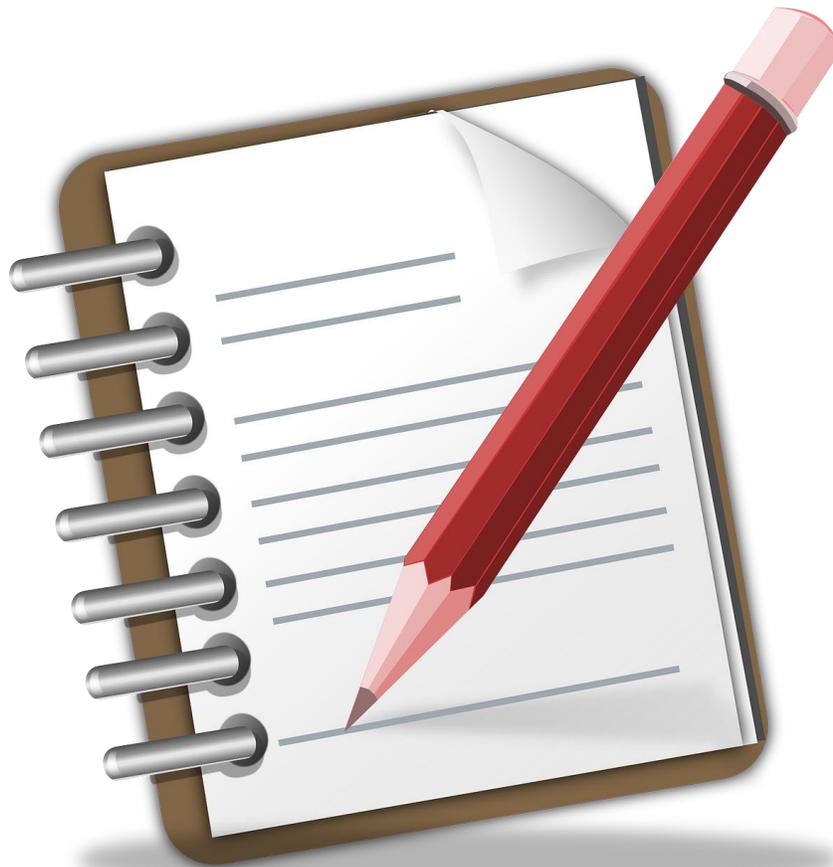


# **Exercise Workbook**

## *Time Management for Writers*

*How to write faster, find the time to write your book, and be a more prolific writer*

by Sandra Gerth



### **EXERCISE #1 – Find the time to write**

- a) Take a look at the above list of strategies. Decide on one that you want to try for the next week. Pick one you haven't tried before or haven't tried in some time. If you have always assumed that you can only write if you have a long block of time ahead of you, see if you can scribble down bits of dialogue while you're waiting for the bus. If you have been writing mostly in the mornings, give writing at night a try. If you've been a night-owl writer so far, try writing before work.

### **EXERCISE #2 – Make the time to write**

- a) Get out your daily planner and look at tomorrow's schedule. Where could you squeeze in thirty minutes of writing? Put that appointment down in your planner.
- b) Set an alarm on your cell phone that will remind you of the appointment.
- c) Think about how you'll make writing a habit. Will you write every day? Five days a week? On all days of the weekend?
- d) If you plan to write every day, print out a calendar for the next year or month and start a chain.

### **EXERCISE #3 – Track your time**

- a) Install Toggl or RescueTime or print out a time-log sheet.
- b) Track your time for at least one week.
- c) Analyze your results as described above.

#### **EXERCISE #4 – Watch out for time wasters**

- a) Make a list of your biggest time sucks. Start by taking a look at how much time you spend on watching TV, surfing the Net, social media, checking your e-mail, playing games, commuting, running errands, checking sales numbers, and doing research. Are there other time wasters that steal your time?
- b) For each of your time sucks, decide how much time you want to spend on it in the future and come up with a plan on how to you could limit these activities.

### **EXERCISE #5 – Learn to say no**

- a) Make a list of the things that you usually find yourself saying yes to, even though you don't really have the time to do them.
- b) Think how you could say no to these request the next time you're asked. Which of the strategies above might be helpful?

### **EXERCISE #6 – Delegate or outsource tasks**

- a) Take a look at your tasks—writing-related or things in your everyday life. What could you outsource or delegate to free up some of your time? Make a list of things that you don't like doing, that you aren't good at, or that someone else could do for you.
- b) Think about where to get help—family members, friends, freelancers, or a virtual assistant?
- c) Contact someone who could help and give them one small task to begin with.

**EXERCISE #7 – Use thinking time**

- a) Where could you include a little time to let your mind wander throughout your day?
- b) Where do you usually have your best ideas? For each of these places, make sure you have a way to capture your ideas.

