



# Writing Routines

## ***12 Essential Writing Routines*** To Help You To Craft Your Own



*“Routine is what it’s all about. You’ve got to get into a [writing] routine that is second nature. Something you love. I wrote the first two books real early in the morning because I didn’t have any extra time. Now it’s about 7:30. Same small office behind the house where I’ve been writing for the last 22 years. Same desk, same computer, same cup of coffee. It’s dark. I love it. There’s no phones, faxes, or internet—I work offline. So I’m in a cocoon for the first three hours, and I just love that. I’ll write for a couple of hours, take a break...then get back into the novel. On a good day I’ll write 2,000 words. A slow day is 1,000. But you do that five days a week for six months and that’s a lot of pages, and that’s how the books are written.”*

- **John Grisham author of 35+ New York Times Bestsellers**



Every professional writer has a routine. They vary widely: Ernest Hemingway stood while he wrote while Truman Capote claimed to only be able to write while laying in bed. But whatever the routine, serious writers have habits. To be great, you have to. Because ultimately, this is a profession like any other. It requires putting in the hours and doing the work.

For inspiration, here are a few common themes the best in the business incorporate into their daily routines.

## SET YOUR HOURS



“It’s important to me to have a place to work outside of where I live. So I have always found myself an office. I go off to work as if I had a clock to punch; at the end of the day I come home as if I had just gotten off the commuter train. I need to impose a structure on myself. Otherwise I can go three or four days without looking at a piece of paper. I try to keep it as close to a nine-to-five job as I’m able, probably closer to ten to four. I spend the first hour reading the Daily News, answering phone calls, lining up paper clips, doing anything but working. Toward the end of the end of the morning, I realize I have no choice but to finally get to work. Sometimes I’ll be transported by the work; sometimes it just won’t come. The most painful part of the day is getting to the moment when I see I have no choice but to do it.”

- **Richard Price author of The Wanderers, Clockers, Lush Life. Writer for The Wire, Michael Jackson.**

“To me writing is a job, a profession, and the best way to be a professional is to set professional hours. So I don’t cram, I don’t do spurts when inspiration strikes, I don’t do it in a bathrobe or from bed. I write every day and I treat it like work. I am sharpest and least imposed on in the morning so that’s when I write. I have a ritual: I get up, I shower, I get dressed as though I am going to a job and then I show up to work.”

- **Ryan Holiday bestselling author of The Obstacle Is The Way, Ego Is The Enemy, The Daily Stoic, Perennial Seller.**

## REPETITION IS KEY



“When I’m in writing mode for a novel, I get up at 4:00 am and work for five to six hours. In the afternoon, I run for 10km or swim for 1500m (or do both), then I read a bit and listen to some music. I go to bed at 9:00 pm. I keep to this routine every day without variation. The repetition itself becomes the important thing; it’s a form of mesmerism. I mesmerize myself to reach a deeper state of mind. But to hold to such repetition for so long — six months to a year — requires a good amount of mental and physical strength. In that sense, writing a long novel is like survival training. Physical strength is as necessary as artistic sensitivity.”

- **Haruki Murakami** author of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, *Norwegian Wood*, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, *Kafka on the Shore*

“There are certain things I do if I sit down to write... I have a glass of water or a cup of tea. There’s a certain time I sit down, from 8:00 to 8:30, somewhere within that half hour every morning. I have my vitamin pill and my music, sit in the same seat, and the papers are all arranged in the same places. The cumulative purpose of doing these things the same way every day seems to be a way of saying to the mind, you’re going to be dreaming soon. It’s not any different than a bedtime routine.”

- **Stephen King**

## WRITE WHETHER YOU WANT TO OR NOT



“A writer who waits for ideal conditions under which to work will die without putting a word on paper.”

- **E.B. White** author of *The Elements of Style*, *Stuart Little*, *Charlotte's Web*, *The Trumpet of the Swan*.

“If you're only going to write when you're inspired, you may be a fairly decent poet, but you will never be a novelist — because you're going to have to make your word count today, and those words aren't going to wait for you, whether you're inspired or not. So you have to write when you're not “inspired.” ... And the weird thing is that six months later, or a year later, you're going to look back and you're not going to remember which scenes you wrote when you were inspired and which scenes you wrote because they had to be written.”

- **Neil Gaiman** author of *The Sandman* and novels *Stardust*, *American Gods*, *Coraline*, and *The Graveyard Book*.

