

A person wearing a blue sweater is sitting at a desk, writing in a notebook with a pen. A red mug is visible on the desk to the left. The background is softly blurred, showing a window with light coming through. The overall mood is calm and focused.

Deep Writing Workshop

Self-Paced Weekend Workshop

Eric Maisel



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Deep Writing Self-Paced Weekend Workshop

I've been running online weekend workshops for years now. The idea behind them is simple. If and when you immerse yourself in a topic or an activity for an intensive weekend, you learn a lot and you also get a lot done.

The format is also simple: a series of timed emails that arrive over the course of two days, five hours each day. First comes a lesson, then a chance to write or reflect on the lesson, then a little break, then another lesson, then another writing and reflecting time, then another break, and so on.

Couldn't be simpler! Or more valuable and effective.

Welcome to this two-day adventure. By setting aside two days to work this program, you'll have made a valuable investment in your writing life and real progress on your current writing project.

You could of course just read this pdf as if it were a text and get something out of it that way. But I really do hope that you will use it as it's designed to be used, as a real two-day workshop that you run over a weekend or some other consecutive two-day period.

The basic idea is that you are acting as if a series of emails is arriving, one email at a time, over the course of five hours on two consecutive days. When I run these workshops live, the hours are 9 am pacific - 2 pm pacific on a consecutive Saturday and Sunday. I hope that you will do something similar.

Set aside two consecutive days (they do not have to be weekend days). Pick your hours. (You'll want to be fresh to do this work,

so don't pick hours after a full day of work has ended.) Have a digital clock handy so that you know the exact time. Tackle each email at its appointed time. That's it!

The emails are numbered so that you can keep track. Times are provided as if the workshop is being run from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. If your starting and ending hours are different, please adjust accordingly.

**

Three days before your workshop

Get a good handle on the basics. Where will you run your workshop? Is that space ready? Who needs to know that you aren't available for those hours? Do you need to stock up on snacks? Make a checklist of the basics and check things off.

Two days before your workshop

The headline is to relax. That you have decided to spend the weekend in touch with your writing is already something to celebrate. So, relax, enjoy, celebrate ... and, oh, get organized.

Getting organized might mean finding stray bits of writing, gathering bits, sorting bits, printing out bits, rereading bits, etc. This may actually amount to a huge task, so just do what you can and don't overwhelm yourself.

Be peaceful and get ready for the two days to unfold. You've committed this time and that's a wonderful start. So just be easy <smile>.

One day before your workshop

Get a good night's rest.

You might give yourself a “sleep thinking prompt” tonight to get yourself started. The prompt might be something like “What does my project need?” or “What do I really want to work on this weekend?” or “What would Mary like to say to John in Chapter 3?” Sleep thinking prompts can prove a very useful part of the creative process.

**

DEEP WRITING SELF-PACED WEEKEND WORKSHOP

SATURDAY. 8 A.M. ONE HOUR BEFORE BEGINNING

1. Welcome (8 a.m.)

Hello, everyone:

Welcome to this Deep Writing online weekend workshop. You will notice that this email is numbered. All the emails that I send you this weekend, with the exception of logistical updates and small cheerleading emails, will be numbered, so that you can stay organized. This will prove useful to you, especially if the emails come to you out of order, which, with emails, is always possible. The numbering of the emails will also help you replicate this weekend whenever you like.

In the next email, I'll describe how this weekend will work. For now, welcome! Lovely to have you aboard!

**

2. What will happen (8:05 a.m.)

Here is what we are doing this weekend.

1. I want you to have a learning-and-writing weekend and also an experience. This can't replicate the experience of being with me in a classroom in Paris, Rome, or London with twenty-five other writers, hearing me and feeling what it's like to write "alone together" with other writers. This can't be that experience. But it can be something special.

2. In the live workshops, I hold the group energy and manage the time. This weekend, you must maintain your own good energy and maintain your own good time management. I will help you with the timing of exercises and writing stints by being very clear with my instructions, but you are the one really in charge of your time. You can sneak off or stay put, distract yourself or stay put, throw up your hands or stay put. I hope that, for the sake of your writing life, for the sake of the project you choose to work on, and for the sake of living your life purposes, you do a marvelous job of keeping to the organization scheme of the weekend.

