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## **Please Read This First**

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## **About the Author**

Alice Morgan started writing for trade publications and magazines when she had a full-time job.

Alice said, “The extra money was very welcome.” But, it was hard work because the demands of the job and her family left little time for the writing. “I kept doing as much writing as I could because I really enjoyed it and was using the writing checks to buy some nice extras for the family.”

Alice learned to make better use of the little time she had for her writing and research. She also studied the methods which highly successful writers shared in interviews and workshops.

“I found a lot of good advice but some suggestions didn’t work for me; they were a bit vague or required some tools or just didn’t fit my situation.”

Alice retired from her job and continued her writing. She started writing short stories which fitted her lifestyle better.

She had an idea for a novel and is making good progress with that.

Alice said, “I found that the technique which helped me produce good non-fiction was generally applicable to the short stories and the novel”.

I believe that the tips which I explain in my ebook will be useful for writers, whatever their specialty. I’ve shared my ideas with many other writers I’ve met at workshops and socially.”

“And, I’ve also learned a lot from their experiences which I’ve been able to use in my own writing”.

This book has the best ideas I’ve learned and, while I can’t guarantee that everyone will fit with each reader, they have all been used by real writers.

## **Good Preparation is Essential**

A writing task in its simplest form has just four sections; preparation, production, revision and promotion (or delivery where you are writing it for someone else who is responsible for promoting and using the work.

Different writers will divide the amount of time they give to each part of the process in line with their experience.

The most important part of the task is the preparation stage. It is also the one which gives many writers a lot of trouble.

Sometimes, the writer spends a lot of the time available for preparation without making any obvious progress. They say that they are fine-tuning but they probably cannot point to anything significant which they have done.

It is likely that the real reason for their lack of progress is fear.

That’s not uncommon and it doesn’t just affect writers.

As their deadline approaches, they plunge into the production stage, but their results are less than they know that they could have achieved.

I will explain the best ways which I have found for dealing with that fear in a later section.

The good news is that it can be used to improve your results, instead of derailing them.

If the preparation has been rushed or research has been skimpy, it will be really hard to complete the project in time and to a suitable standard.

A story or an article cannot be better than the foundation you build it on.

This is usually the result of poor organization.

The only way to deal with that is to set aside the time necessary to work out a system which suits you.

That is not hard but, of course, many people feel some reluctance to give up that time because it is not paid for.

The truth is that it is not so much a cost as an investment which will soon come back to you when you are producing better writing for your clients.

## Get More Done With Less Effort!

It is amazing how some things seem so good in theory but are less effective in practice.

I know many writers who set aside a block of time to get a particular piece of writing done, maybe two hours or more.

But, they find that they do not get good results from this effort.

They may think that their lack of success is because they do not have the necessary skill level or that they need to focus more strongly during the session.

But, I believe that the problem is related to the way we work and is not a reflection on our ability or our willingness to apply ourselves to the task.

If we are digging in our garden, we can expect to get better results from a longer and more intense period of solid work than a shorter one, provided it is within our physical ability.

But, our writing is done in a less physically active way and most of us cannot just apply ourselves to a high level of mental effort for longer periods and expect to get a similar increase in output.

Even though we can handle the physical effort of pounding the keyboard, the restricted movement of the rest of our body can have some negative effects which reduce the quality of our production.

Writers can suffer similar effects to those experienced by air-travelers, including deep vein thrombosis in extreme cases.



And, the relaxed but constricted position of our bodies is likely to make our concentration less, despite our best efforts to focus on the work we are doing.

Many writers do not realize that they need to maintain their bodies with appropriate nutrition and exercise or we will not be able to produce the quality of work which we are really capable of or avoid health

problems in the future.

My suggestion is that you set up a series of shorter blocks of working time. They could be twenty minutes but no longer than thirty minutes and give yourself five minutes between them where you leave your writing area as often as possible to



restore the flexibility to your body and give your mind a break from the work you were focused on.

I understand that you will sometimes keep thinking about the project. That probably can't be avoided. But, try to get some mental refreshment which is not related to that project when you can.

I must mention the downside which this change to shorter periods of focused work brings with it.

Research suggests that we lose a few minutes as the end of the work session approaches as part of our mind starts to focus on what we will do in the break. We also lose up to a few minutes when our focus has to re-adjust to the work when we come back.

The trade-off is usually worthwhile because of the benefits to our general health and the increase in the quality of the work we can achieve when we start looking after ourselves better. Over time, the benefits are enough to easily outweigh the loss in actual working time.

## When You Write, Just W-r-i-t-e!

If I had to choose one strategy which I believe has had the greatest impact on my own productivity as a writer, it would be when I stopped trying to edit while I was still writing the first draft.

Almost all of the writers that I know personally either has or used to be affected by this habit.



It's seems to be natural because we want to produce the best writing we can and so we fire up our in-built editor, probably thinking that it will save time by improving the first draft and thus eliminating the need for some of the usual revision.

But, the reality is that we cause our writing speed to be dragged down with no great benefit to balance that negative effect.

