [Minimalist Gym](#) | *Zen Habits*

## 4. Be exciting

Create a mystery in your introduction that then unfolds in the main part. When you use this strategy, you create a bridge from the headline (which should offer a promise) to the middle part – which delivers the promise. The key is to intimate to your readers in the introduction what are you going to reveal to them in the rest of the article.

*Example:*

Your headline is the first, and perhaps only, impression you make on a prospective reader. Without a compelling promise that turns a browser into a reader, the rest of your words may as well not even exist. So, from a copywriting and content marketing standpoint, writing great headlines is a critical skill. Here are some interesting statistics:

*From:* [How to Write Magnetic Headlines](#) | *Copyblogger*

## **5. Offer the 'why' of your post**

Write about what triggered this topic in your mind, or in your life.

*Example:*

When I started the 8-Week Fitness Challenge, I had no idea what the response might be. I was amazed when about 100 people joined the Challenge! It seems that there is a quiet revolution in progress.

*From:* [Fitness: 5 Things that Make Exercise Enjoyable](#) | *Goodlife ZEN*

## **6. Lead in with a personal story**

A personal story can be a great way to draw your readers into a post. Of course the personal story needs to focus on the key issue of your post.

*Example:*

Today, my mom was telling me about her life as a young married mother of two in the mid 70s. She worked full-time, cooked all the meals, did all the shopping, homework help, vacuumed, dusted, swept, mopped, made homemade bread, weeded an immense garden, cleaned the bathrooms, did the laundry and dishes. We begrudgingly helped a bit.

*From:* [Do You Have a Chair of Your Own](#) | *Momentum Gathering*

## **7. Ask questions**

A question that is unanswered feels incomplete. Questions intensify the reader's curiosity. The key is to ask questions that the reader can't answer without further information.

*Example:*

When a young Turkish boy named Celal Kapan first began to speak, almost the first thing he said was: “What am I doing here? I was at the port.”

Later he told his parents that he had been a dockworker who had fallen asleep in the hold of a ship when a heavy oil drum fell on him and killed him instantly. Was he remembering a previous life?

*From: [Is There Life After Death?](#) | Goodlife ZEN*

## 8. State facts

Details increase the value of your post, and boost your credibility. Use exact numbers if you can. Readers tend to trust numbers.

*Example:*

Sex may be a common topic in the US, but there are some facts about sex that most of the American population is unaware of. For instance, cold feet is probably the reason for a lack of orgasm. A UK study found that 80% of couples wearing socks during intercourse were able to reach orgasm, but 50% of those who were sockless weren't able to reach orgasm.

*From: [Interesting Facts About Sex](#) | Medical Billing and Coding*

## 9. Use quotes

Quotes are a great way to lead into your post. Everyone loves quotes. They are usually by well-known authors and through using their quotes, you are borrowing their authority. If you use quotes supporting the main points of your post, this will increase the reader's trust in you.

*Example 1:*

*“In the midst of winter, I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer.” ~ Albert Camus*

About ten years ago, I stopped sleeping. It started on a vacation. The first night in this lovely beach rental, I couldn't fall asleep and stayed wide awake all night. Of course I was a mess the next day, and the following night I was panicky that I wouldn't be able to fall asleep again.

From: [Just a Bad Mood or Are You Coming Unglued?](#) | Live Bold and Bloom

*Example 2:*

*“What unites us as human beings is an urge for happiness which at heart is a yearning for union.” ~ Sharon Salzberg*

Have you ever looked into the mirror and wondered who is staring back at you? Or longed to unite the many parts within you? The friendly one, the angry one, the resentful one, the sad one, the calm one, the impatient one, the confused one – that are all jumbled up behind a public persona that’s buffed and glossed – but tends to crack when you’re angry or upset.

From: [Unraveled? Here’s How to Knit Yourself and the World Together](#) | *Zen Habits*

## 10. Anecdotes

If you can find good anecdotes, the introduction is a great place to place them. Anecdotes are short, punchy stories. Speech writers often lead in with an anecdote because it helps the audience to pay attention.

*Example:*

Google just introduced customizable background images on their site. Here’s what happened:

“I need to search for someth.... wait, huh? What is Google celebrating today, the guy who invented transparency? A background image, oh weird, it’s like a mountain view. Oh I get it... Mountain View! I wonder who that woman on the dock is? Not a huge fan of big, busy images... too distracting. What other pictures are there? Yuck. Yuck. Nice for a photo album, but too busy for this page. Meh, the colored background is ok, red... no, gray, yeah, gray. Actually, maybe I want—Wait, I was supposed to be searching, how do I turn this off? Wait, why does clicking remove background image just return the original picture of the woman on the dock, I just want nothing to be there. Argh!”