3. Each day's workshop is five hours in length. That is a lot! But there are breaks built in and I hope that it will not prove too exhausting. And isn't exhausting yourself in the service of your work a good thing once in a while <smile>? So, expect long days - but valuable days.

4. There will be breaks, including a lunch break. Depending on what time zone you're in, that lunch break may come rather late in the day. If so, just call it a dinner break or a late-night snack <smile>. That is, don't get too hung up on the differences

between time zones; that's a natural feature of an online workshop of this sort.

5. In a little while I will send you an email with ALL of the emails for the workshops in one document. In this way, if a given email fails to get to you because of some cyberspace malfunction, you can still keep on track. My advice would be to print out the email-of-all-emails and have it handy, so that you can stay on track throughout the weekend. That print-out will also serve you when and if you want to recreate this experience and run another two-day writing workshop for yourself.

**

3. All the emails (8:10 a.m.)

In this email, you will find all of the emails for the weekend (except for some logistical and cheerleading emails). Please try not to glance at this too much or get ahead of yourself. Just keep this email handy for guidance or print it out and keep it handy. It is for reference, not for reading <smile>. Let the weekend unfold email by email and minute by minute.

**

4. We begin shortly (8:15 a.m.)

Tea made?

Battery charged?

Phone off?

Agreements in place (that you won't be bothered except for emergencies)?

Fingers limber?

Okay! We begin shortly, at 9 a.m. Pacific time (in about 45 minutes)

**

SATURDAY

5. Picking Your Project (9 a.m. - 9:05 a.m.)

We begin now. Each lesson will be short, because this isn't an exercise in reading lessons. It's a writing weekend. To begin with, I would like you to do the following.

You've likely chosen a project for this weekend. It may be the book (I'll use the word "book" to stand for novel, nonfiction book, screenplay, stage play, article, blog post, etc.) you've been working on, the book you put aside, or a new project you want to launch.

Even if you've chosen a project for this weekend, I'd like you to clear your mind and spend a moment thinking through what you want to work on this weekend. It may be the project you had in mind; or a different project may percolate up. Take two minutes (shutting your eyes if you like) and see which project wants to come forward as your project for this weekend.

When you've settled on your project, commit to it. This is what you are working on this weekend. (And, yes, you can change your mind <smile>. Let's call this whole-hearted, provisional

commitment. FEEL committed—but recognize that there is always the possibility that you may want to change your mind.)

YOU NOW HAVE YOUR PROJECT IN MIND. If you have no project in mind, then you will be obliged to face the blank page, which is no tragedy. Get ready.

**

6. WRITING (9:05 - 9:35)

Write for 30 minutes.

That is the whole instruction. I'll send you an email at the twenty-eight-minute mark to let you know that you have two minutes of writing time remaining. Work on your project now.

**

7. Process and Stretch (9:35 - 9:45)

Please stop writing now.

I would like you to observe the following:

+ 30 minutes isn't an amount of time to scorn. You don't need hours and hours and hours to appear in order to write: thirty minutes matter.

+ **DON'T NEED THIS TO BE EASY.** The reality of the creative process is that much of the time we must live with confusion, chaos, uncertainty, morphing ideas, and ever so much more that makes writing less than fun. **DO NOT NEED THIS TO BE EASY.** That is a headline. If you've mistakenly believed that some other

writer somewhere is having it easy, let go of that belief. Writing is real, shifting, taxing, confusing work. So be it.

+ You may want to keep a little “process” notebook or computer file for this weekend and make some notes about what you’re experiencing or learning. If you’d like to do that, start that notebook now and make some notes for yourself.

Stretch! But don’t go far away. This isn’t a lunch break or the opportunity to get a latte. Just stretch, go the bathroom if you need to, come back, and resume being present.

