Just Do It - the Art of Un-Procrastination

Kelly A. Harmon

Nike gets to the heart of the matter in how to get things done.

Just do it.

But sometimes, you sit down at the computer and the white page just stares back at you. Motivation is lacking. The clock is ticking. Nothing's flowing. Often, even when the deadline is looming it's hard to kick the brain into gear.

How do you get your fingers moving when all you feel like doing is surfing the web or playing another game of solitaire? Here are a few things I do to oil the mechanics in my brain:

Tried and True Methods for any Project:

Make a to-do list. Break down larger projects into smaller ones. Don't write 'finish novel' on the to do list and expect to get it done. It's also not a good idea to try 'finish chapter 30'. These large chunks of prose are too much to conceive of when the words won't come. Instead, plan to accomplish smaller, more manageable tasks: write the opening paragraph for chapter one/write the ending scene for your short story/write scene one of chapter 30.

Set a timer. This is similar to a deadline only in that there is a time limit. This can work if you acknowledge that when the allotted time is over, you're done for the day - as long as you've written during the entire time period. Allow yourself to write crap, purple prose, adverb-laden tripe, whatever, in order to get the job done. I turn off my internal editor (hard to do!) when I use this method. I'm sometimes surprised by how *usable* the prose is that I come up with.

Bribe yourself. Set yourself a reasonable goal. Once you finish, reward yourself with something you desire. (I like to treat myself to a new book or a trip to "the office superstore" for more writing *implements*.)

Writer Specific Methods:

Try "[Write or Die](#)" by Dr. Wicked. This handy web application forces you to write by negative reinforcement. Depending on which mode you choose to type in, you will be reminded to continue writing via a pop-up box, punished with 'an evil sound' or worst case, your writing will start to un-write itself on the screen.

Try writing dialogue only. Forget descriptive passages and scene setting. Don't worry about your character's word choice, voice or POV. In fact, shake it up and make your characters say unexpected things. For me, this accomplishes two things: 1) I sometimes learn something about

my characters I didn't already know, and 2) dialogue fills a page faster than prose: the white space disappears faster. Mentally, I get the kick-start I need to keep going.

Forget your work in progress for a short time and try a story prompt to get warmed up. Sometimes, just the act of moving fingers across the keyboard (or pen across the paper) will get the creative juices flowing. I'm currently toying with the [Writers Unblock Tool](#) by [Mode Room Press](#). It's a gadget for your iGoogle page which offers a new prompt each time the page is reloaded.

Change your writing habit (at least temporarily). H.G. Wells said, "If you are having difficulties with the book, try the element of surprise: attack it at an hour when it isn't expecting it."

Set a firm deadline to be finished. This is a tricky method, I admit. When I was a newspaper reporter, I had set deadlines for each story I was assigned. I never failed to meet a deadline. But I was writing non-fiction: knew all the facts, asked all the questions and interviewed all the parties necessary. I knew what I needed to say—beginning, middle and end—before I sat down to write. Fiction is not so easy to force into the same mold, but it's possible.

For me, a single method doesn't do the trick. Today a story prompt may help, tomorrow I may have to rely on the dialogue trick. It all depends on my mood. (Which is key to understanding the nature of the block, I think. But that's a subject for another day...) Some days, it takes me more than one method to break through a block.

What do you do when the words won't flow?

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