From: [A Google Background Image Anecdote](#) | *Plastic Mind*

## 11. Moral stories

Since the dawn of mankind, people have told stories to illustrate and inspire. There are some great collections, such as Aesop's fables. If you can find a story that exemplifies the core of your post message, then it may be something you can offer in your introduction.

*Example:* [The Hare and the Tortoise](#)

## Conclusion

The introduction is a crucial part of a blog post. It's a chance to connect with readers and encourage them to read your post.

You may think that it's common knowledge how to write a good introduction, but about 60% of all guest posts that land on my desk lack an introduction. It's not a difficult skill to learn; it just takes practice. A great way to learn how to write good intros is to try out all of the eleven ways above in turn.

## About the Author:

Mary Jaksch is a published author, Zen Master, and psychotherapist. In the last few years, she's turned into a successful blogger and online entrepreneur.

She writes the blog [Goodlife ZEN](#) and is Chief Editor of Write to Done. Together with Leo Babauta of Zen Habits, she is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Her most recent blog is [A-List Blog Marketing](#) which shows bloggers the Good Karma path to online income.



## How to Make Your Free eBook a Magnet for New Readers: 5 Crucial Tips

By Tess Marshall

*“If we advance confidently in the direction of our dreams, and endeavors to live the life we imagine, we will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”*

~ Henry David Thoreau

I recently completed a free ebook to put on my blog in exchange for a subscription to my newsletter. The names and email addresses I collect, will be used to build traffic as part of my internet marketing plan to monetize my blog.

A mailing list, allows me an opportunity to create value, build relationships, and gain prospects for products and services. It enables me to increase my online presence and create income.

My newsletter will be used to inform my list of updates, tips, contests, surveys or announcements of services, products, and changes to my blog. Electronic email has replaced the postal service and is the most common use of distribution of mass mailings.

The power of a freebie in exchange for a name and email address is often overlooked and underrated. There is a temptation to avoid your best effort and save your best content, out of haste, lack of commitment or because it's free.

When you give your subscribers an unforgettable ebook they will look forward to doing business with you in the future. Happy subscribers become happy customers and members of your tribe.

Some believe a blog is only as valuable as the size of one's list. I would like to add a list is only as valuable as the quality of one's products. It's wise to make all products and services uncommon and outstanding.

*Read on to learn how to attract readers with an irresistible eBook.*

## **1. Do and give your best to build trust**

Build a stable and solid internet marketing business by always using your brilliance to provide quality content, perfect solutions and products that enrich lives.

With an extraordinary and useful free ebook, subscribers will thirst for additional content and products. You'll build your list, become known as an expert, and sell future products.

It's good business to be generous and give more than is expected, always produce top-notch, unique and remarkable goods and services.

As your business becomes appreciated and profitable, you'll gain respect, build trust, and establish cherished life-long customers.

## **2. Establish connection through trust**

Creating and selling on the internet is an enormous opportunity for establishing heartfelt, lifelong, friendships and connections throughout the world. I believe everything we do, say, and create as bloggers counts.

Our work has the ability to bring joy, happiness, calm, courage, faith and hope. Every product or service we create and sell with integrity will stand out, provide value, establish, and enhance our relationships.

By revealing our hopes, dreams, hurts and pain to one another, we will grow. Through mutual respect, listening, and acceptance, we'll develop relationships and friendships for the duration.

Look at your list as more than names and emails or a method to make money. See your list as your friends who deserve your best. Their names are sacred, their addresses private. Put a priceless value on the list. Never sell or share your list with anyone.

## **3. Use what you have and make it even better**

If you have been blogging for several months, read through your blog and gather two or three of the most popular, well written and important posts. Next, gather three more posts related to these. Look for a theme or topic to appear.

For example, when writing my ebook, I recognized themes on relationships and happiness, purpose and meaning, connection and love, gratitude and inner peace, and fearlessness and courage.

Place your gathered articles in a logical order. Use your articles to create chapters. Do more research and expand on each chapter. Use quotes, personal stories, and stories of others to further enhance your material.

If you are a brand new blogger, with little in your archives, consider your niche and research ideas and themes that fit your blog. Expand on your research as well. Get creative. This is your chance to make a good first impression.

Another option for a beginner is to create a special report based on your specialty and knowledge. This may seem less daunting.

My ebook is only 17 pages. However, it does create a strong impact. The power lies in the choice and meaning of every word, photo, color, and line in the design. The power lies in my message.

You want it to move readers emotionally. You want your readers to learn, enjoy, think differently or feel differently. When a person is changed by your work, you have succeeded.

#### **4. Hire or barter with a creative genius**

Next consider your design. For mine, I wanted to use the stunning photos belonging to my blogging buddy, Caroline Manrique. I chose one for my cover and one for every page to create added value. I credited her in exchange for the free use of her photos. If you choose photos, it's necessary to resize and format them so your ebook will download quickly.