(As you await the next email, feel free to write. ALWAYS feel free to write <smile>. But when the next email comes in, please pay attention to it. Don’t lose the rhythm of lesson-writing-lesson-writing ...)

**

8. Life Purpose Choosing (9:45 - 9:50)

From my point of view there is no purpose to life. Rather, there are our life purpose choices: our decisions about what we deem important. We have life purposes, rather than a single life purpose. This is huge news. It means that we shouldn’t overvalue writing as the only thing in life that is important and we shouldn’t undervalue it, either, since if it is one of our life purpose choices, it really matters to us.

If writing is one of your life purpose choices, you honor that choice by writing. The writing may prove hard work but you will make yourself proud as and if you actually live one of your life purpose choices. **WRITING IS NOT ABOUT WORDS ON THE PAGE.** It is about living one of your life purpose choices.

By living your life purposes, you give yourself the chance to experience life as meaningful. It is your job to live your life purposes and create opportunities for meaning. Put writing in that context: not as words on the page but as a life purpose choice and a meaning opportunity.

**

9. WRITING (9:50 - 10:20)

Write for 30 minutes.

**

10. Process and Stretch (10:20 - 10:30)

You've now spent an hour writing (in two half-hour stints). That's what an hour of being with your writing feels like. Maybe you found it hard, maybe you found it easy. Either way, please celebrate having shown up to your writing for an hour. Really, please celebrate!

How would you like to celebrate? With a round of applause? With a knowing smile? With a bowl of popcorn? With a silent "Congratulations!" Please create a little celebration right now that really FEELS like a celebration. You just honorably lived one of your life purposes. Celebrate that.

You may also want to do a little processing. What are you learning? What are you experiencing? Stretch, move around a bit, but don't go far away. Come on back from your stretch and from your processing. A nice break is coming next <smile>.

**

11. Break (10:30 - 10:45)

You are not leaving the work, rather you are leaving the work for a while. Get that idea very clearly in your mind. You will be returning after a pleasant, useful break.

How will you spend your break? You might make the decision not to break the spell too much and rather than turning to emails, day job work, or the news of the day to instead stay quiet, stretch, make some tea, and stay connected to your project. This is a break, not a leaving. Try not to go too far away, either mentally or physically.

**

12. In the service of meaning (10:45 - 10:50)

The following is big news. An activity aligned with our life purposes may not feel meaningful in the moment. Maybe you're an activist and your job this week is to lick envelope flaps in the service of the cause. You know why you are doing that—because you believe in the cause. But the actual experience of licking those many envelope flaps may not feel very meaningful—or meaningful at all.

This is a very mature understanding, that activities that align with our life purposes and that serve our meaning needs may not feel meaningful in the moment. On any given day, the experience of writing may not feel very meaningful. It may only feel arduous and even painful. So be it! Do not need the experience of writing to feel meaningful in the moment. If you are writing, you are living one of your life purposes; that's what

counts. If you also experience it as meaningful, that's a wonderful blessing. But if you don't, that's nothing to bemoan or worry about.

Do not need the experience of writing to feel meaningful. It may or it may not. What matters is that you are honorably living one of your life purposes.

**

13. WRITE (10:50 - 11:20)

Write for the next 30 minutes.

**

14. Process and stretch (11:20 - 11:30)

During this ten-minute processing period, you might want to check in with yourself and see if you need to make any changes. Maybe it might make sense to work in a different area of your project. Maybe it might make sense to step back and do some organizing. Maybe it might make sense to face a hard part of your project, one that you know you're avoiding. Maybe it might make sense to let your imagination run wild for a bit. Take this process-and-stretch break as an opportunity to decide if you should "just continue" or if there is some change to make or new direction to take.

**

15. Anxiety management (11:30 - 11:35)

Anxiety and anxiety management are huge subjects and hugely important. A full discussion would take us far beyond our “small lesson” format. So, for this lesson I just want to tease out a few headlines. Let each one sink in a bit. Anxiety is a great silencer and one of the most important obstacles to writing regularly. Consider this the briefest of introductions to a vitally important subject.

