

The Get-to-Writing Kit

How to write when you don't have time

By Zee Ahmad (Two Marshmallows)

(Based on my book: *You Can Write – How to write when you're convinced you can't*)

Contains:

- Paper for writing (both lined and unlined)
- Calendar
- Instructions on getting-to-it

You will need:

- Pen or pencil

OR

- Computer, if you prefer to type

Anyone can write. All you need to do is sit down, put pen to paper (or hands to keyboard) and then write one word after another. No analysing or judging the words; no worrying about how they sound or whether you're making a mistake. No giving in to distractions or making excuses. You just sit down and write; one word after the other. Then you do this on a regular basis so that you can complete a body of work.

It's as simple as that. But as you know, simple doesn't necessarily mean easy. There are plenty of things that can get in the way of making writing a habit. One of the biggest is the belief that we just don't have the time.

For many of us, our days are already full. We have our paid and unpaid jobs: caring for children or other family members, cooking, cleaning and maintaining our homes. Then we have our friends, our hobbies, and all the unexpected demands on our time, not to mention health issues that can also complicate matters.

So, in the midst of all of this, how do we find the time to write?

1. Importance

The first question you need to ask yourself is: how important is writing to you? Do you really want to do it? I don't mean do you want to be a published author. I mean, do you want to engage in the physical act of writing? Are you willing to set aside time to do it every day?

If you think seriously about this question and find that the answer is no, that's great! It means you can stop reading this booklet and go do what you really want to do instead. Hop to it, because life is too short to waste on doing things you don't like.

If the answer is yes, then you also need to hop to it because life is far too short to waste on not doing what you love.

2. Reasons

For many people, knowing that they want to do something is only the first step. They also need to know why. Make a list of your reasons for writing. It will help keep you grounded and focused during the tough times. (While I would love to tell you that writing is always easy, the truth is that there will be tough times).

Your reasons can be as simple or as complex as you like. I wanted to write because it was fun and it made me happy. I also wanted to write novels, short stories and letters to friends.

What about you? Do you have a story to tell? Is there an event you want to capture and put on the page to share with others? Do you want to keep a diary? Do you want to improve your essay-writing skills? Do you want to write television shows, plays, movies, greeting cards, or blog posts? Do you find writing relaxing? Or do you just want to delight in expressing yourself and letting your words fly?

3. Time management

What we perceive as a lack of time is often a lack of time management. Once you start analysing what you do in a day, you'll find there are plenty of moments that can be devoted to writing. You can write during your lunch break. You can write on the train. You can get up earlier or go to sleep later. You can write while waiting in the car for the kids to get out of school. You can save your television shows for later and write. How much time do you spend on the internet? Yeah, I thought so. It's okay, I understand. I love the internet, too. But I can assure you that it is possible to use the internet less and write more.

I've included a summary of my own time management techniques at the end of this booklet, just to give you an idea of where to begin. With a little effort, you will find that you can integrate writing into your daily schedule. And that's because writing takes less time than you think.

4. Commit to the minimum.

If you commit to writing for either five minutes a day or one hundred words a day, you'll be amazed at how much you can accomplish.

As a general rule, writing one paragraph by hand will take approximately five minutes, depending on how fast you write. (Depending on how fast you type, it

can take even less time when using a computer). You can spend five minutes a day on writing. And, if you do, you'll find you have seven paragraphs after one week. If you prefer to commit to writing one hundred words a day, regardless of how long it takes you to write them, you'll have 700 words at the end of a week. That's enough for an article or a short story (or even one of each). For reference, this paragraph contains just over one hundred words.

Remember, this is the *minimum* of what you can accomplish in one week, just by committing to this small amount.

5. Topic

Have your topic ready before you sit down to write. That way, you can get straight to work and utilise all your time. If you're new to this or you've got so many ideas you just can't choose (or both), here are a few things you can do:

- Write down all your ideas and then work through them;
- Start a prompts folder. Put in it any lines, phrases or images you find appealing. When it's time to write, pick one at random and write about it;
- Pick up a book. Open it to a random page. Select the first three words of the first sentence you see. Use those words to start your piece. Then keep on writing;
- Select an object you can see in the room, or out of the window, and write about it.