Another friend used her artistic and technical talent, time, and energy to design my ebook. It's visually aesthetic enough to print and frame every page.

The value of an ebook cover can't be overstated. The average buyer will spend 8 seconds looking at it. As one marketer said, "Make them want to reach right through the screen and grab it." You don't want to lose subscribers because of a poorly designed cover! Make all of your work count!

## 5. Ask everyone to share your ebook

Because you've done excellent work, it's highly likely your friends, family, and colleagues will forward your ebook to others. Ask your readers to pass it on.

Place an invitation on the final page of your eBook suggesting it be shared with everyone who will enjoy or benefit from it.

Also, ask others to share it using social media.

In conclusion, create an ebook that is useful, enjoyable and relevant to your blog or website. Customize it to build and reflect your business. Put your unique spin on it. Create something a subscriber can't get from anyone else. Make it hot property!

The blogosphere is made of trillions of words and photos, forming endless stories, sending out a ripple effect of possibility and positivity.

Creating your eBook to be a magnet for new readers will also send out ripple effect of undeniable quality of your blog, website or business.

## About the Author:

Tess Marshall is a speaker, author, fear shattering, calculated risk taker. Her blog, [The Bold Life](#) is a juicy mix of inspiration, spirituality, and personal development. Download for free her guide, Peace, Love & Connection and follow her on Twitter and [Facebook](#)



## Writing an eBook: How to Get Started (and Finish!)

By Cara Stein

**W**riting an ebook is awesome. You can control the publication process, eliminating the long delays of finding a publisher and waiting for your book to be printed. If you do a free one, it's also a perfect way to let your future customers take your writing for a test drive.

I recently released a free ebook, [How to be Happy \(No Fairy Dust or Moonbeams Required\)](#), and it's done wonders for my subscriber numbers and traffic. I've gotten tons of comments from people about how much they liked it and how helpful they found it. Music to a writer's ears!

Here's what I learned from the process:

### **1. Get inspired**

For my ebook, the idea jumped into my lap and wouldn't go away until I wrote about it. (It was a lot like how I got my cat!) But normally, I expect I'll be going after ideas myself, rather than the other way around.

A good place to look for ideas is what you already know and are good at. What do you know now that you wish you had known a few years ago? What resource would you have killed for when you were starting out?

### **2. Make an outline**

Once you have an idea, making an outline is a great way to start building the book. That's how I did my ebook. I had a lot of things I wanted to say, so I started listing and organizing them. Once I had the outline, all I had to do was fill in the blanks.

The magic of this technique is it takes an overwhelming task (write a whole book!) and turns it into a bunch of doable pieces. Once the whole thing is broken down, writing a section is a lot like writing a blog post. Write a bunch of blog posts? Of course you can do that!

### **3. Schedule your writing time**

I would love to have the kind of life where scheduling wasn't necessary, but I juggle way too many things. If I don't schedule something, it doesn't get done.

When I was working on my ebook, I set aside a two-hour block four mornings a week for writing. It was a good plan, but I often let other things trample a writing session. Oh, the furnace is out—I'll meet the repair man Wednesday morning. Poof! There went a writing session. Time to make Thanksgiving pies. Poof! There went another one.

It's especially difficult when the people around you don't share your priorities. They want to spend time with you, you say you can't because you'll be writing, they look at you like you're weird, crazy, and lame.

Or maybe I just had this problem because I didn't believe in myself. If you don't take yourself and your project seriously, nobody else will, either. If you want to write a book, commit to it, make it top priority, and guard your writing time as sacred. You will finish it if you want to badly enough.

#### **4. Celebrate**

Whether your book is short or long, finishing the writing is an accomplishment. Treat yourself!

#### **5. Revise systematically**

I tend to write like mad and revise later. I do a little rewording during the writing, but I try to leave my critical internal editor at the door. That leaves me a big rough draft at the end.

This is where I got really stuck. Writing is exhilarating. Revising and editing, on the other hand... far less sexy. I'd try to read through the whole thing and end up asleep on the couch.

Then I had the idea to break the editing down to the size of a blog post, like I had done for the writing. The amount of work required to fix and tighten up a blog post is about one to two hours for me—a doable amount. So I split the book into chunks and revised them one at a time. Much better! Then I could look at the book as a whole and fix it on that level.

Another trick I use for revising is formatting the text. After two or three passes through a piece of text, I can't read all the words any more, no matter how hard I try

to make myself concentrate. But when I move it from a word processor to blogging software or a book layout and start concentrating on headings, emphasis, and lists, it gives me a new perspective and I can read all the words again. This is usually my last round of revisions. In the case of the book, I also sent it to grammar-loving friends for additional copy editing.