“If you write a half-hour a day, it makes a lot of writing year by year.”

- **Gertrude Stein**

## CUT DISTRACTIONS



“If you’re just starting out as a writer, you could do worse than strip your television’s electric plug-wire, wrap a spike around it, and then stick it back into the wall. See what blows, and how far. Just an idea.”

- **Stephen King.** *On Writing*

“Turn off your cell phone. Honestly, if you want to get work done, you’ve got to learn to unplug. No texting, no email, no Facebook, no Instagram. Whatever it is you’re doing, it needs to stop while you write. A lot of the time (and this is fully goofy to admit), I’ll write with earplugs in — even if it’s dead silent at home.”

- **Nathan Englander** *author of For The Relief of Unbearable Urges*

## ORGANIZE YOUR IDEAS ON NOTE CARDS



“Get yourself a stack of index cards. Write a one-line synopsis of each specific scene that you think should be in your story, one scene per card. Don’t worry about writing them down in any specific order. Just write them down as fast as you think of them. Now, take all these separate cards and shuffle them together and start laying them out on the kitchen table in the order you think they should go. First organize each plot line in its own thread. Then you can go back and forth between separate threads, picking up the next appropriate scene from each.”

**- David Gerrold**

“My Commonplace Book is the first thing I’m taking out of my house in a fire. It’s several thousand 4x6 notecards—based on a system taught to by my mentor Robert Greene when I was his research assistant—that have ideas, notes on books I liked, quotes that caught my attention, research for projects or phrases I am kicking around.

Every book I read is also broken up and digested on these cards, which are all loosely by themed. I don’t have a great exact memory but I know in broad strokes what I have on these cards and whenever I’m writing or speaking and need it, I pull it out and find it.”

**- Ryan Holiday bestselling author of *The Obstacle Is The Way*, *Ego Is The Enemy*, *The Daily Stoic*, *Perennial Seller*.**

## EDIT BY HAND



“I write with a felt-tip pen, or sometimes a pencil, on yellow or white legal pads, that fetish of American writers. I like the slowness of writing by hand. Then I type it up and scrawl all over that. And keep on retyping it, each time making corrections both by hand and directly on the typewriter, until I don’t see how to make it any better. Up to five years ago, that was it. Since then there is a computer in my life. After the second or third draft it goes into the computer, so I don’t retype the whole manuscript anymore, but continue to revise by hand on a succession of hard-copy drafts from the computer.”

- ***Susan Sontag*** author *On Photography*

“I would write the intro, print it out, and edit it. Get it passable and close to what I wanted. Then I wrote the first chapter, and did the same. Then once I had a clear sense of what this book is going to be I wrote the first third, edited and then wrote the second third.”

- ***Ryan Holiday*** bestselling author of *The Obstacle Is The Way*, *Ego Is The Enemy*, *The Daily Stoic*, *Perennial Seller*.

“I like to see the draft on paper before I edit.”

- ***Richard Clarke*** bestselling author of *Against All Enemies*

## EXERCISE



“The twin activities of running and writing keep the writer reasonably sane and with the hope, however illusory and temporary, of control.”

- **Joyce Carol Oates author of Black Water, Blonde, The Wheel of Love**

“When I’m in writing mode for a novel, I get up at 4:00 am and work for five to six hours. In the afternoon, I run for 10km or swim for 1500m (or do both), then I read a bit and listen to some music.”

- **Haruki Murakami author of A Wild Sheep Chase, Norwegian Wood, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, Kafka on the Shore.**

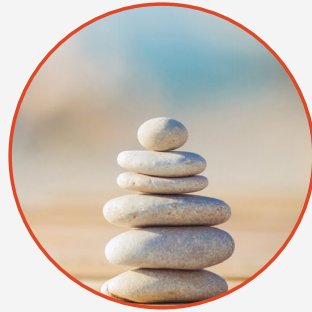
“I work in the morning at a manual typewriter. I do about four hours and then go running. This helps me shake off one world and enter another. Trees, birds, drizzle — it’s a nice kind of interlude.”

- **Don DeLillo bestselling author of White Noise, Libra.**

“I awake at 5:30, work until 8:00, eat breakfast at home, work until 10:00, walk a few blocks into town, do errands, go to the nearby municipal swimming pool, which I have all to myself, and swim for half an hour, return home at 11:45, read the mail, eat lunch at noon.”

