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Assemble Your Tools, Control Your Time, and Beat Writer's Block

Amy Deardon
www.amydeardon.blog

If you want to be a writer you need strategies to write. This lecture covers a workable game plan you can adapt to make it happen. You'll learn how to keep track of ALL your ideas, create a flexible weekly writing schedule, and use free tools to write wherever and whenever you want—on your computer or on the go with your phone and a folding keyboard. Finally, you'll learn methods to smash writer's block so you can put down—really—1000 words per hour or more. You'll be writing "THE END" before you know it.

OUTLINE

Mission Statement and Goals
Tools for Success
 Idea Management
 Writing
 Time Management
Strategies for Writer's Block
Handy List of Resources

MISSION STATEMENT

God made me fast. When I run, I feel His pleasure.

—Eric Liddell
Chariots of Fire

Take some time to decide WHY YOU WANT TO WRITE.

My own mission statement:

I will use my God-given writing and other skills and my God-given opportunities to communicate to others about His awesomeness and how He is my hero. I will use my gifts to inspire and educate others around the world to also lift up God's name above all others.

You can use this template as a model to write your mission statement:

"I will [action] for [audience] by [skills] to [desired result]."

NOT good reasons to write:

- Fame
- Money
- Compete with someone else

⊙

GOALS

Make your goals SMALL and ACHIEVABLE and BASED ON YOUR EFFORT ALONE.
Instead of saying "get an agent," say "send out two queries this month."

Build in an end-point to your goal, eg weekly quota. Finish your goal, then make a new goal and reach that too.

Some ideas of success:

- Spend 30 minutes with God every morning for a week.
- Do 63 pomodoros in a week (average 9 pomodoros a day).
- Write 2100 words in a week (average 300 words a day).

Do your best and leave the results up to God.

—Alex Kendrick
Facing the Giants

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

NOTE: See the end of this handout for a handy list of resources with links.

IDEA MANAGEMENT

Ideas are like fish, slippery and easy to lose.

You need to capture your ideas by writing them down.

Get a notebook and carry it around with you everywhere. Write all your thoughts in this—chores, phone numbers, story ideas, etc.

Make sure you write enough information so that you know what your entry means later.

Date each entry.

My favorite tool: A fat 4x6 inch spiral notebook. This is the right size to be portable yet there's enough room for writing.

A Great Resource for Capturing Your Ideas:

If you want to learn some useful tips for using your notebook, I highly recommend you get the book *The Bullet Journal Method: Track the Past, Order the Present, Design the Future* by Ryder Carroll

Carroll's method is intuitive, simple, and amazingly effective. It will take you less than a day to start using this awesome system. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.



WRITING

You may already use Microsoft Word (PC) or iWork (Mac) to write. If you do, I'm going to suggest something radical here:

Switch your writing platform to Google Drive.

I can hear the protests! But hear me out.

Google Drive is a fully functional writing platform that is similar to your computer's work suites. The advantage is that it makes your work PORTABLE. You can work on the newest version of your manuscript from multiple devices that will automatically update your work. You can type on

your home computer in the morning, then type on your phone while waiting to pick up your kids after school. When you're at the office or the library, you can continue to type on your manuscript using the community computer. Nothing is lost.

Imagine *how much more work you can get done* by using those little 15 and 30 minute time blocks throughout the day.

Google Drive:

- Is free and easy to get.
- Works similarly to Microsoft Word and iWork. You can learn how to use it in two hours.
- Saves your work in real time to the cloud so your work is always accessible.
- Has plenty of storage—15 GB per account. And it's easy to create multiple accounts if you really want to.
- You can find previous versions of your work if you don't like the changes you made to your manuscript.
- You can easily save your files on a thumb drive or your computer hard drive as well as Google Drive.
- Your files can be saved in Microsoft Word format.
- You can make and read PDFs.

If you are comfortable with Google Drive and needing a new computer, you might want to consider getting a Chromebook instead. Chromebooks are significantly less expensive than computers, running as low as \$200.