## **6. Launch**

Once the writing and editing are finished, it feels like you should be about done, but actually, there's still a ton of work to do! You need to design the cover and do the layout, or get someone else to do it. Then there's all the marketing and technical stuff!

For me, the excitement of having other people finally read my book was essential motivation at this stage. There are a squizillion little things that need to be set up and taken care of for the launch to go smoothly. Making a checklist is essential.

Check and double-check all of your links. It sounds obvious, but it's easy to mess up. Try to launch when you don't have a lot of other things going on. But most importantly, launch! Nobody will get to read your great work otherwise. It can be tempting to keep tweaking and improving, but at a certain point, you have to declare victory and get it out there.

## **7. Take the long view**

Leading up to my launch, I was 100 kinds of excited. All this work, finally coming to fruition! I stayed up until 2 am the night before getting everything done. Meanwhile, my day job was causing a ton of stress and sucking up a lot of energy. By launch day, I was an exhausted, gibbering bundle of nerves.

A lot of things fell short of my expectations on launch day. One of my download links was broken (insert self-flagellation here!). I had less traffic than I hoped, and of the direct traffic that day, only 13.5% actually clicked the "download" link. I was crushed.

Then, I got a message from a reader saying she liked the book but didn't see enough of me in it – next time, I should include more of myself.

I had asked for feedback, and at the time, I sincerely meant it, or thought I did. The problem is, once I consider something finished, I can't imagine anyone's honest feedback being anything but "Stellar! Best thing I've ever read! I've been waiting for this all my life!" So this feedback, even though it was constructive and mostly positive, crushed me. As fried as I was by then, I couldn't see anything clearly. I was devastated, ready to quit writing and retreat to my cubicle.

That would have been a huge mistake! Over the next week, I got some rest, traffic and downloads picked up considerably, and I got a ton of enthusiastic comments from old friends and new subscribers. The rush I was expecting on launch day did happen, just not all that day. It's also given me the chance to interact and deepen my relationships and feel more a part of the online community as a whole.

Writing and releasing an ebook is one of the best things I've ever done. I highly recommend getting started by writing a short ebook or manifesto and releasing it free. The positive energy is addictive!

## About the Author:

Cara Stein is the founder of [17000 Days](#), a blog about remembering that life is short and making your best days a common occurrence. She's a big believer in self-reinvention and building your ideal life for yourself. She's written two ebooks: [How to be Happy \(No Fairy Dust or Moonbeams Required\)](#) and [The Less Hassle, More Harmony Relationship Guide](#). Her latest adventure is [Beyond Fear](#), a workshop on overcoming your fears.



## Get Your Eagle Eye On: 10 Tips for Proofreading Your Own Work

By Leah McClellan

**T**he best blog post I read this morning—of many—is good. Very good, actually. It flows. It’s fresh. It has a rhythm that drew me in and made me want to read every word. The ideas are thought-provoking.

But how much more enjoyable would it have been if I didn’t have to reread certain sections to make sure I was getting the gist of things? How much better would the post be if I didn’t hesitate at *it’s* instead of *its* and *there* instead of *they’re*? How much intended meaning and power was lost over a lack of subject-verb agreement or commas that might have been better placed?

Tripping, stumbling, and hesitating over misspelled words or ill-placed punctuation is like watching a TV show with a shaky cable signal or trying to talk while a cell phone connection is breaking up—the reader is jostled right out of the story the writer is telling.

If the errors are too big or too many, I’m outta there.

This writer intentionally broke a lot of rules in his 1100-word article, and he broke them well. Sentence fragments clustered together as ideas to ponder, a long list of items without commas that symbolizes repetitive drivel, the same word repeated over and over in a few short sentences to pound in a point. Good stuff and well done, for the most part.

Some grammar and punctuation rules can—and should—be broken, when you know what the rules are and how to break them effectively. But the lack of solid proofreading in this piece is like cake without icing, pottery without glaze, or a fine piece of wood in need of a polish. The writer didn’t step back and get his Eagle Eye on.

*“Come on,”* you chortle. *“It’s hard to proofread your own work. And who notices anyway?”*

Believe it or not, lots of people notice unless they’re just scanning. And it’s quite possible that many of those scanners might linger on every word you write if typos and bloopers and unintentionally-broken punctuation or grammar rules weren’t making them stumble and wonder and lose their focus.

Typos and errors break up the “voice” that readers are trying to hear as they read your written words.

It doesn't matter whether you're a freelancer, a blogger, a student, or anyone who writes for any reason. Most of us don't have proofreaders or a skilled family member or friend to help us out on a regular basis. And if you're submitting work to an agent or publisher or a big blog for consideration, why let typos and mistakes clutter and cloud the brilliant work you want them to read?