+ When we feel anxious about something, what we most want to do is flee the encounter. If something about your writing is making you anxious, you are likely to want to do something else (really, anything else) than write. Millions of would-be writers are not writing because they are feeling just a little bit anxious. **DO NOT AVOID YOUR WRITING JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE FEELING A LITTLE ANXIOUS ABOUT SOME ASPECT OF THE PROCESS.**

+ The act of choosing provokes anxiety. The creative process is one choice after another. Therefore, anxiety inevitably threads through the process. You can only avoid making choices and the anxiety that comes with making choices by not writing. **DO NOT TAKE THAT ROUTE.** Accept that you must make choices and that needing to make them and actually making them will make you anxious. Accept that. You must choose; you will feel anxious; so be it.

+ There are LOTS of ways to manage this anxiety. There are scores of techniques and strategies available for you to try, including deep breathing techniques, relaxation techniques, guided visualizations, calming ceremonies and rituals, and tons more. Perhaps the simplest is mentally “flipping the calmness switch” and deciding to become a calmer person, one who creates fewer internal dramas and is more mindful about “not

sweating the small stuff.” Maybe you can decide the following right now: “I’m not going to let anxiety keep me from writing.”

To repeat: do not avoid writing because something about the process is making you anxious. Learn one simple, useful anxiety management strategy and use it to reduce your experience of anxiety. And if some anxiety remains - well, write anyway.

**

16. WRITING (11:35 - 12:05)

Write for 30 minutes on your project.

**

17. Process and stretch (12:05 - 12:15)

You’ve been at this for three hours now. You might want to respond to the following two prompts as part of this process-and-stretch interlude:

+ I’m beginning to see that to have the writing life I want I must

...

+ I’d like to institute the following new habit or practice in support of my writing life:

**

18. Lunch (12:15 - 12-45)

You now have a 30-minute break. How do you want to spend it? Try to be mindful about this lunch break. Might a quick shower

refresh you? Are there some emails you must get to, so as to get them off your mind? Might a short walk out in the world serve you? Is this a time to relax, to catch up with some pressing business, or even to take a quick nap (set an alarm!)? Remember to hold this lunch break as an interlude in the service of your writing day: you want whatever you do to support your return to your work thirty minutes from now.

**

19. Your morning writing practice (12:45 - 12:50)

I believe that you should start your day (every day) with your writing, if your writing is important to you, if you are holding it as one of your life purposes, and if you agree that you and your efforts matter.

There are three important reasons for instituting this morning writing practice (and by “writing practice” I mean working on your project, not journaling, doing morning pages, or doing writing of that sort; that writing should shift to another part of the day). These three important reasons are:

1. If you try to write later in the day, you probably won't, as you get tired during the day and you also can get a little blue (because you aren't getting to your real work). By putting off the writing until “later,” you're much more likely not to get to it.

2. By writing first thing, you get to make use of your sleep thinking, that is, the thinking your brain does during the night. (Your brain both dreams and thinks while you sleep. It dreams during REM sleep and thinks during non-REM sleep.) This sleep thinking is an incredibly valuable part of the creative process,

but you only get to benefit from it if you turn to your work as soon as you awake.

3. By writing first thing, you will have lived one of your life purposes first thing and “made meaning” first thing. Then, even if the rest of your day gets consumed by ordinary tasks, errands, and “meaninglessness,” you’re much less likely to despair. By writing first thing, you build up some “life purpose capital” or “meaning capital” and help prevent existential depression.

These are three really big reasons. I hope that you’ll institute a morning writing practice as soon as you can, that is, on Monday <smile>.

**

20. WRITING (12:50--1:20)

Write for the next 30 minutes on your project. Good luck!

**

21. Process and stretch (1:20 - 1:30)

It’s been a long day and you may be getting quite foggy. Maybe this is a moment to splash water in your face, briskly walk around the house, or really stretch. Use this process-and-stretch interlude to clear your head and prepare yourself for the last writing stint of this workshop day.