For writing-on-the-go, you can use your phone with a Google Drive App and folding keyboard. Use those 15 minute time blocks to finish your work!

NOTE: Scrivener is an advanced novel-writing platform we won't be discussing here. I just wanted to mention that if you use Scrivener, you probably know that there is a mobile app for it that will allow you to take it writing-on-the-go just like you can with Google Drive.



TIME MANAGEMENT

An effective method to accomplish goals is the POMODORO TECHNIQUE. This is a game-changer.

The Pomodoro Technique was invented by an Italian University student, Francesco Cirillo, who figured you can do anything if it's for a short period of time. He used his mother's kitchen timer (which looked like a tomato—hence the name) to break tasks into 25 minute intervals followed by a 5 minute mini-break.

You can modify this technique if you want. I do 30-minute pomodoros rather than 25 minutes to translate more easily into hours.

To do pomodoros, at the beginning of each session decide what you are going to work on for half an hour. Set a timer and work until the timer goes off. Make a hash mark on an index card. Take a five minute break, then do another pomodoro. Record the total of your tally marks at the end of each day.

You will be amazed at how much you'll get done if you stick with it!

How many pomodoros should you set for a goal? The short answer is, as many as you can comfortably and *consistently* manage. When in doubt, go low and work up. I recommend you make a weekly goal rather than a daily goal so that, if you overwork some days, you can take a day off during the week if you'd like.

If you would like some guidance on goal-setting, consider this study of emerging and selling authors. They found that those writers making 100K or more from book sales spent, on average, 32 hours a week writing.

<https://tinyurl.com/2p8xkv4k>

32 hours is 64 pomodoros. 9 pomodoros/day times 7 days/week equals 63 pomodoros per week—close enough to 64, and it's easy to count. So 63 pomodoros per week works for me.

STRATEGIES FOR WRITER'S BLOCK

Writer's block is a painful condition in which the writer cannot put words down even though you really want to.

The solution is to realize that writing has three distinct components:

- Planning
- Writing
- Editing

Writer's Block occurs when you try to do more than one of these things at the same time.

Break it down.

Planning—Outline your work, whether fiction or nonfiction. This doesn't have to be formal — just put your ideas down. Even if you are a pantster, you may find that some direction before you start is really helpful.

Writing—the trick to fast writing is to allow yourself to write without judging your words. You can probably type at least 30 words a minute—so just do it. 30 words/minute times 60 minutes/hour equals 1800 words/hour. Hmmm.

Another trick that will DOUBLE your writing speed is using free dictation software. See the Resources section at the end of this handout for a tutorial on Voice Typing with Google Docs.

Editing—a first draft ALWAYS needs to be edited.

Start with self-editing your work. Use NOUNS and VERBS rather than adjectives and adverbs. Cut useless words like “very” “quite” “began to” “somewhat” and “rather.” Don’t try to do everything at once.

A good critique group is invaluable for honing your words. Check out the ACFW’s online critique group.

Remember that editing is an art, not a science. Everyone does it differently. You want to make sure you find a good match.

Professional editing is expensive. Deciding to hire a professional editor is often premature. There is no one way to edit so make sure you find someone compatible.

Happy Writing!

Amy Deardon

www.amydeardon.blog

HANDY LIST OF RESOURCES

KINDLE E-READERS— LIFE CHANGING!

Kindle E-Reader. Imagine holding 1000 books in your hand. Imagine in your jammies you buy that next book in your series and start reading it a minute later. Imagine reading at night in bed without needing a lamp because your book is backlit (and the light doesn't hurt your eyes). Imagine having your book read to you with text to speech while you drive or fold laundry.

Consider that e-books tend to be half or less the price of the same print books. Many e-books are free. You can borrow e-books from the local library. You can even join Kindle Unlimited where, for \$12 a month, you can download up to 20 titles at a time from the regular Amazon store and keep them as long as you want.