Any time you write something, you want readers to enjoy and appreciate your masterpiece. It's your baby, an extension of yourself. Take good care of it.

Writing and editing is art. Proofreading is science.

So says Rushang Shah, President of [Gramlee.com](http://Gramlee.com), an online editing service with editors behind the scenes constantly proofreading and copyediting. Rushang says that "all proofreading and copyediting involves the human element, and that's why computers cannot replace a proofreader."

Proofreading your own work can be challenging, it's true. You already know the story, you already have a picture in your mind of what to expect and, as a result, you tend to skim over words and groups of words. Plus, you know your own voice and, even if there are errors in your writing, you don't "hear" them or see them because you're in a hurry, and your mind fills in the blanks as you skim over things. You might be daydreaming—even if you're reading out loud.

If you have a system, though, proofreading can be like doing a quality check on an assembly line. It's just busy work, really, and not very creative at all. But it's so important.

Here are some tips to help you get your Eagle Eye on and proofread your own work like a pro.

- **Don't proofread until you're completely finished with the actual writing and editing.** If you make major changes while proofreading, even if it's just within sentences, you're still in an artistic, creative mode, not a science mode.
- **Make sure you have no distractions or potential interruptions.** Shut down email and social media, hide the cell phone, shut off the TV, radio, or music, and close the door. Print your document if you need to get away from the computer altogether.

- **Forget the content or story.** Analyze sentence by sentence; don't read in your usual way. Focus on spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Work backwards, if that helps, or say the words and sentences out loud. Concentrate.
- **Make several passes for different types of errors.** Try checking spelling and end punctuation on one pass, grammar and internal punctuation on another, and links or format on yet another pass. Develop a system.
- **Take notes.** If you notice a format issue while checking spelling or if you need to look something up, make a quick note and come back to it so you don't lose your focus.
- **If you do make a last-minute change to a few words, be sure to check the entire sentence or even paragraph over again.** Many errors are the result of changes made without adjusting other, related words.
- **Check facts, dates, quotes, tables, references, text boxes, and anything repetitive or outside of the main text separately.** Focus on one element or several related aspects of your writing at a time.
- **Monitor yourself.** If you find yourself drifting off and thinking about something else, go back over that section again. Try slapping your hand or tapping a foot in a rhythm as you examine each word and sentence out loud.
- **Get familiar with your frequent mistakes.** Even the most experienced writer mixes up *their*, *they're*, and *there* or *too*, *two*, and *to*. When I'm tired or writing fast, I write what I hear in my mind and just get careless. Not a big deal. That's what proofreading is for. You caught those errors, didn't you?
- **Check format last.** Every document has format, even an email, whether it's paragraph spacing, text wrap, indentations, spaces above and below a bullet list or between subheadings and text, and so on. Leave this for the end because contents may shift during handling.

You already know better than to rely on spell-check, so I won't belabor the point except to say that "wear form he untied stats" doesn't bother spell-check but it might get an American in trouble at a customs checkpoint.

What if you don't quite know what you're looking for while proofreading?

Do you know basic comma rules, how to use a semi-colon, or when to use *who* or *whom*? You might have an excellent sense of what things should look like or sound like, especially if you're an avid reader, but if you don't know basic grammar and punctuation rules, proofreading might be guesswork, at best, with doubtful results, at worst. Why not make your life easier and your writing better? Take some time to learn basic rules from some online resources I consult when I need help:

- [Grammar Girl: Quick and Dirty Tips](#)
- [Purdue Online Writing Lab: General Writing Resources](#)
- [Oxford Dictionaries: Better Writing](#)
  - [GrammarBook.com](#)

You can also download a free copy of *The Handy-Dandy Everybody's Guide to Proofreading* over at my blog, [Peaceful Planet](#).

Don't let mistakes tarnish your work of art, whether it's a research paper, a blog post, a query letter, or business communication. And remember, proofreading is not the same as writing and editing. It's not about creativity; it's a science that needs a system. Follow these tips and create your own system, and you'll have your Eagle Eye on in no time.

## About the Author:

Leah McClellan is a fun-loving freelance writer and excruciatingly exact editor who can spot misplaced modifiers and comma splices from a mile away. In her free time, she enjoys a variety of pursuits and often entertains friends with her fluency in colorful colloquialisms and a surprisingly strong command of street slang. You can find her over on [Peaceful Planet](#) where she blogs about personal, community, and world peace.



## How to Rescue a Piece when You Write a Frankenstein

By Mary Jaksch

Sometimes I write a Frankenstein piece. It looks fine until I notice that arms sprout where the legs should be – and unfortunately I forgot to attach a neck.

I don't always notice that straight away. Why? Because when I finish writing a piece, I'm in love with it. I adore it. It's great. No, not just great: it's brilliant! ...Until the next day...