When our editor kicks in, we probably have to:

- Drag our attention from the flow of words we were transferring to the

computer

- Change our mode of thinking from creative to analytical
- Deal with the mistyped material
- Change thinking modes again
- Try to reconnect with that stream of words

Even if you only do that once for each paragraph, it must have a significant effect on your speed and the quality of your output.

It probably also promotes some dissatisfaction in your own mind about how well you are doing your writing because this stop-fix-start method highlights the number of errors you find. You will probably think you are writing much worse than you thought you were capable of but don't realize that the

number is probably no more than most writers produce in their first drafts.

This method will probably make you think that the errors are more significant than they are.

The constant switching between thinking modes will probably increase the number of minor errors which you make.

You might find making this change feel natural may take some time if, like me, you have been doing this unnecessary editing when you write your first draft for some time.

It also seems to be less natural for most people because we feel we are all good editors as well as writers.

Keep your focus on the improving results which will soon show in your writing and the rate of production.

When you are able to separate the editing and writing functions, you will notice a significant improvement in both as well as a higher approval rating from your readers.

## **Systems are Boring until you see the Results!**

Writing is acknowledged as a creative activity which can also produce a comfortable income for almost anyone that applies themselves and finds an audience who will pay them for their work.

But, some writers think that the quality of their writing could be negatively affected if they build systems like templates and formulas into the writing.

I have found that using systems reduces the time spent on mundane work of organizing our material and actually results in improvements (according to readers) in the quality of the writing.

When I refer to systems, I am talking about structures that support our efforts to produce good work, not anything which is so constricting that we produce writing where every piece is so similar and bland they resemble literary sausages.

Preparing a template for a type of article or story gives us a framework to weave our facts and our craft around. It helps to ensure that we do not forget to include any important points or that we repeat material.

If we find that the pieces produced with the template we create, we just need to make the template more a guide and less of a fence.

It's a great way to ensure that we cover the subject and give our readers all the necessary details and leave no loose ends.

Even if you intend to write a sequel to the current story, it's a good idea to ensure that your readers will be satisfied that they got value from the present story you supplied to them.

## Perfection can wait!

Do you release what you write before it is perfect?

I think that all writers might have things they would like to put another tweak to but most realize that they cannot afford to hold their writing back until it is perfect, in their eyes at least.



Your book or article needs to be available while the audience you aimed it at is most receptive. If you hold back to improve some minor details, many of your potential readers may buy another writer’s work on the same subject. It may be enough to satisfy their needs for information in that area

even if it doesn’t have the level of information which you aim to provide.

Or, there may be technical or other developments which make some of your writing less valuable than it was when you wrote it. So much is changing so rapidly that the window of opportunity for a particular book or other piece of writing can be a lot shorter than it might have been even just a few years ago.

So, my recommendation is that you provide the best work that you can and verify all important facts in your work, but don’t worry about trying to cover every detail which might be of interest to any reader.

Too much minor detail might bog down the majority of readers for the sake of a few.

## **Cut the Filler!**

Too many new writers try to make their written pieces longer by using longer phrases than necessary to increase the word count without adding any value for their readers.

We all have greater demands on our time because of rapidly improving technology delivering more information and entertainment than ever before and almost everyone feels under pressure to some degree.

If you provide your information in easily understood form, without talking down to your readers, they will appreciate it and start to look for more of your material because it fills their need but leaves them more time for dealing with their other interests.

The common wisdom among editors and writers is that you should use a level of words appropriate for Grade 9.

There are many services which will help you to check fairly accurately the grade level most appropriate to your writing.

This one:

[http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability\\_test\\_and\\_improve.jsp](http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp) is worth trying.

That website also has a range of other free services which may be useful for you. Although their services are free, donations are requested and they help with the costs of the site.

## **Encourage Your Readers to Act**

If you write in active voice, you attract the reader’s attention more than if you use a laid-back passive tone.

And it also helps you to get some action by the reader. And, that is the main purpose of most writing, isn’t it?

You write to inform or amuse but you want to move them to either do or feel something different after reading your piece.

That might be to buy a particular item, vote for someone or just look forward to buying the next book you write.

You can also affect the impression on your readers by the voice you use for the piece.

If you use the first person (I or we), readers will either bond with you or the character you write about, if they find them or the ideas which they express interesting or in line with their own.

When it is used well, the first person voice can make a lasting connection with the reader.

Otherwise, they may react negatively and decide not to finish reading that piece.

When you use the second person voice (you), it can create a good connection but you should review your use of it to ensure that you do not appear to be imposing your views about what the reader must do.

## Who is Your Reader?



Many writers have found this exercise helpful and rewarding.

Find your readers motives and unlock the money!

All you need to do is to work up a picture in your mind or on your computer screen of the type of person that you are expecting to want to buy and read the piece you are about to write.

You can do this entirely as a mental exercise if you want to.

Most writers have enough imagination to produce a mental picture of their “ideal” reader and also enough discipline to focus on the details which are relevant to the exercise – those which will affect the reader’s decision to choose your writing over other possibilities which are available to him or her.

Some factors which could be relevant might include:

- **Age group**
- **Marital Status**
- **Income**
- **Hobbies or other Special Interest**
- **Do they have children?**
- **Location**
- **\* What about my writing will most appeal to this reader? \***

These factors may seem very obvious but the answers may take a little time. That will be worthwhile because the closer you focus your information or entertainment to a particular group of people, the more chance of it being a success for you and the publisher.