**

22. Using small increments of time (1:30 - 1:35)

In addition to showing up for your morning writing practice, learn how to occasionally use small increments of time during the day, twenty minutes here and thirty minutes there, as impromptu writing stints.

In order to do this, you will need to “switch gears” from your everyday, busy, “need to get things right” mind to a quieter mind that has real permission to engage in process (including permission to “get things wrong”). To get from that one mind space to that other mind space, you may need to employ a ceremonial bridge.

The ceremonial bridge I suggest is using a deep breath (four or five seconds on the inhale, four or five seconds on the exhale) as a container for a useful thought, in this case the thought “I am completely stopping” (my need to keep rushing around and my need to get things right). When those twenty or thirty minutes make themselves available, you would breathe deeply, think that thought (“I am completely stopping”), quiet and center yourself, and write for a bit.

Your morning writing practice may prove to be enough writing time. But you may also want to get in the habit of not scorning small increments of time for writing. You’ve had great practice today seeing how valuable thirty minutes can prove to be. Try to remember the value of small increments of time when you return to your “regular” life.

**

23. WRITING (1:35 - 1:55)

This is your last writing stint. (You're welcome to keep writing after the workshop day ends but you will probably be quite tired and you will have done a lot already!) Get quiet now, smile a bit if you can, and write for twenty minutes.

**

24. Closing ceremony (1:55 - 2:00)

It is time to end this long, good day. (I hope it was good <smile>.) What sort of ceremony would you like to create that celebrates the day and acknowledges that you have done real work and lived one of your life purposes?

Try not to just hurry on to your next set of tasks and duties. Take a few minutes, or at least a few moments, to honor your accomplishments and sing your own praises <smile>. Maybe a song of praise is the ceremony! Let this be a peaceful, celebratory, joyful moment. Then, when you're ready, return to your day.

**

25. END OF DAY

If you worked today's program, congratulations! If you worked part of today's program, congratulations! I hope you had a valuable, useful and productive day.

Thoughts at the end of the day:

+ You and your efforts matter. Please take that in deeply.

+ You may be feeling tired (even very tired). Therefore, you may want to go to bed early and get a good night's rest. Don't turn the sensation of "feeling tired" into an argument for not coming back tomorrow <smile>. Feeling tired today is not a reason to avoid writing tomorrow.

+ If you feel like it, you might give yourself a sleep thinking prompt tonight. That might sound like, "I wonder what Mary wants to say to John in Chapter 3?" or "I wonder how I can solve that plot problem near the end of the book?" Of course, you may fall asleep even before you can give yourself a sleep thinking prompt. In that case, sleep well.

+ See you tomorrow!

**

SUNDAY

26. Welcome back! - We begin shortly (8:15 a.m.)

Hello, everyone:

A happy Sunday to you. I hope that you're ready for another day of learning and writing. The rhythm of the day will mirror yesterday's. We'll have new lessons but the basic set-up is the same. Lessons and lots of writing! And breaks, stretching, and time to process. I hope that you'll find today productive and enjoyable.

We begin shortly. Get your pencils sharpened!

Best,

Eric

**

27. Thinking thoughts that serve you (9:00 - 9:05)

Your thinking either helps support your writing life or helps sabotage your writing life. If you think thoughts like "I'm too busy" or "I'm too tired" or "What's the point?" or "I don't know what I'm doing" or "I have no chance" or "There are so many writers out there!" or "I'm too easily distracted" or "This is too hard" or ... If you countenance thoughts of this sort, you're considerably less likely to write.

Only think thoughts that serve you. That's a high-bar goal but a worthy one.

A true thought may not serve you. “There are a lot of writers out there” is a true thought that doesn’t serve you much to be thinking. Start to ask of the thoughts you think, not “Are you true?” but “Do you serve me?” If a thought doesn’t, refuse to think it. Hear it, dispute it, and think a thought that does serve you, for instance “Time to write.”

Thinking thoughts that serve you is hugely important. For the sake of your writing life and for the sake of living your life purposes, take charge of your thoughts and only think thoughts that serve you.