Next day I'm shocked to see that my piece needs intense reconstruction. What happened? Overnight I took off my writer's wings and donned the editor's white coat and stethoscope.

Let's say that you are ready to do the same. What now?

Those of you who can wave a First Aid certificate will know. First you do triage. Find out whether it's a case of CPR or whether a plaster will do. Is it an oh-gawd-this-just-doesn't-hang-together-at-all piece? Or is it a well-this-will-only-need-a-tweak piece?

In the following I'll focus on how to get a piece to hang together. It's about structural editing, or, how to reverse engineer a piece. Structural editing makes sure that all the bones of a piece are in the right place.

**Here's how you can operate successfully on a bungled piece:**

## **1. Reassemble the Bones**

- Write down each point of your article in its shortest form.
- Re-arrange the points into headings and subheadings.
- Add missing points.
- Cut and paste each part of the old article into the new structure.
- Add or delete sentences to make transitions.

## **2. Check Your Transitions**

Once you've got your bones right, check for smooth transitions. The reader wants to be led from one idea to the next – without any jolts. I find that transitions sometimes

happen in my mind but don't land on the page. Maybe it's perfectly clear to me how I got from cucumbers to cataracts – but my readers might need a pathway from one to the other.

### 3. Make a bold entry

*“Before you settle on a beginning, ask yourself if it provokes sufficient curiosity in the reader.”*

~ Leo Stein

Take a look at the start of your piece. There are two questions you need to pose:

1. Does it grab your readers?
2. Does it introduce your theme?

Here's a behind-the-scenes look at my writing to show how editing the entry made a difference. Some months back I wrote my first guest post for Write to Done:

[Juicy Writing: 5 Ways to Glue Readers to the Page](#)

The draft I sent to Leo Babauta had this beginning:

*Do you want your readers to sit up and read your stuff in one gulp?*

*Here are five ways to glue readers to your page, whether you're writing a blog post, an article, or a book.*

1. *Sweep in; don't creep in*

Leo wrote back:

*“Could you add a couple paragraphs to the intro, explaining why gluing the reader to the page is a good thing and how it's worked in your experience — I find that having a bit of background leading into such a list is helpful to readers — less abrupt.”*

My version number 2 was as follows:

*I love reading. But not just anything. Some writers arrest me on the spot and shackle me to their page. But others fail to keep my attention: I soon start playing with the cat or surf off to other sites.*

*Our readers are exactly like that. Their attention is fickle and they will wander off if we don't grab them with our words.*

*That's why it's important to seize them from the moment they hit the page and get them to read our stuff in one gulp. In the following five steps I'll show you how to glue readers to your page, whether you're writing a blog post, an article, or a book.*

I think you'll agree that the second version is more elegant and leads the reader into the theme.

#### **4. End on a high note**

- Check out your ending.
- Do you fizzle out?
- Do you cut off in mid-stream?
- Do you wrap up your theme?

It's important to wrap up your piece and hand it to your readers at the end. Don't just throw it at them and walk away!

When you look at these four points, you'll understand that a structural edit can rescue a bad piece, as well as enhance a good one.

There are some simple things you can do to improve the structure of your writing. One is to plan your piece before you write it. (All the pieces of mine that needed reconstructive surgery were ones I wrote on a surge of inspiration – but without prior planning). The other is to analyze articles by other authors with the eyes of a structural editor.

Ask: is it a Frankenstein, or does it skip, dance, and sing?

## About the Author:

Mary Jaksch is a published author, Zen Master, and psychotherapist. In the last few years, she's turned into a successful blogger and online entrepreneur.

She writes the blog [Goodlife ZEN](#) and is Chief Editor of Write to Done. Together with Leo Babauta of Zen Habits, she is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Her most recent blog is [A-List Blog Marketing](#) which shows bloggers the Good Karma path to online income.



## The (Nearly) Ultimate Resource: 177 Tips for Writers

By Mary Jaksch

A couple of weeks ago I asked you, [“What helps you to become a better writer?”](#) You put forward 73 tips. Then I went to Copyblogger and showed the Write to Done list of tips to their readers. I called the post [73 Way to Become a Better Writer](#). Folks over there were pretty enthusiastic about the list and started adding to it. 981 Tweets later the list had grown to 177.

Today I’m bringing it back to Write to Done. Can we grow it to 200?

1. Become a blogger.
2. Use self-imposed word limits.
3. Accept all forms of criticism and learn to grow from it.
4. Read what you’ve written over and over, until I can’t find any more problems.
5. Show what you write to a trusted friend for feedback
6. Outline. And then write to that outline
7. Edit, and edit again
8. Live with passion.
9. Be open, curious, present, and engaged.
10. Take a break between writing and editing.
11. Learn a new word a day.
12. Get the pen and fingers moving
13. Write in different genres: blog posts, poems, short stories, essays.
14. Read grammar books.
15. Write without distractions.
16. Challenge yourself: write in a crowded cafe, write on the toilet, write for 24 hours straight.