If you are writing something for children, then you will probably decide that it is for girls or boys or both, and mostly those of a specific and probably fairly

small age range.

Then, you might have, or know children of your friends, who are in that group. That could give you a better feel for their particular interests that your readers might share. If you are lucky enough to get feedback from readers of your material, use it to fine-tune your picture.

## Tips about Editing

All good writers want to offer the best material they can.

We want to avoid sending out material which has mistakes which we miss but are obvious to others, because that can damage our reputation and potential for future work.

But, few people are any good at editing their own work from their first attempt. We are too closely attached to it or we try to do it completely impartially and cut the life out of it along with the errors.

Although I am not an editor, I have had to edit a lot of my own work.



These tips from my experience and some editors I have discussed the subject with, mostly at workshops, will help you to make the necessary break between you and your writing and do a better job of editing your own material.

Let me repeat that this won't work if you try to edit while you are still writing it. The actual process of editing should not start until you have finished writing your piece.

The first step is to get a period of time to make a noticeable break between the writing and the editing.

Ideally, it should be at least two days. But, I know that is not always possible.

Please avoid the temptation to read it as a ruthless editor machine might.

When you start your self-editing session, you want to be able to look at what you wrote as if you were the type of reader which you wrote the piece for.

Not everybody can do this, so don't spend too long on it. Just try to keep that

ideal reader in mind through the rest of the process.

The most important factors that you meant to appeal to that reader and thousands like him or her will be fairly obvious to you despite any differences of outlook or situation.

My next step is to read the whole piece aloud. This will probably give you enough separation from the creative writer side of your brain to be more objective than you could be when you were in the writing part of the task.

But, your focus should be that of a reader. You want to check that the points which you wanted to get across to them are clear.

This is when you check whether you stuck to clear and simple language or used some jargon or any words which might not be familiar to some readers.

Check your grammar and spelling.

Sometimes you will find you have repeated something. You would usually remove one of the entries if they are duplicates, but it's okay to do that occasionally for emphasis or where you are writing on a separate sub-topic.

Then, you can read it again to sweep up any more errors which your experience as a writer helps you to find.

Check each sentence as an individual item.

Then, consider whether there is enough variety in the length of the sentences?

Is the pace and tone too monotonous through the piece. You need to have peaks and plains to keep the reader awake and variety in the language to keep them interested.

Don't use any obscure or special words without making their meaning and relevance clear in the text.

Use bullet points and highlighted sections if the other materials where your piece will appear have them.

Don't overuse flourishes such as italics and bold or colored text.

You may also find that you have used some expressions more often than you

might have realized.

Avoid using clichés or popular expressions in material which is intended to circulate for months or years unless it is needed to make the characters and the story realistic.

If the piece has more than one page, don't leave one or two lines on an otherwise blank page.

If you use material which was produced by others, make sure that you have their permission in writing before you submit your work anywhere.

Check your work against your outline or mind map. You will probably find significant changes. That's not a worry. But, ensure that you have not left out anything which would be critical for the reader to understand and enjoy or use your piece.

That simple process usually helps you to produce a final draft which you can be proud of.

Use any grammar or spell checker which you have access to. Be careful that the points which the program suggests are accurate. Some versions of some well-known word processing programs show some odd results in my experience.

## **Great Titles are Vital for Your Success**

If you have been writing for awhile, you probably have heard that titles are very important.

Copywriters from David Ogilvy (one of the original “Mad Men”) to the latest genius to appear on the Internet will agree that you need to spend a lot of time and effort on titles and headlines.

The simple point they emphasize is that, if your headline or title and the first paragraph of text doesn’t hit one of the reader’s hot buttons and compel them to want to keep reading, you probably have lost the sale.

They will not stay around to read all the other stuff you put so much effort into!

That is equally important for chapter titles in books. Many people that visit brick and mortar or online bookshops intending to buy a book often feel overwhelmed by the wide choice available and, will usually limit their examination of a particular book to the title, the publisher’s blurb and the table of contents.

Only when their interest has been aroused by something in those brief snippets, will they go to the reviews.

So, your titles have to be strong enough to compete with all the other books which are on display.

I suggest that you follow the common practice of a lot of copywriters and write fifty or more headlines or titles. If you find a few that don’t fit this piece, file them for later projects.

## **Improving your Titles and Headlines**

Because the headlines and titles which you use are so important in the process of attracting readers to what you write, any time which you used to improve the quality of them will be well spent.

One thing that has helped me in this area is that I have started to make a conscious effort to study those titles and headlines which intrigued me.

When I find myself being drawn in by someone else's skilful copy, I make a note of the headline so that I can study yet at a more convenient time.

I have been adding these notes to my swipe file for a few years and I have noticed a few things which might help you improve your titles as well.

Your title must connect directly with the interests and desires of your target reader.

It does not have to tell the story; it just has to increase their desire to read it.

The best and cheapest school for learning to write better titles is in your local magazine stand. The writers who produce the titles which are displayed on the covers of glossy magazines are experienced and successful campaigners.

