

## Letting Go of Writing Crutches

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Are you that guy on Friday night, looking for your lucky Hawaiian shirt, before you sit down at the poker table? Maybe you have a lucky bowling shirt? Or pair of socks?

Or perhaps... you're a writer that needs a particular pen to write with? One that glides effortlessly across the page. Maybe the words flow only when your favorite band is jamming through the speakers? Or the door is closed, or open. Or you're drinking tea (not coffee), or you're in front of your PC in your writing cave...

Did I hit a nerve there?

I'm going to step out on a limb and opine that if you're a writer who needs:

- the right pen - gel, erasable, India ink, ball-point, fine point, wide point, felt-tip
- the right notebook - moleskin, snakeskin, lined, unlined, college rule, wide-rule, spiral on the top, composition
- the right laptop, netbook, PC, hand-held, split keyboard, IBM Selectric, Royal manual
- the right music: jazz, metal, classical, country, new-age, new wave, punk
- the dark
- the light
- the morning
- the evening
- a large chunk of time

.... or any other such *crutch*, in order to write, you're not living up to your potential.

Let it go. Let it all go.

I believe that having the right pen, notebook, whatever—can hinder you in the long run, like creating a bad habit. Year after year of writing only with Bic fine-points in Mead wide-rule notebooks creates in your brain an imprint of how the writing process needs to be for you.

After a while, you may not be able to write any other way. Your muse will ignore you if you try to break the routine you've established.

In *Booklife*, Jeff VanderMeer calls this need for the right “whatever,” “fetishizing the process.” He says (and I agree) that doing so, instead of simplifying the writing process, costs writers moments of creativity.

I think they cost more than moments. A crutch, or fetish, tosses huge roadblocks into the writing process, particularly if you happen to be in a place with some time to kill and you're not toting your favorite notebook, or pen, or...whatever.

Don't misunderstand me—I have my favorite pens, a preferred style of notebook and my favorite laptop (yeah, I've got more than one). I'm not advising anyone to chuck these favorite things into the trash. I'm just advising that you don't let any of them *influence* how, or when, to write.

I advocate writing in the moment, with whatever means you've got, to capture the idea. The trusty laptop won't always be by your side. There will be times when it's inconvenient to carry your notebook.

Are you in a fast-food joint? Use the napkins. Taking a walk? I'll bet you've got a receipt in your wallet you could scribble on. If not, use currency. I have. (VanderMeer carries index cards for just such found moments.)

Writing doesn't mean you have to be typing the words or printing them along the blue-lined spiral. Are you driving? Call your home phone from your cell and dictate into the answering machine. Don't wait until you get home and you've forgotten all that juicy prose.

How about texting yourself a message to your email?

The key is to not care about:

- where you are
- who you're with
- what time of day it is, or
- what you're using to write...

... so long as you're getting down the words or ideas.

~ First Published in “Are You Afraid of the Dark?”

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