- **Kurt Vonnegut bestselling author of Slaughterhouse-Five**

## MEDITATION



“My routine is over thirty minutes of Zen meditation (known as zazen) every morning. In this form of meditation (referred to as shikantaza) the main goal is to learn how to empty the mind, develop superior powers of focus (joriki), and gain access to more unconscious, intuitive forms of thinking.

“When we focus deeply on whatever is before us, we slowly gain greater powers of mental perception and we are able to see deeper and deeper into things. We see the connections between phenomena. We awaken higher levels of intelligence. We are hardly aware of the powers we actually possess when we focus this lens.”

- **Robert Greene bestselling author of *The 48 Laws of Power*.**

## PLAY MUSIC ON REPEAT



“The more we listen to music on repeat, we tend to dissolve into it. That’s extremely useful for creative work, when tuning out the monkey mind is of utmost importance.”

- **Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis.** *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind*

“I pull down the blinds. I put my headset on and play the same soundtrack of twenty songs over and over and I don’t hear them. It shuts everything else out. So I don’t hear myself as I’m writing and laughing and talking to myself. I’m not even aware I’m making noise. I’m having a physical reaction to a very engaging experience. It is not a detached process.”

- **Michael Lewis bestselling author of** *Liar’s Poker, The Blind Side, The Big Short.*

“I’ve found that picking one song—usually something I am not proud to say I am listening to—and listening to it on repeat, over and over and over again is the best way to get into a rhythm and flow.”

- **Ryan Holiday bestselling author of** *The Obstacle Is The Way, Ego Is The Enemy, The Daily Stoic, Perennial Seller.*

“I’ll listen to a single song over and over on repeat, hundreds of times. It helps me focus.”

- **Matt Mullenweg**

## CREATIVITY ELIXIRS



“I found by accident that my best sessions all followed a specific ratio: 3 cups of yerba mate tea for each glass of wine consumed. 3:1. I also like adding a little [theobromine](#) with a few [E. Guittard 72% cacao chocolate cooking chips](#) every 20 minutes or so.”

- **Tim Ferriss bestselling author of** [\*The 4-Hour Workweek\*](#), [\*The 4-Hour Body\*](#), [\*The 4-Hour Chef\*](#), [\*Tools of Titans\*](#).

“I need an hour alone before dinner, with a drink, to go over what I’ve done that day. I can’t do it late in the afternoon because I’m too close to it. Also, the drink helps. It removes me from the pages. So I spend this hour taking things out and putting other things in.”

- **Joan Didion author of** [\*The Year of Magical Thinking\*](#), [\*Blue Nights\*](#), [\*We Tell Ourselves Stories In Order To Live\*](#).

“I can’t think unless I’m lying down, either in bed or stretched on a couch and with a cigarette and coffee handy. I’ve got to be puffing and sipping. As the afternoon wears on, I shift from coffee to mint tea to sherry to martinis.”

- **Truman Capote**

## STOP BEFORE YOU'RE OUT OF MATERIAL



“You write until you come to a place where you still have your juice and know what will happen next and you stop and try to live through until the next day when you hit it again.”

- **Ernest Hemingway** author *The Old Man and The Sea*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *For Whom The Bell Tolls*.

“I don’t believe in draining the reservoir, do you see? I believe in getting up from the typewriter, away from it, while I still have things to say.”

- **Arthur Miller** author of *The Crucible*, *Death of A Salesman*.

## ABSOLUTELY MAKE TIME FOR READING



“If I had a nickel for every person who ever told me he/she wanted to become a writer but “didn’t have time to read,” I could buy myself a pretty good steak dinner. Can I be blunt on this subject? If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.”

- **Stephen King**, *On Writing*

“I write two pages. And then I read and read and read.”

- **José Saramago**, *recipient of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Literature*

“I can’t begin to tell you the things I discovered while I was looking for something else.”

- **Shelby Foote**, *The Civil War: A Narrative*

“The greatest part of a writer’s time is spent in reading; a man will turn over half a library to make one book.”

- **Samuel Johnson**, *A Dictionary of the English Language*

“...EVENINGS: See friends. Read in cafés....”

- **Henry Miller** *author of Tropic of Cancer, Black Spring, Tropic of Capricorn, and more.*

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of writers and authors visit



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