Study how they hook the casual browser despite the clamoring of their competitors all around them.

They don't have time to be subtle, just a few seconds to catch the eye and set the hook.

If you can learn some of their techniques, it will help you to make your writing stand out in the book stores and on the Internet.

## **Writing the Sales Letter before You Write Your Book**

A tactic which can help to keep you focused on the main points which you want to cover in your writing is to prepare a version of your sales letter before you begin to write the actual book.

You probably don't think about writing a sales letter at all. Your focus is on the book and you realize that the sales letter requires a different set of skills. But, this sales letter is just for your eyes.

It will help you to focus your thinking on those parts of the book which will be most important for the ideal reader we spoke of earlier.

As you work through the book, you can use this sales letter as a checklist. That will ensure you do not leave out any of those most important points from your book.

Of course, you could just make a list of the important points and work from that.

But, my experience is that writing them in the form of a sales letter helps you to remember the relative importance of each feature which you mention there to the overall flow of the book and how you intend that they will fit together in the final version.

When you first do this, don't get tied up in trying to write a great sales letter. That's not the point.

The sales letter format just happens to be well suited to producing a guide for your whole book which keeps the main features you want to include close to hand in a brief, easy to read format.

## **Getting Feedback**

One of the most valuable things that anybody can do for a writer is to give them honest feedback about their work.

Even when the feedback does not agree with your own perception or is even distinctly negative, keep in mind that it is potentially useful.

Don't let a negative tone in somebody's comment upset you. If it is actually a personal attack, display a professional attitude without any hint that you're affected by it.

Otherwise, the person who made it will be encouraged to do more of the same with others who may not be able to handle it like you probably can.

Always remember that people who step out of their comfort zone and offer genuine criticism are showing courage and courtesy above the ordinary.

Always thank them for their comments and consider them carefully for any points which will help you to better understand the views of the people you are writing for.

I have found it useful to repeat back to that person my understanding of the point they were making in my own words. Then, I will explain my reasons are doing whatever they commented on in the way that I did.

This has gained a positive reaction even from people that were initially highly critical. Few people expect or get a reasoned response when they say something even mildly negative to another person in our current society.

This may not be easy at first but the effort is worthwhile because it helps to provide and sustained a line of communication with an actual reader of your writing.

One thing that has made this much easier for me is the realization that the comments are not targeted really pointed at me personally but at my work. If you take such comments as a personal attack, you will lose the opportunity of further helpful feedback. Also, a defensive reaction will probably mean that you will lose that reader as well.

## Timely Tips for Greater Productivity

Our time is almost certainly a most undervalued and most often wasted resource.

I hope that the tips and resources which I share here will help you to make better use of whatever time you have available for your writing so that you can get more time with your family and friends.

When I want to learn to do something better, I look for inspiration and advice from people who are "champions" at that activity.

They may be acknowledged experts who offer their advice through books and workshops as well as colleagues and friends whose free advice and personal example may often be just as valuable as what I can learn from the experts.

But, I also sometimes learn how to improve how I do something when people tell me of mistakes which they have made. I make plenty of my own mistakes but I don't have time to learn by making them all myself.

Time management is important for everyone but particularly for writers.

I have tried a variety of paper diaries, electronic personal information managers and computerized time management systems.

I was turned off the portable electronic diaries when mine self-destructed while I was typing in the third month's worth of data!

But, I have been assured that the more recent and much more powerful systems which are now coming onto the market are also more reliable, so I will be looking at trying one of those in the very near future

They certainly are easier to use than their more primitive predecessors. And there are plenty of ways now for me to quickly and reliably back up my information to prevent this sort of loss I suffered before.

I have also found it very useful to use an older type of technology - a clockwork kitchen timer. Until recently, I used one to time my concentrated 30 minute work sessions.

I replaced that with a small digital timer because it is easier to set up and has a pleasant beep which is less distracting than the kitchen timer's harsh

alarm.

I also set out the time I allocate for my activities each day on a simple chart. Although I usually find that there are few days when I can keep everything within its allotted time, but, having that simple chart near me means that I am always aware of the important things which I have not yet done that day. That makes it much easier for me to make any necessary changes in my schedule "on the run" which may be needed.

Each evening, I make a simple list of the most important tasks and commitments which I have arranged for the following day. From the list of tasks, I choose one which I will complete before I have my breakfast on the next day.

I also decide what item on that list is most urgent and important.

That is the item which I will focus my energy and attention on in the morning and will, as far as possible, stay focused on each until it is completed.

Then I can say that, whatever delays and distractions interfere with the rest of my tasks, I will have completed something of lasting benefit each day.

The rest of the tasks and appointments on my list are divided, as far as possible, into "urgent" and "important".

I know it against each item and estimate of how much time it is going to require.

I also set up on my daily time schedule a couple of sessions where I try to do all of the phone calls and e-mails together.

One great timesaver for both me and the people I need to talk to is checking with each person to contact about what times are most convenient for them to have me call them.

I found that many of the busiest people on my lists arrived at their offices early each morning and were very happy if I was willing and able to call them well before normal business hours when they were likely to have many more distractions to deal with.

Using an Internet-based phone service such as Skype has been a time-saver

and also a lot cheaper than my regular phone service.