### **EXERCISE #8 – Stop multitasking**

- a) Make a list of things that you often find yourself attempting to juggle at the same time. Which belong to the good-kind-of-multitasking category? Which are the bad kind that you should stay away from in the future?
- b) Think about whether you are the type of writer who finds it helpful to work on several different projects at the same time or whether you'd rather finish one project before getting started on the next book.
- c) Make a list of tasks that you could batch instead of doing them repeatedly throughout the week or month.

### **EXERCISE #9 – Set priorities**

- a) Take a look at the tasks that take up your time. What are the quadrant 1 and quadrant 2 things you should spend your time on? What quadrant 3 tasks could you do less of, delegate, or outsource? What quadrant 4 things could you drop altogether without any negative effect on your life?

### **EXERCISE #10 – Set goals for your writing**

- a) What are the goals for yourself as a writer this year? Take a look at each one and rewrite it in a SMART way, making sure each goal is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.
- b) Do you want to set a daily or a weekly word-count goal for yourself? If yes, what do you think would be a realistic goal for you that challenges you without setting the bar too high?
- c) Which goals have priority for you this year—writing goals, publishing goals, education goals, or marketing goals?

### **EXERCISE #11 – Set deadlines**

- a) Write down the next steps in writing your book. What will you have to do next? Research? Outlining? Writing the first draft? Revising? Proofreading?
- b) If you can, break down each step into subtasks, e.g., researching the setting, researching your main character's profession, etc.
- c) Set a deadline for each of the subtasks and write them down in your calendar.
- d) Think about who could keep you accountable. Is there a co-author, a critique partner, a beta reader, an editor, or someone else who'll keep you motivated to reach your goal on time?

### **EXERCISE #12 – Participate in writing challenges**

- a) Think about whether participating in a writing challenge could be a motivation booster for you. If yes, which writing challenge is the best fit for you? Make sure you pick one with a goal that is achievable for you.

### **EXERCISE #13 – Eliminate internal distractions**

- a) Make a list of the internal distractions that most often derail you when you're trying to write.
- b) For each distraction on your list, think of some solutions and things you could do to prevent that particular problem from distracting you.

**EXERCISE #14 – Eliminate external distractions**

- a) Make a list of the things that most often distract you while you are writing—phone calls, e-mails, social media, visitors or family members...
- b) For each distraction, brainstorm ideas for how to get rid of it.

### **EXERCISE #15 – Find your ideal writing speed**

- a) Think about what kind of writer you are. Do you tend to pour out the words as quickly as possible during the first-draft stage, or do you write slower and revise as you go?
- b) Does your first-draft process work for you? Do you often end up with a first draft that's a mess? Or do you lose too much time to procrastination, distractions, or obsessing over every word?
- c) If you haven't found the ideal writing process yet, try writing the opposite way of what you're used to. If you usually fast-draft, try writing slowly and carefully. If you have written slow first drafts so far, try speeding up and breaking the habit of editing as you go.

### **EXERCISE #16 – Work in blocks of time**

- a) Think about the session length that might work best for you. Pick a length for your pomodoro and your breaks.
- b) Decide what kind of timer you want to use.
- c) Give the Pomodoro Technique a try.

### **EXERCISE #17 – Find your planning style**

- a) Unless you're already perfectly happy with your planning method, think about adjusting it a little. Pantsers, do you want to give outlining a try or at least plan your next writing session? Plotters, could you try writing a story with a less detailed outline?

**EXERCISE #18 – Write what you love**

- a) Take a look at the upcoming scenes and sections of your book. Do you feel excited about each of them? Either revise or cut the scenes you don't find interesting.

**EXERCISE #19 – Write your ideal writing space**

- a) Where do you write most often? Are you happy with that writing area? What could you do to optimize it?
- b) Make a list of the places where you have gotten at least some writing done in the past. Which places worked well and which didn't?
- c) Make a list of writing spots you could try in the future, then pick one for your next writing session.

### **EXERCISE #20 – Use your computer more efficiently**

- a) Make a cheat sheet of the shortcuts you think you'll use most often and keep it next to your computer until you know them by heart.
- b) Try out a text expander. Install it and set up shortcuts for phrases you use frequently.
- c) Organize your desktop. Set up folders and subfolders and move your documents into them.
- d) Schedule backup and computer maintenance into your calendar at least once a week for the rest of the year so you won't forget it. Better yet, set up automatic backup.

**EXERCISE #21 – Use music to enhance your writing**

- a) Think about past experiences: Are you the kind of writer who needs total silence, or do you work better with music or background sounds?
- b) Unless you can't write with music at all, try out at least one or two different types of music. Which one inspires you most and helps you be more productive?
- c) Try one or two of the noise generators I listed above. How do they influence your productivity?