**

28. WRITING (9:05 - 9:35)

This is a new writing day. Write for thirty minutes where you left off yesterday; write where you feel you ought to be writing today; write where your sleep thinking has prompted you to write; or “just write” if no clear or pressing starting place is making itself known. With or without a clear starting place, write for thirty minutes.

**

29. Process and stretch (9:35 - 9:45)

Remember to congratulate yourself for showing up! Your measure of success isn’t the number of words you’ve written, perfect clarity, or beautiful paragraphs, it’s showing up to the work and to your life purposes. Celebrate and stretch!

If you're keeping a process notebook for this weekend, check in with yourself about how this writing period went and what, if anything, you've learned.

**

30. Your craft checklist (9:45 - 9:50)

You learn your craft by writing, rewriting, completing, and showing your work in the world. The following is a craft list to keep handy. The right answer to each question is "Yes!" Read this through to get a quick sense of what's required of you in order for you to learn your craft.

1. Am I writing?
2. Am I writing a piece with requisite form (for example, do I know if I'm writing a novel or a memoir)?
3. Am I getting quiet and going deep?
4. Am I engaging my imagination?
5. Am I avoiding illegitimate shortcuts (for example, am I avoiding trying to skip the hard parts)?
6. Am I writing regularly, virtually every day?
7. Am I making the choices that need to be made?
8. Am I integrating the parts of the piece into a seamless whole?
9. Am I getting to the end of the piece in a timely fashion?

10. Am I reading what I've written with a loving, appraising eye?

11. Am I honorably revising as many times as necessary until it feels complete and done?

12. Am I showing and selling?

You learn your craft by writing, revising, completing and showing. Return to this checklist as needed!

**

31. WRITING (9:50 - 10:20)

Write for thirty minutes.

**

32. Process and stretch (10:20 - 10:30)

If you haven't been jotting notes to yourself or processing your experience of the workshop, you might spend a few minutes doing that now. You have a break coming after this process-and-stretch interlude, so instead of leaving right now spend a few minutes having a conversation with yourself about how you can ensure that you will continue writing in a regular, everyday way after this workshop ends.

**

33. Break (10:30 - 10:45)

Get a nice break in. But don't stray too far away, either in mind or body. Catch up with things in the world, if you must, but try not to leave so completely that you put returning in jeopardy.

**

34. Completing projects (10:45 - 10:50)

It is often hard to get started on a project and it is often hard to work on it in a regular way. And it is also often hard to complete projects. There are MANY reasons why completing a writing project can feel daunting; the following list hints at these many possible difficulties.

The headline I would like you to take away is that it is your job to hold the intention to finish your projects. A given project may indeed warrant abandoning; but it is a good policy to err on the side of completing projects, so that you don't get into the unfortunate habit of abandoning projects too soon.

One way to hold the intention to finish your creative projects is by adopting the phrase "sooner rather than later" as your mantra. Announce to yourself that not only do you intend to finish this project but that you want to finish it "sooner rather than later," that is, that you want to get this one done so that you can move on to your next (perhaps currently known or perhaps currently unknown) excellent project.

Here is an incomplete list of reasons why completing is often so difficult. There's nothing that you need to "do" with this list; just get clear on the twin ideas that completing is its own sort

of challenge and that holding a firm intention to complete your projects is a good idea.

Completing Difficulties

1. The current version doesn't match your originating impulse
2. The book still has plot or organizational problems
3. The book is really several books-in-one and needs teasing apart
4. The book is overly ambitious, unwieldy, and has too much going on
5. The hard bits won't come
6. It's hard to know when or if it is complete
7. Lingering doubts/could do more/dithering
8. No process for deciding/no completion checklist
9. Lost love/Happy place
10. Ongoing conflict about how much to reveal
11. Fear that this is your best idea and therefore hard to leave it
12. Putting off reckoning and appraising
13. Putting off showing the work to others
14. Putting it off selling it

15. Not wanting the process to start all over again

See if you can pledge to complete your writing projects, even in the face of these many difficulties.