These V.O.I.P. (Voice over Internet protocol) systems also provide low-cost messaging and other services which can be a great help especially if you have to stay in contact with people in other states and countries.

## **Cut the Clutter**

A major cause of poor time management is that we allow our work areas and our minds to become cluttered with unimportant or irrelevant items that distract us from our work.

We may have a desktop covered with notes, folders and other paraphernalia but not be able to find the important information which we actually need in a timely manner.

Part of our preparation when we are starting a new project should be to remove everything which is not essential for the new task so that we can concentrate fully on it.

If you let your enthusiasm for a new task push you into getting started with it before you have planned out the steps you need to take, you will waste more time and resources on that project than you might expect.

Although it will vary from project to project, I use 25% as a general estimate of the amount of the available time to do proper planning of an important project.

Although I know some people that are comfortable having music or even a radio playing in their work area, I think that most people will be more productive without that, at least during the time they are actually working.

The more focused you are on the current task, the more effective you are likely to be.

For that reason, I try to avoid having interruptions during my concentrated working sessions.

It is also important to keep your mind focused on the task as much as possible.

This becomes easier after you have done it several times. You also will be greatly encouraged when you review the amount and quality of the work you produce in those shorter, concentrated sessions.

## Fill Your Days

Writing has many benefits as a way to earn a living but it is also a fairly solitary activity.

Unless we take steps to maintain a routine at that includes adequate exercise, good nutrition and social activities, our writing and our general health will suffer.

It's very tempting to put off some social commitment because of the pressure from an important deadline.

But, maintaining and enjoying your social life is just as important as any single piece of writing.

An occasional apologetic withdrawal from some social event is understandable and probably inevitable. But, we must ensure that we organize all the commitments in the various areas of our lives so we maintain a good mixture of experiences from all of them.

Otherwise, we will start to get fewer opportunities for that interaction and that will affect our general well-being too.

It is also easier to grab a quick and filling snack which we can eat our desk instead of going all the way to the kitchen and taking the time to prepare a healthier meal.

But, if this becomes part of their regular routine, we will be affected by the lack of real nutrients and the higher levels of fat and other low value ingredients in our snacks. We will also find that a desire to achieve more and even our ability to do that will be affected over time.

And, putting off a short but strenuous walk or other type of exercise, especially when the weather is bad or we are just not feeling well, probably seems like a good idea at the time.

If the weather is bad, making the effort and dealing with the temporary discomfort will re-enforce our commitment to achieving our greater long-term goals.

If we start to routinely put off what is difficult or unpleasant, we inform our

subconscious that this is our choice. Then, it will become progressively harder to push ourselves out of our comfort zone and closer to the success which we desire for ourselves and our family.

Taking the easy decision and using our need to complete some writing or prepare for a large and important project as the excuse ignores the downside which probably is greater than the temporary benefits we are focused on.

None of these decisions are likely to have a major effect on us in the short term. They will however have a long-term effect on the quality of the work we produce and our ability to improve in all areas.

My brother has a great saying about this, "Easy decisions will cause spreading of the waistline and reduction of your bottom line."

## **Filter Your Input to Produce Better Output**

From our first day out of the womb until the last days of our lives, we are affected and sometimes controlled by the information and opinions which we take in from other people.

The amount of information available to us now is greater than ever before, easier to access and harder to filter.

But, it is important that we set up our own filters and continue to evaluate what we take in or we will find that the quality of our writing, our lifestyle and our social and business interactions will suffer greatly.

If we accept other people's opinions of our abilities, prospects and ideas without question, we will limit ourselves and our enjoyment of life in general.

A lot of the information provided to us comes from people and organizations that have their own biases and goals. We have to be sure that carefully check what we are told, who and where the information comes from and what is motivating those which it to us.

When you are a writer, it is very important that you check your facts so that you can provide the best information to your readers or viewers.

Most of us do that as a matter of course, because of our own integrity.

But, many people overlook one of the most important information sources we have. That is the information that we provide to our own subconscious through our internal conversation and reaction to external input.

I've already mentioned a couple of times in this book how our decisions such as avoiding some temporary discomfort by putting off a harder than usual exercise session can influence our subconscious to accept this as part of a normal day to day behavior.

If we decide that something we should do is too hard for us to handle, this also starts to create a habitual behavior that will become our automatic response before very long.

From what I have read, our subconscious does not evaluate the instructions and impressions which we deliver to it. It accepts and acts on the information

we supply and that can pose strong but completely artificial limitations on our ability to produce better work and vastly superior outcomes for ourselves and our families.

The good news is that we can remove these limitations over time. It probably will be harder to achieve than it was to put them in place originally.

We start by examining the results that we have been achieving in the recent past and deciding whether they are in line with our values, level of effort and known abilities.

If we find self-imposed limitations, as we almost certainly will, the first step to changing the outcomes we are getting is to change what we are telling ourselves. That's no more difficult than changing the music we listen to during our leisure time.

But, we must also start to monitor the tone and content of our self talk so that we keep it realistic and upbeat and don't slip back into the negativity which had we had been injecting before.

While it may be a struggle for a while, as it always is when we try to change any type of habit, you will probably find that you will gain other benefits fairly quickly.