17. Take a trip. Road trips, beach trips, bus trips, plane trips.
18. Watch movies. Can you write the story better?
19. Write. And then write more.
20. Read, think, read, write, ponder, write – and read some more.
21. Read your stuff aloud to anyone who can stand it – including the cat.
22. Go back and cut 10% from your word count.
23. Talk to people.
24. Listen to how people talk.
25. Read many books. The good and the shitty ones.
26. Make notes of your (fleeting) brilliant ideas.
27. Start your writing ahead of time – not hours before a deadline.
28. Listen to podcasts on writing tips
29. Use simple, declarative sentences.
30. Avoid passive voice.
31. Limit your use of adjectives and adverbs.
32. When in doubt, cut it out.
33. Kill clunky sentences.
34. Be inspired by other art forms – music, dance, sculpture, painting.
35. Read your old stuff and acknowledge how far you've come – and how far you have to go.
36. Write for publication, even if it's only for the local newsletter or a small blog.

37. Make writing your priority in the morning
38. Keep squeezing words out even if when you feel uninspired.
39. Say to everyone: “I’m a writer.”
40. Recognize your fear and overcome it.
41. Let your articles rest and then return to them with fresh eyes.
42. Comment on your favorite blogs.
43. Keep a journal to keep the writing juices flowing.
44. Use a journal to sort out your thoughts and feelings.
45. Keep it simple.
46. Practice monotasking. Set a timer for uninterrupted writing.
47. Watch people.
48. Get to know someone different from you and reflect on the experience.
49. Try new ideas or hobbies – the more variety you have in your life, the more likely you are to keep on generating good ideas on the page.
50. Read works from different cultures. It helps keep your writing from tasting stale in the mouths of your readers.
51. Rethink what is ‘normal’.
52. Work on brilliant headlines.
53. Check if your assumptions are right.
54. Join a writing group. If you can’t find one, form one.
55. Write during your most productive hours of the day.
56. Designate time to research.

57. Take time to muse and mindmap.
58. Map out a writing schedule for your project and stick to it.
59. Ask someone else to proofread.
60. Read Zinsser's "On Writing Well" at least once a year.
61. Break out of your comfort zone.
62. Write at the scene. If you want to write about a beach, get a picnic rug and go write by the sea.
63. Go to the supermarket, the ball game, the class room, the building site. Make notes of the sensuous details, the atmosphere, the people.
64. Start with metaphors and stories.
65. Approach writing with gratitude, not just with a 'must do this' attitude.
66. Deconstruct and analyze books and articles you enjoy.
67. Know about story architecture. Many writers don't. Which is like doing heart surgery or flying an airliner by intuition. Survival rates are low.
68. Socialize with other writers.
69. Stretch or exercise in between writing.
70. Make a note of ideas for further development before you leave a piece for tomorrow.
71. Use mindmaps for inspiration.
72. Take risks – don't be afraid to shock. You are not who you think you are.
73. Read Stephen King's "On Writing"
74. Keep a copy of 'Strunk and White' within arm's reach.
75. Keep a journal specially for work, for analyzing your progress and doing writing practice

76. Always think of your reader
77. Expose yourself to as many new experiences in a short amount of time as possible.
78. Learn to LOVE writing and reading
79. Write like you're on your first date
80. Write everything down. Don't trust your memory when you have a good idea, especially at night.
81. Set a time limit on each writing session, along with a goal for what you will finish in that time.
82. Simply let things be what they are.
83. Read fiction
84. Write for different media
85. Don't be afraid to cut out a line that seemed brilliant when you wrote it but really doesn't add much.
86. Stop following links and write! Right now.
87. Hire someone else to write for you
88. Read Copyblogger
89. Trying to convey a certain emotion but not sure how? Listen to music that conveys a certain emotion in you while writing.
90. Set a timer and force yourself (even if it's not your best work) to write a story within a designated amount of time.
91. Devour 'Stein on Writing' regularly.
92. Subscribe to Write to Done.
93. Read great writing

94. Write the opening sentence or headline last
95. Read your own writing out aloud
96. Read 'Reading Like a Writer' by Francine Prose
97. Write to agitate the mind and the nerves.
98. Find your unique voice
99. Love your words when you write them, hold them in suspicion when you edit them.
100. Write solely from the heart and shun copying others.
101. Cure for Writer's Block: Read a great article from a favorite author or publication.
102. Use a voice recorder (or iPhone) when the right words come to you – but not in the shower.
103. Write a For and Against article for the same issue. This helps to stretch your thinking.
104. Engage strangers in conversation. Then write about it from memory, describing the person, setting, and conversation.
105. Write using a pencil instead of a laptop for more creativity.
106. Write outside
107. Read as much as humanly possible.
108. Remember: if you're not sure, you don't know.
109. Know when to walk away – and when to come back.
110. Believe that you're a writer
111. Never trust your spell checker.
112. Write about what someone else has written

