

YOUR WRITING HABIT CHECKLIST

1. PLAN

Schedule in some time to write every week, marking it in your diary and putting a reminder on your phone so that you don't forget. Commit to this time and protect it, even if it's just an hour one evening before bed, or half an hour first thing in the morning. It's as important a commitment as any social event: developing your creative writing skills is a worthwhile pursuit, and it matters to you.

2. PREPARE

Brainstorm what you need to prepare before you write, so that you are comfortable and happy in your body and your environment. Perhaps you need to be wearing certain clothes, be in a particular place, be alone, let certain people know that you're going to be busy for that time frame, light a candle, put your phone on airplane mode, disconnect the internet, stretch... Find out which of these things and more apply to you through trial and error, make a list of them, and make sure you prep accordingly each time.

3. FOCUS YOUR MIND

Discover what inspires you—whether that's a song, a quote, or a phrase/affirmation—and give yourself a dose of it before you start. Copy out your favourite quotes and affirmations, and stick them where you can see them while you write so that you can glance at them if you get hit with a bad case of writer's block and self-doubt. Remember, you're doing this to practice, not to be perfect. Even if you don't end up using a word that you write, you've still achieved what you set out to do just by sitting down and getting some words on a page.

Here are a few quotes I love to get you started:

“You do it because the doing of it is the thing. The doing is the thing. The talking and worrying and thinking is not the thing.”—Amy Poehler, *Yes, Please*

“Ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this earnest question with a strong and simple “I must,” then build your life according to this necessity.”—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

“I know it's hard to write, darling. But it's harder not to. The only way you'll find out if you 'have it in you' is to get to work and see if you do.”—Cheryl Strayed, *Tiny Beautiful Things*

“Get it down. Take chances. It may be bad, but it's the only way you can do anything really good.”—William Faulkner

4. DEFEND YOURSELF AGAINST DISTRACTIONS

Have a notebook or piece of paper open next to you as you write, so that as random distractions pop up in your mind you can jot them down and put them aside for later. Anything and everything that is not connected to what you're writing goes on this list—hanging up the laundry, replying to a text, watering the plants—it can all wait an hour or so. If you write it down, you won't need to worry about forgetting it. Our brains are champions at coming up with excuses to avoid doing something we feel daunted by, especially starting a creative project that we really long to do but fear we'll be no good at. Arm yourself in advance!

5. REWARD YOURSELF

Have a little reward lined up that you give yourself at the end of your writing session—a favourite chocolate bar, a hot bath, whatever it is that makes you happy. Remember, you're rewarding yourself for doing the writing, not for writing something good or successful.

6. ANTICIPATE ROADBLOCKS

We all have a narrative that we tell ourselves about why we don't regularly make time to write, so reconnecting with our passion for writing and eye-balling the things that stand in our way is a crucial part of building up a writing habit. Whether it's time-consuming work, relationships and a busy social life, parenthood, other hobbies and activities (or all of the above), there's always something we could use as an excuse to put this off. But if creative writing truly makes you happy, and is something you'd like to make a priority, you need to figure out how to make time for it somehow. Perhaps you can go to bed earlier one night a week and wake up earlier. Or cut out an evening of Netflix. Or ban yourself from unintentional social media scrolling. Ask yourself where you'd make time if your life depended on it, and more likely than not you'd find a way.

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Everything takes practice—no successful writer just wakes up one day and writes their greatest works out of the blue. Above all, remember that your voice and your story are unique, and there's a place for what you have to say in the world.

Sophie xo