Anyone who has been putting negativity into their own mind has almost certainly been spreading that negativity among the people that he or she mixes with.

As you start to work on your own internal messaging, you will find that your interaction with others will also be more enjoyable because your own improved attitude will be more attractive to other people that have a positive outlook and high self-esteem.

## **Pace Yourself**

When you start to do your writing in focused and relatively short blocks of time as I suggested earlier, you may also keep a record of the amount of writing that you produce in a session.

Then you can compare your level of productivity and, to some extent, the quality of the output which you achieve as you proceed with other changes that you believe will improve the results you are getting over time.

It would not hurt to make a conscious effort to compete against yourself.

But, you must be careful to keep in mind that this is just a device to increase your enthusiasm and enjoyment of your writing sessions.

The difference between the results that you achieve in separate sessions over a short period of time is not likely to be of any long-term significance.

There are likely to be a number of variables that are affecting what you do achieve in those sessions and their effects will change according to the particular work you are doing each time.

Keep it light-hearted, give yourself small rewards when you start to see significant and lasting improvements and your progress is likely to be sustained over the long term.

## One Step at a Time

It is important points to remember when you have a goal and want to make a number of changes that you believe will help you to reach or exceed it more quickly.

You already know that it will not always be easy to replace your current action or habitual train of thought with a more beneficial one. It will take time and the track will probably have a few bumps in it where you slide back, feel disappointed and take more time than you would like to start moving ahead again.

You have the goal in mind. When you realize that you will probably have to make a number of changes, either small or large, to get the effect that you want, you may want to make several adjustments to your current methods at the same time.

That may cause you more delay and disappointment instead of increasing the pace of your journey towards the outcome in that you seek.

You will probably get your best results if you just apply one change to your routine at a time.

When you make more than one change at the time, you are increasing the level of difficulty involved in ensuring that all the improvements have the effect that you want.

Some changes will work together seamlessly and only have a positive effect on the outcome should get.

Sometimes one or more of the changes will not work or may cause something else to malfunction or produce less beneficial results.

This is why anybody that is testing a new piece of equipment which they are developing takes the slower course of just making one change each time as I have suggested there.

It is slower, but it is also almost guaranteed to give you the results you want.

Then, the benefits to your self-esteem and your achievement of your long-term goals will be greater than you could have ever expected.

## **A Mind Map Is Your Path To Treasure!**

Whether you are planning your next piece of writing or setting out the steps that you'll need to take to become better organized, I suggest that you try using a mind map for your planning.

That will also be useful to you for checking that you are continuing to make the progress you expect without any unnecessary detours.

If you have not actually used a mind map or even know what they are, I am sure that you will be pleasantly surprised.

A mind map is a very simple way of planning and controlling the elements of a project and monitoring its progress from start to successful completion.

You can produce a mind map using any of a number of computer programs. They vary widely in features and cost (some are free!).

Or, you can just use a whiteboard, or even a blank wall that is covered with sheets of blank paper, and some markers.

You start with a circle in the center of your drawing space. That circle represents the initial position that you start the project from.

Then you start to add the other important elements of the task which you are using the mind map for. With a book, that might be the chapter headings, the most important characters and/or the most significant events which you need to include.

If you are creating a mind map for a project like becoming more organized, you would start with a circle which marks your current situation and then start laying out circles or other shapes which represent the other important factors or people that will need to be involved in the project.

As you put more elements of the project on your sheet, you can add links between those elements which have important relationships to each other.

It is likely that you will, like me, come to realize that the mind map is a very powerful way to improve your productivity in any task that you undertake.

It can save you a lot of time and the benefits will increase as you become more used to using it.

It gives you a lot of freedom in the way that you lay out the various elements.

It has some resemblance to brainstorming. But, where brainstorming involves creating lists of items people and actions that are relevant to the project, a mind map lets you connect those various elements more easily so that you can explore the benefits and discover any possible problems with very little expenditure of time or effort.

Like brainstorming, the information which you put on your mind map should not be restricted by anyone’s preferences, Give yourself free rein to list every thought - the format allows for all ideas and suggestions to be included without any pre-judgment.

The low-quality or irrelevant items which often appear during this un-moderated, free-flowing first step will be easily filtered out as you progress towards your final goal. And, sometimes, some of those spontaneous suggestions can be used when combined with other suggestions.

In a group situation, the lack of restraint in the early stages encourages everyone to be fully involved. Some good ideas might be lost if you or any person in a group felt that their ideas were not welcome.

You can add any comments which may be relevant to any of the items which you put into your mind map at any stage. This can help you when you start to decide which items are of greatest or lesser importance.

But, the main advantage is that you can quickly see which items need to be connected at any stage or given extra attention as the project proceeds.

The free-form nature of a mind map means that you don't have to stick to a particular structure when you are adding items to your sheet or computer page.

You can erase or move any items around the mind-map as the project develops. This is particularly easy to do with the computer versions, of course.

The computer version, whichever program you use, allows you to compress

any of the main groups of points (called nodes) so that you can concentrate more easily on a particular area.

This can also be handy when you are using the mind map to monitor your progress. Keep the current node open so you can see all the items which are linked to it and what node you will be concentrating on next. At the same time, fold all the information in the other areas out of the way so you can stay focused.