E-books have revolutionized the publishing industry. And the Kindle e-reader, with its flip-open cover, makes it seem like you are holding a very thin trade-paper-sized book as you read. I respect when you say that you don't want to give up print books, but honestly, truly, the Kindle e-reader is so much better. It's like driving a racing car rather than a horse and buggy.

The Kindle E-reader is not a computer. It's not a tablet. It is a gizmo that acts like a book with a black-and-white flat e-ink screen showing typed sentences and paragraphs. You turn pages, one at a time, just like a book. There is no movement and no distraction or advertisement on the page. It is just a book page with print. Fun fact: you can make the text bigger or smaller.

Kindles have truly changed my life, and I can't imagine any reader or writer not being thrilled with them. OK enough said. Did I say I LOVE my Kindle?

©

Kindle. If you want to just dip into the Kindle experience, this is the budget model running \$100 when it isn't on sale. The "budget" means you give up a few bells and whistles, mostly that it's not waterproof: <https://tinyurl.com/ubut6559>. Check out the comparison chart on the page to see the difference between kindles.

Don't forget to get a cover for your kindle to protect it. There are many covers available. I like this one because it's inexpensive and has many different looks to choose from: <https://tinyurl.com/3pezxa45>.

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Kindle Paperwhite: This is a higher-end kindle at \$150 when it isn't on sale. It's slightly larger and has an adjustable "warm" light (amber background) to make the light even easier on your eyes at night. It is also waterproof so you can bring it to the pool or bathtub without worries: <https://tinyurl.com/554rz3p4>.

Again, don't forget to get a cover. Be careful that your cover is for the paperwhite because it's a different size than the basic kindle. This cover is inexpensive and has lots of choices: <https://tinyurl.com/yvsv5jtz>.



TEXT TO SPEECH ON A KINDLE

Kindle TTS: If you have a kindle you can listen to your books—even if they are not audible books! Get a FREE download to show you how to enable TTS (text to speech) on your kindle at <https://amydeardon.blog/free-downloads/>

IDEA MANAGEMENT

Notebook: All you need for capturing ideas and information is a notebook and pen. Personally I prefer the fat 4x6 college-ruled notebooks with 200 pages because they're portable yet last awhile. You can get them at Walmart or an office store, or find them on Amazon at: <https://tinyurl.com/2hvfk3hz>.

Learn Bullet Journaling: You can just write things down—but Bullet Journaling is simple and will take your organizational skills painlessly to a new level. I highly recommend you take a few hours to learn this powerful system that only uses a notebook. *The Bullet Journal Method: Track the Past, Order the Present, Design the Future* by Ryder Carroll.

KINDLE: <https://tinyurl.com/yzmdjyxf>

PRINT: <https://tinyurl.com/4ebmu7j4>

Bullet Journal Notebook: If you want to go with the "official" Bullet Journal notebook that is sturdy and comes in beautiful colors, check out: <https://tinyurl.com/t38f9jt6>.

E-Ink Notebook: If you love gadgets and have some money, you may want to consider an E-ink notebook instead of a standard notebook. Writing on it is just like writing on paper, and the unlimited paper/files and organizing capability is pretty cool. You can also load and write on PDF files and epub books. Your handwritten files can be converted to typed text. There are two

notebooks I have tried and both are outstanding—Remarkable 2 and Kindle Scribe.

Remarkable 2's biggest advantage for me is that it has a keyboard (with the type folio) so you can TYPE on it as well as write. Wow! The Remarkable 2 also has multiple device apps so the work you do on your computer or phone is updated with your device, and it's easy to save files for accessibility. The Remarkable 2 links well with others, say in an office environment, for file sharing, group presentations, and whiteboard capability. It's pricey at around \$400 plus \$200 for the type folio—but a great tool if you like it, and the keyboard is absolutely awesome for distraction-free writing: <https://remarkable.com>.