113. Think before you include an expletive
114. Check out the Urban Dictionary for topical inspiration
115. Be current – how do today’s headlines apply to your audience?
116. Ask, “Can it be turned into a list?” Think of at least five things you can list about it.
117. Never take a mundane experience for granted.
118. Bookmark this list and come back when you need to get those creative juices flowing.
119. Buy a small notebook and pen to take with you
120. Read the comments on your blog, treasure the folk who take the time to leave them and gather the seeds to make a great post.
121. Tell the story you most desperately want to read.
122. Always ask the question: “What if…”
123. Dialogue with your characters
124. Study criteria-based writing
125. Write as if you will stand up and present the article to an audience of a thousand people. Would they want to listen or go home?
126. Take up story challenges
127. Write in 101 words
128. Take up Nanowrimo
129. Write about what you want to write, not what you know.
130. Write 15 minutes a day. Every day.
131. Write with a plain text editor

132. Write on ugly paper because it tricks the brain to really believe that it doesn't have to be perfect.
133. Write in small paragraphs in order to get to the point immediately
134. Look closely how successful writers make sentences.
135. Write when it comes to you
136. Write at the crack of dawn
137. Accept no excuses
138. Write when you're tired
139. Write when you're uninspired
140. Use a stack of 3×5 cards to start writing your book. Use one item or idea per card. Stack the card in order and type them in to develop a first draft.
141. Force yourself to disconnect for a while each day – turn off cell phone, Blackberry, iPod, music, email, Twitter, conversation with others.
142. Allow your mind to wander.
143. Try scotch or weed if all else fails...
144. Use 'clustering' to free up inspiration.
145. Put on your reviewer hat and write a review of your own article or story.
146. Visualize the person you are communicating with: What do their eyes reflect as they read this? What will the first thing they might say in response?
147. Do what works for you
148. Always call a spade a spade. It's never a long-handled gardening implement!
149. Check out Richard Lanham's 'Parademic Method'

150. Do a 'stream of consciousness' piece and see where it leads you.
151. Record random thoughts, story ideas, quotes on your phone when you're out and about.
152. Try writing without accuracy. Not worrying about errors (left brain) allows for easier flow of thought (right brain).
153. Cut the crap
154. When in doubt, cut it out.
155. Write collaboratively
156. Read Dr. Frank Luntz's "Words that Work"
157. Mean what you write, write what you mean
158. Write at the crack of dawn
159. There is a time for writing, and there is a time for editing. Don't do both at once otherwise you'll become too critical about what you wrote.
160. If you have a sense of where you want your piece to wind up, start there instead and see what happens.
161. Steal time for writing wherever and whenever you can find it.
162. Make writing a priority in your life. If you say it's important to you, then show it in how you spend your time.
163. Tell the truth- that way you don't need to remember what you wrote.
164. Don't edit your work to death.
165. Collect words
166. Don't be afraid to bust out the thesaurus to find a word that fits better in a sentence than the one currently there
167. Give yourself permission to write a crappy first draft

168. Try to eat properly. If you only eat junk your mental capacity diminishes and you can't write well.
169. If you can't write a book, write a blog post.
170. If you can't write a blog post, comment on a post.
171. Love your tools. As St. Bumpersticker says, "My fountain pen can write better than your honor student!"
172. Study nature for simile possibilities. ("as still as oak leaves on a windless summer day" )
173. Avoid these three weak words – unless absolutely necessary: Ifs, Buts, and Can'ts
174. When you feel blocked, do something mindless, like ironing or going for a quiet walk.
175. Practise condensing. Write a synopsis and then condense that. Précis the condensed synopsis. It helps to get to the bare bones of a story and reveal what it's really about.
176. Rewrite from memory a good story you've read and then compare the two. Evaluate and learn from the differences.
177. Harness the power of your emotions

## About the Author:

Mary Jaksch is a published author, Zen Master, and psychotherapist. In the last few years, she's turned into a successful blogger and online entrepreneur.

She writes the blog [Goodlife ZEN](#) and is Chief Editor of Write to Done. Together with Leo Babauta of Zen Habits, she is a co-founder of the [A-List Blogger Club](#) and [A-List Blogging Bootcamps](#). Her most recent blog is [A-List Blog Marketing](#) which shows bloggers the Good Karma path to online income.

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