

The Life of a Writer

Writers love to talk about writing with anyone, but enjoy it most with other writers. It is like being with your own kind who understand the trials and tribulations, the purpose, the expectations, the glory and the shame – the glory of the well-crafted sentence and the shame of not writing enough.

First of all, it is a job. It isn't about writing a great book, or an article or poem. It is about going to work, picking up your tools and building what you can every day. If it doesn't fit or sit straight, you can fix it. But build something first.

It begins with a thought, an idea or a dream. That's all the material you need to start. You have a vision of a story you want to tell. Begin speaking.

Find an anchor – a central idea about which everything hangs or pivots. Put a picture to it in your mind. After a while, a title will come when the muse has visited you.

Do not outline. That is a computer program that does not leave you any wiggle-room to wander and explore and develop. Write your whole story almost all at once from beginning to end. At first it will go fast and you will have 5,000 to 10,000 words in a hurry. Maybe you will see, as Faulkner always bragged, you will know exactly how it will end and have an idea how it should begin.

This book you have written quickly is no book. It is your outline. But it is too short and pitifully thin. You only have a few chapters and none of them are finished. Strengthen the end and the beginning, or the beginning and the end and ponder the middle. You need more characters to meet your characters. You need to develop their personalities and their experiences. You need more scenes. You need the muse to come back.

Listen to music, watch movies, read books, look at art or nature or the world events around you. Learn history. Learn history. The muse will come back.

Fatten the middle of the book. Your rate of progress may begin to slow down. Do what you can.

If you are waiting for something to happen, start another book. You have chosen the life of a writer, so one book is not your whole life. The muse will come back and you can bring the first book to life once more. Keep building. Go to work every day.

How will you know when it's done? You won't. Read what you have written. Does it completely fulfill your idea of the first place? Is there more to say? You will know the moment the story is done.

This story is done (for now). There are 462 words here excluding this sentence. I have been writing for about 30 minutes. I will go back to work tomorrow morning and type it later after the muse has left. I'll add more to it and edit it after that if she stays away awhile. A book has begun.

This morning I am continuing from last night and coasting along on the ideas the muse has left me. I do not have one chapter or one character yet.

A writer writes because he has to. A runner runs because she has to. She looks for longer trails, higher mountains, greener pastures to conquer. It is the same for a writer. Your shoes may be the third person omniscient or first person personal voice – active or passive. It really doesn't matter. Both take practice. In the conversational style, it is impossible to avoid, I, me, my. But after a while, these can be minimized. (Now there are 618 words and I have been writing for about an hour, accumulatively. Do not dwell on word count unless you are waiting.)