**

35. WRITING (10:50 - 11:20)

For this writing period, I'd like you to consider engaging with the following exercise. If the exercise doesn't speak to you, just use these thirty minutes to work on your project. But I suggest that you at least consider the exercise. The exercise is made up of three ten-minute writing stints. I'll send emails to alert you when each ten-minute stint is up but you may want to set a timer also, in case my emails are delayed.

Here is the exercise. Choose to work on it or continue with your project.

1. What's the hardest place in your book? Go there and write for 10 minutes.
2. What's the most personally revealing place in your book? Go there and write for 10 minutes.
3. What's the part of your book that you'd really like to avoid? Go there and write for 10 minutes.

If the above exercises don't speak to you or don't pertain to you, just continue on your project for 30 minutes. But do double-check with yourself first before skipping these exercises.

**

36. Process and stretch (11:20 - 11:30)

If you tackled the last exercise, you may have gained some important insights about the hard places in your book, about your feelings about revealing and/or not revealing yourself, about your desire to avoid certain parts of your book, etc.

Take a minute to process what you've just learned. Especially if you've learned something important about what you do and don't want to reveal, try to think through the implications of your new understanding.

**

37. Getting organized (11:30 - 11:35)

How can a writer really organize fragments, ideas, bits of manuscripts, bits of descriptions, and all the other bits that accumulate as you think and as you write? There is no simple or perfect answer, just the heartfelt intention to stay as organized as you possibly can.

Here are some tips for staying organized. You won't be able to really think about this list in the next few minutes; just read it through and make a commitment to return to it when you get a chance.

HOW TO GET AND STAY BETTER ORGANIZED

1. Include long-term tasks on your daily to-do list

If you only focus on pressing short-term tasks, the long-term tasks will never get accomplished. You must organize your day around both the immediate and the long-term.

2. Protect your space

If you let people invade your space and intrude on your work, you are bound to stay disorganized. The same is true if you let things invade your space. It is your job to protect your space from invasions.

3. Protect your time

You can protect your time or you can give it away. You can squander a free hour with some Net surfing, television watching or email checking or you can work on one of your short-term or long-term projects.

4. Organize around your life purposes

It is common to organize our lives around our tasks and duties as opposed to organizing our lives around our life purposes. Everyday tasks must get taken care of but not at the expense of our life purposes.

5. Organize each day

Each day is a certain sort of negotiation. We have to make choices, prioritize, and be mature about how much a day can

hold. If we mindfully organize every single day, we have organized our life.

6. Organize each week

Do you set yourself weekly goals? Weekly goals accomplished add up to completed long-term projects. Factor your cherished dreams and your highest aspirations into your weekly planning.

7. Think in three-month increments

The mind likes three-month increments. You will discover that three months is an excellent amount of time to begin to implement a business plan, write a draft of a book, or accomplish some other big task.

8. Manage the anxiety of organization

Because organizing involves making choices and because choosing provokes anxiety, there is always anxiety associated with our organizational efforts. Learn how to manage the anxiety of organizing.

9. Use small increments of time

Keep a separate to-do list of writing or writing business tasks that can be accomplished in just a few minutes and when you get those few minutes, don't scorn them or throw them away - use them.

10. Regularly catch up with yourself

Your organizational scheme of today may not suit you six months from now. Even as life rushes by, we nevertheless must stop and

make sure that we are organized in ways that still make sense. Make time once or twice a month to catch up with yourself and do some updating and reorganizing.

**

38. WRITING (11:35 - 12:05)

This is a 30-minute writing stint. You may want to employ it in the usual way, working on your project, or you might want to tackle the following exercise.

When you can articulate what's interesting and important about your project, that adds motivational juice to the process and helps reduce the risk that you'll stop working on your project. Therefore, it pays to spend some time articulating what you see as interesting and important about your project. If you want to do that work now, use the following three prompts. If you want to continue with your writing rather than engage with this exercise, then do turn to it at another time. I think you'll find it valuable.