Your basic mind-map makes it easy to understand the relationships between various sections of the project, but you can also use different colored text to emphasize different points, use varied shapes for different types of elements in the plan and highlight important factors, such as possible problems with highlights like stars and other symbols or background colors.

Because you usually use just a few words or sometimes only one to describe each item on your mind map, adding and amending entries usually takes like effort or time.

If you feel stuck at any point in your project, a quick look around the map will often get you back on track.

The mind map is easy for anyone to use. I suggest that you try it and compare with whatever method you are currently using. I am very enthusiastic about mind maps but still use lists, tables and timelines.

They all have their place.

## **Your Timeline**

If you haven't used a timeline when you were planning and actually producing your previous writing projects, I suggest that it is worth trying for your next one.

The mind map or whatever method you use which includes all areas of your project is important but a simple timeline is still worth doing to keep you focused on the major points in your schedule where you must meet certain personal or contractual markers.

I put a strip of paper across the top of my whiteboard with the various dates and requirements clearly marked.

This timeline needs to be kept as uncluttered as possible but I always add some other markers to the strip.

The first are markers which show other important commitments which are unrelated to this project but also need to be accommodated in the schedule.

They are to help me remember other important events and other commitments which are not related to this project but which I must make sure are accommodated in the schedule in the same period. This always includes any important social activities, especially those which involve my immediate family.

## Inspiration

Everyone needs inspiration to keep striving and to make their life feel worthwhile.

If we don't feel our efforts are rewarded or at least appreciated, we will probably start to question the need to put in our best efforts. Unless we have clearly defined goals and a sense that we are making progress, our motivation will sag.

That will affect our feeling of self-worth.

This change will show as more negativity in our attitude and that could damage our relationships as well as our own ability to achieve our desires.

Two things which may cause this are:

1. We focus more on our work and long-term goals and start to put less effort and time into our personal relationships and commitments.
2. We don't see any support or reward or recognition for our continued effort.

Our family and social connections are a vital part of what makes us feel worthwhile.

But, we may not realize that we must work on their maintenance and improvement or those people who are most important to us may start to drift away or feel that we are losing interest in them!

A close friend said to me that he had not realized that he had let his work take over his life until it was almost too late.

He said, "I learned that the job I was paid for could never give me enough rewards to replace those I already had, which I had been undervaluing because they were freely given."

We may appreciate the support and comfort which we get from our family and friends, but always seem to be too busy to take the time to tell them or show them how much we do.

## Research Tips

Research is a vital part of any writer’s work, whatever they are producing.

These are some of the best ways I have found to improve my writing through improving my methods and the results I get from my research.

The Internet is a powerful means of finding information, confirming or disproving information you are considering using and exploring ideas.

But it is not an infallible source of information.

Much of what is offered as reliable information through the Internet is just as likely to be untrue, biased and may even be dangerous.

Even the search engines which are viewed by many people as reliable sources and completely unbiased may manipulate the way they present their responses to your questions and other requests.

Some links are given prominence over some others because they pay for that prominent position.

Links may get prominence, which leads us to assume that it has greater relevance or authority because it has been carefully edited to get that ranking by complying with the criteria used by the search engine programmer at that point. Of course, the companies which operate the search engines are constantly adjusting those criteria and try very hard to keep them confidential so that the manipulators cannot exert too much bias on the results you see, but each side is always improving their methods, so some sites do get better results because of their expertise in this area.

Some search engines actually keep a record of your searches and may adjust the results which they serve to you to best fit with their opinion of what you want.

You can see this for yourself by getting three different people, with at least one in a different geographic area to the others, putting in the same question to the same search engine at the same time (allowing for time zones etc).

That may seem to be a good thing because you might get more results which fit with your actual needs.

But, the results which were not shown or moved lower in the list you were presented with may have been at least equally valuable to your research. These other suggestions might have led you to alternative resources which had more value than those which were offered.

The other problem is that many sources offer false information as fact. Sometimes, that may be deliberate while other instances may be due to the people who maintain that site having been misled themselves.

It’s always important to apply a few rules to any information which you are offered.

The first is to use your own common-sense and decide whether the person offering the information may have any motive for bias? That may be a desire to profit directly from your use of the information or because of a commercial or other relationship with the person or company which the information is about.

The second rule is to not use information which you cannot find at least one other independent and reputable source for.

The third is to check the site’s policies for the information which is presented on it.

Some sources which many people rely on, such as Wikipedia, just offer a place where almost anyone can present their version of some information. They usually have people who try to verify or correct the information which is displayed but there can be no guarantee of its authenticity.

In fact, the information on Wikipedia may be edited by any visitor.

I applaud the desire of the people that put their money and other resources into sharing information through their websites but emphasize that they should not be used without careful checking.

Even when you are confident of a particular site’s intentions and information, always check for other points of view or corroboration.

Your own reputation depends on it and the fact you were misled will not help you.

## Review

Some of these have been mentioned but I put extra points here.

There are also a few I couldn't fit into any particular section.

### *Small bites*

Many writers become overwhelmed by the amount of work they face when writing their first large project.