Kindle Scribe's advantage for me is that it is within the Amazon universe so you can read your kindle books on a big screen as well as write. The Scribe also has backlighting so it's easy to use in dark conditions —the Remarkable 2 requires a book light in the shade. I really like that the Scribe turns on automatically as soon as you open the cover: <https://tinyurl.com/4bypm2pb>.

There are different Scribe cases, but I like the one with the built-in pen holder so the pen isn't easy to lose: <https://tinyurl.com/2h3hd5ev>. The scribe plus the case, when the scribe isn't on sale, will run you about \$350-\$400 depending on how much memory you get (although really you don't need more than 16GB).

WRITING

Google Drive: If you have a gmail account you already have google drive. Otherwise sign up for a free account at <http://www.drive.google.com>. The advantage of Google Drive is that your documents are automatically backed up in the cloud, so you can access the updated version of your manuscript on any device.

Learn Google Drive: Learning the Google Suite isn't complicated, but if you're not familiar with it you would be wise to take a few hours to learn it well rather than on the fly. You can check for books or on the web. One book I like is *Google Drive & Docs In 30 Minutes: The unofficial guide to Google Drive, Docs, Sheets & Slides* by Ian Lamont.

KINDLE: <https://tinyurl.com/4j42a6hk>

PRINT: <https://tinyurl.com/3pxnbh7p>

Google Drive App for Your Phone: You can get a free app of Google Drive to put on your phone so you can write on-the-go. Go to your phone's app store—the

app is available for both Android and Apple. Your phone screen is smaller than a computer but once you get used to typing on it you may not notice.

Foldable Keyboard: This rechargeable keyboard uses bluetooth to pair with your phone so you can write your book on-the-go. I prefer a keyboard without the number pad because it's smaller—and who needs the number pad anyway? This keyboard also includes a phone stand so you can see the screen without straining your neck: <https://tinyurl.com/fh5u8jmr>

Portable Battery Charger: There's nothing worse than having a dead battery on your phone or keyboard when you're ready to write. I like this battery charger because it's thin and can charge multiple devices fast: <https://tinyurl.com/4aykbzw8>

Cables for Charger: Don't forget your cables to charge your devices. I like to use the 6 inch cables because they don't get in the way. USB-C cords for Android phone and keyboard: <https://tinyurl.com/y6hc48p2>
Iphone cords: <https://tinyurl.com/mr2zt55f>

Bag to Carry Writing Accessories: A grab-and-go bag with your writing accouterments is super-convenient. Check the dimensions of any bag before you purchase since phone size can vary. This is a good general-size bag I like and I hope will work for you: <https://tinyurl.com/fvmhsj6v>

TIME MANAGEMENT

Learn a Powerful Productivity Method: Learn the Pomodoro Technique for getting things done from its creator, a frustrated university student who found magic with his mother's kitchen timer. The timer looked like a tomato, hence the name "pomodoro." Try it! You will be amazed. *The Pomodoro Technique: The Acclaimed Time-Management System That Has Transformed How We Work*, by Francesco Cirillo.

KINDLE: <https://tinyurl.com/5ystz582>

PRINT: <https://tinyurl.com/bdfeebca>

WRITER'S BLOCK

Double Your Writing Speed. You can use free dictation software with Google Docs. Check out this free tutorial on Voice Typing: <https://tinyurl.com/3k7k24bn>

Self-Edit Your Work. A classic self-editing book that will make your words sing is *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers, Second Edition: How to Edit Yourself Into Print* by Renni Browne and Dave King. Highly recommended:

KINDLE: <https://tinyurl.com/bder5tas>

PRINT: <https://tinyurl.com/ye4cmvvh>

Critique Group: Check out ACFWs critique group at: <https://tinyurl.com/yeynz4n8>.

Professional Editor: To find a professional editor: First ask friends for recommendations. You can also check out Editorial Freelancers Association www.the-efa.org Once you find several names, ask for recommendations and samples to make sure you get what you want to get.