**EXERCISE #22 – Dictate or touch-type to increase your writing speed**

- a) Find out what keyboard works best for you—an old-fashioned desktop keyboard, a mechanical keyboard, a laptop, or a thin laptop-type keyboard with short key travel? What layout do you prefer—QWERTY or an alternative keyboard layout? Do you want to try out a new keyboard, or are you happy with the one you use?
- b) Take a typing test and find out how fast you can type. Are you happy with your typing speed? If not, make a plan for how to improve it.
- c) Give dictation a try. Don't invest in software just yet. Use Dragon Dictate or another free app on your phone and try to dictate a section of your book. Does it enable you to write more words per hour?

### **EXERCISE #23 – Work with your biological rhythms**

- a) Find out what time of day is your most productive and what times would be best used for “zombie tasks.” Download and print out a heat map and keep track of your productivity for at least a week.
- b) Find a way to schedule your writing during your peak hours. Shift tasks that don’t require as much focus to your slump times.

### **EXERCISE #24 – Boost your energy**

- a) Take another look at the subheadings in this chapter and identify your unhealthy habits.
- b) For each habit, come up with a plan on how to take better care of yourself in that area of your life.
- c) Take the first action immediately. For example, if you're reading this book sitting down, stand up and get yourself a glass of water.

### **EXERCISE #25 – Experiment to find your ideal writing conditions**

- a) Make a list of things that have a positive impact on your writing productivity.
- b) Now make a list of things that have a negative influence on your writing productivity.
- c) Download the productivity sheet on my website or create your own spreadsheet that will help you keep track of each writing session.
- d) Look at the lists of things that influence your writing productivity and decide on a handful of factors you want to track.
- e) Establish your baseline productivity for a week by writing the way you normally do and keeping track of your word count in each session.
- f) For a month, change one different factor in your table or spreadsheet every week.
- g) Analyze the data and find out what factors influence your productivity most.
- h) Adjust your writing routine to create the most ideal conditions for you.

### **EXERCISE #26 – Conquer fears and self-doubts**

- a) Identify the things that your inner critic usually whispers in your ear when self-doubts rear their ugly heads.
- b) Come up with strategies to counter the things your inner critic says. Could any of the above-mentioned strategies help?

### **EXERCISE #27 – Beat procrastination**

- a) If you sometimes procrastinate, make a list of things you usually do while procrastinating.
- b) Look at the list of common causes for procrastination. Is there a cause that you think most often leads to your procrastination?
- c) Once you have identified the cause of your procrastination, think about things you could try to beat procrastination. Does one of the tips above sound promising?

**EXERCISE #28 – Overcome writer’s block**

- a) If you suffer from writer’s block right now, try to figure out the cause. Is something inside of you stopping you from writing, or is there a problem with the story?
- b) Depending on your answer to the previous question, pick out one suggestion for how to overcome writer’s block and try it out.

### **EXERCISE #29 – Use marketing time wisely**

- a) Decide how much time you should spend marketing vs. writing at this stage of your writing career.
- b) If you haven't set up social media sites yet, research your audience to pick the best platforms for you.
- c) If you do use social media already, run the analyses described above.
- d) Make a list of things you want to change based on the results of your analysis. Do you have to change the type or content of your posts? Post more often? Change the timing of your posts?
- e) Take a look at the list of specific marketing tips that have been effective for many authors. Are there any you haven't tried yet and that seem promising to you? Make arrangements to try one out right now.

### **EXERCISE #30 – Tame your e-mail in-box**

- a) Set up an e-mail schedule for yourself. Decide how often and at what times of the day you want to check your e-mail.
- b) Turn off all alerts on your computer, your laptop, your cell phone, and all other devices.
- c) Make a list of folders you want to set up. Find out how to do it for the e-mail service you use, and then set up the folders.
- d) Create filters for the newsletters, blog subscriptions, and group e-mails you receive. Sort them into a folder of your choice.
- e) Unsubscribe from newsletters you no longer read.

### **EXERCISE #31 – Decide on your business hours**

- a) Set up your work schedule by answering the following questions: At what time will you get up in the morning? When will you start and stop working? When will you take a lunch break? Will you take a day or two off each week? How much vacation time will you give yourself and when? At what time of the day will you get your writing done?

**EXERCISE #32 – Master the challenges of working from home**

- a) Take a look at the list of challenges you might face working from home. Which ones affect you?
- b) For each of the challenges that you experience, make a list of strategies on how to deal with that problem.

### **EXERCISE #33 – Choose the right tools**

- a) Take a look at the tools you use for writing, proofreading, backup, file sharing, and research. Are you happy with all of them, or do you think one of the tools mentioned in this chapter would work better for you?
- b) Try out one or two of the tools that sound promising to you, but remember to use only the tools that add to your productivity. Don't let them become a distraction from your writing!