This can make them delay beginning the project. Eventually, many of these people decide to do something else and leave their dream to another time which may never come.

That can be avoided by looking at the parts of your big project, such as the chapters of your book as a series of simpler and shorter projects.

Then, just focus on the first one until it is completed. Then, start fresh and a little more confident because you have already completed your first project.

That puts you above people that have not started theirs and shows that there is really no reason that you cannot complete each of the other chapters in good time.

That will improve your own self-esteem and your ability to produce the full book.

### *Have an Achievements Record*

Highlight your accomplishments in your diary. Many of us fill our diary with our appointments, financial transactions and other commitments without recording any but the most significant achievements we have.

I suggest that you either make space for two items which gave you the most enjoyment or inspiration each day or create a separate Appreciation Journal where you list whatever gives you a smile or a sense of gratitude every day.

This has two benefits. We usually can remember our disappointments, big or small, and keeping those memories does us no good at all.

But, when we start to emphasize the good things in our daily existence and record them, we push positive vibes, backed by verified information, into our

subconscious. This makes it easier over time, to improve our feeling of self-worth and that will show in the more positive way we approach our responsibilities and the people we deal with.

### ***Don't come to a Full Stop***

When you finish a piece of writing, start your outline or even just list some ideas for the next piece.

I've found that when I finish an article or whatever and then reward myself by finishing for the day, it takes longer for me to start the next piece.

When I immediately start a new outline and stop before I finish it, my subconscious and my own work ethics drives me back to the computer more quickly!

I can't wait to get back into the unfinished piece. But, if I had come to a full stop, I might have headed off to the Library and stopped at the garden supplies store on the way home .....

Leaving something unfinished is a good spur for you to greater effort the next day.

### ***Write everyday.***

Set a time.

You may say that you took up writing to get away from schedules but that has a downside. If you wait until you feel like writing or till you are inspired, you will have a lot of unproductive time.

So, you probably won't get the results you are capable of!

Writing every day will create a habit which will make you more enthusiastic and productive.

Anytime that you find yourself looking at a blank sheet of paper or computer screen, start writing anything which comes to mind.

Make yourself keep writing for at least ten minutes.

You will probably find that you start focusing on your current project before that period is up. Then, simply continue with that and you will have a productive session.

If this happens on a day when you have finished your latest project, it is likely that your mind will start to fill with ideas for new worthwhile projects. It will be stimulated by the actual act of writing.

The problem of having nothing to write can often be overcome simply by writing.

Even if the first few pages you produce a few pages have no apparent value, this simple strategy will often give you a flying start into your actual writing session.

### ***Nothing to Write?***

If you can find nothing to write about, just write "I can't find anything to write about" repeatedly!

Or, choose any other bit of nonsense and write. The physical act will encourage development of the writing habit and your mind will quickly fill with ideas. They may not be real good ones at first but your subconscious will put better ones in your head every day.

Try it and see for yourself.

### ***Don't share unfinished Work***

Keep your work to yourself until you have it almost ready for submission, or publication if you self-publish.

You can pick a topic which you enjoy reading about if you are having trouble getting your writing done.

But, if you focus on future hot topics and learn to write for the people who want to know about those subjects, you will probably make more money and increase your mental agility at the same time.

### ***Write the first Draft without editing!***

When you are writing the first draft, ignore mistakes (yes, that was deliberate!) because you will slow yourself down and lose valuable time.

The first draft is to get the ideas onto paper or your computer.

You test this by writing something, about one thousand words (or 40 lines if you are a poet) using your current method where you edit as you go.

Then, do a piece without stopping to edit. Then, do a quick edit on the second piece. Even though you will take more time with the second edit, the result is likely to be 100% better.

And, you may also find that you took less time for the two-step second piece than the first where you combined your writing and editing!

### ***Always write your Outline first***

An outline will save you time by making sure that you cover all the important points.

It will also encourage you to avoid spending time or words on side-issues which may not appeal to your readers.

### ***Do you write for your ego or for your readers?***

If you want to have more readers, write to solve their problems, even if it is just that they have nothing they want to read!

### ***What do you Want your readers to do?***

Ask yourself, "What action do I want my readers to take after reading this piece I am writing?"

If you don't know, how will they?

If you have that course of action in mind from the start, your outline will be easier to write and the result is likely to have more reader appeal as well!

### ***Get accountable!***

An Accountability partner can be a great help. Find someone who is about your level in the writing industry though they may focus on a completely different area.

You must be able to trust and share each other's plans and progress. You arrange to contact each other twice a day. In the morning, you share what you plan to do with your writing time that day. At the end of each day, you each tell the other what actually happened.

Over time you will encourage each other to greater success and support each other when you hit a bump or two.

## **Resources**

This is a list of a few resources which I believe are worthwhile for you to try.

There are no commercial arrangements between me and the suppliers of the services listed except I’ve used their products.

## **Last Words from Alice Morgan**

Thank you for reading my book.

I hope that it will help you produce your future writing projects more quickly and easily.

I am glad for the opportunity to pass on some of the ideas I have used for several years and acknowledge the help I had from many writers during that time.

I wish you more success than you dream of and all the happiness you deserve.

***Alice Morgan***

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