When it comes to making writing a habit, the topic is less important than the act of writing itself. Don't worry too much about those days when you're just not excited about the subject matter. They happen from time to time. What counts is that you wrote something.

6. Track your progress

Print out the monthly calendar provided. At the end of each day, note what you've done. It can simply be a tick to indicate that you completed your writing session for the day. Or you can enter specifics, such as word count or the amount of time spent writing.

This is not about criticising or punishing yourself if you don't feel you've written enough. This is purely about making writing a natural part of your life and noting any patterns that emerge. Do you write better at specific times (morning, afternoon or evening)? Is one long writing session more productive for you? Or do you work better in short blocks throughout the day? Is there a particular day or time when it's just impossible to write? Are there days that are more conducive to writing? Are there any places in which it is easier for you to write? All of these things will have an effect on your progress.

7. Belief

Reading a free booklet is not going to automatically result in pages filled with words. All the advice in the world won't mean a thing unless you actually write. And to do that, you need to truly believe that you can do this. A lot of the incorrect notions about writing are pure snobbery. You don't need a degree to put words on a page. You don't need permission from anyone to express yourself. You don't need to be paid for your work in order for your words to have legitimacy. If you want to write, then write. Make the commitment, find the time, pick a topic, and go for it.

Everyone has a story to tell. Everyone has something to say. This includes you. Believe that your words are valuable. Believe that *you* are valuable. Believe that you can find the time to do what you love. And if you're having trouble believing, then let me believe in you until you can do it for yourself. Because I promise you, you can write. You will have to work for it. You might have to take a class or get hold of some writing manuals. But if you make the commitment to doing a little bit of writing every day, it will add up to so much more than you could possibly imagine.

To recap:

- **Decide that writing is important;**
- **List the reasons you want to write;**
- **Learn how to manage your time (see below);**
- **Do some writing every day;**
- **Keep track of your progress;**
- **Believe you can do it.**

Time management techniques

I manage my time by making lists. I make a list of what needs to be accomplished this week. Then I break that down into a daily list where I note everything that needs to be done today. It's much less work than it sounds. I spend about two minutes a day making my lists, and they save me a lot of time and stress.

Before I could get to this point, I needed to work with someone to teach me how to manage my time. These are the steps they had me take:

1. I wrote down what I did for every hour of every day. I did this for about six weeks;
2. I was very honest about where I was wasting time and why. I won't go into detail, but I will say they were extremely important questions for me to ask. Berating myself didn't help; knowing what I was wasting my time on and why did;

3. I decided that writing was more important than all those other things on which I was wasting my time;
4. I either cut out or cut back on those things. For example, reading all the comments on my favourite websites was both entertaining and educational, but it wasn't productive. I stopped going to some sites and drastically reduced the time spent on others. (If you're curious, I did miss those sites in the beginning but not for very long. Writing turned out to be a lot more fun and it became much easier to resist temptation once I saw how much I could accomplish.)

When it comes to personal writing (that is, writing for myself, not for clients) my rule is that I must do something every day. This means meeting the minimum requirement of writing either one hundred words a day, or revising two paragraphs, or typing up one page of notes. It doesn't matter what I do, as long as I do it.

I have a low baseline for two reasons. First, it means I don't put too much pressure on myself, which actually motivates me to write more. Second, the downside of writing for a living is that there are days when I don't have much time or energy for my own writing. On those days, having a small goal means I don't get overwhelmed.

I do give myself time off, though, and there are days when work has been so intense that I just can't do any more writing. But for the most part, this is the writing routine that works for me.

There's not much I love more than seeing people write, so if this kit helps you, please drop me a line and let me know: zee@twomarshmallows.net.

If you enjoyed this booklet, you may like my book: *You Can Write: How to write when you're convinced you can't*. You can find it on the Writer Support section of my site: www.twomarshmallows.net.

Thank you for reading.