Three prompts:

1. I'm currently writing a book (describe it a bit)
2. I think this book is interesting because ...
3. Not only is it interesting, it's also important because ...

**

39. Process and stretch (12:05 - 12:15)

If you tackled the previous exercise, you may have discovered that your book feels interesting and important to you. I hope that's what you concluded <smile>!

This may be a moment to do a bit more writing about your project's "selling points" or "talking points," to be used down the road when and if you decide to send it out into the world, either to traditional publishers (via a literary agent) or via self-publishing.

Stretch a bit and think a bit about those future tasks, the marketing and promoting of your work.

**

40. Lunch break (12:15 - 12:45)

Get some sustenance! And do take a real break. But also remember that you will be returning—our day is not over yet!

**

41. Handling criticism (12:45 - 12:50)

Many writers stop writing at the first hint of criticism. This is a shame. Try to deeply embrace the idea that everyone has an opinion, that criticism is coming, and that you can weather the criticism coming your way.

Everyone has an opinion. Let YOUR opinion be the opinion that matters the most. Glean from agents, editors, readers, and anyone else whatever is worth gleaning, but do not believe that

someone is right just because he or she sounds knowledgeable, plausible, or adamant.

I've seen too many writers lose months and years because someone said something about the thing they were writing. Try not to allow this to happen. Instead, say "Bring it on!" At the same time, learn how to handle criticism better. Below are a few tips; you may want to think about this list more after this workshop has ended.

Ten Tips for Dealing with Criticism

1. Grow a thicker skin
2. Adopt a more philosophical attitude
3. Learn when and how to detach
4. Silence self-criticism
5. Appraise situations correctly
6. Let meaning and life purpose outweigh criticism
7. Ventilate your feelings
8. Temporize before responding
9. Heal the past
10. Be the hero of your own story

Try not to let someone's opinion throw you badly off course or stop you from writing.

**

42. WRITING (12:50 - 1:20)

Write for 30 minutes. You may find yourself sinking a bit, getting fogging, feeling tired, growing grumpy, or landing in some other state not so conducive to writing. See if you can shake the cobwebs off, cheer yourself up with a thought that serves you, and proceed with this writing stint.

**

43. Process and stretch (1:20 - 1:25)

Okay! Get a good stretch in!

Here are a few practical questions for you to ponder as you stretch and process:

1. If you've been writing in longhand, when will you move all that writing to the computer? Do you need a separate, special schedule for that?

2. If you've been working on an electronic device, have you been backing up scrupulously? Indeed, you may want to back up your writing in two different ways, say via the Cloud and an external disk or as an email attachment to yourself.

**

44. A writer's top challenges (1:25 - 1:30)

This lesson can't be assimilated—or even read—in just a few minutes. When you get a chance, take your time with this. The headline is that, in order to write and keep writing, you will have to meet the many challenges presented by the facts of existence, by your circumstances, by your creative nature, by the nature of the task, and more. There is no way around this reality. I hope that after this weekend you will have a few more tools at your disposal to handle these challenges.

A Writer's Top Eight Challenges

Challenge 1. The Facts of Existence

All human beings are confronted by the facts of existence and the vagaries of circumstances. We are born with more or fewer opportunities, a better or worse home environment, and more or fewer obstacles to overcome. Everyone must deal with all of this, writers included. If our “depression” and “insomnia” epidemics are any indication, we aren't dealing with the facts of existence all that well.

Challenge 2. Your Creative Nature

Creative people tend to have outsized appetites, pressing meaning needs, racing brain issues, a penchant for sadness, and other qualities and attributes that produce their own problems. If you are creative, you're likely to have to deal with *all* of this.

Challenge 3. Your Doubts, Fears and Anxieties

Writing, because it connects to your self-worth, your meaning needs, and your very identity, is experienced as a certain sort of

risk; risk produces anxiety; and many writers and would-be writers find themselves silenced by their anxious reactions to risk.

Challenge 4. The Nature of the Task

Writing is essentially thinking; and thinking isn't easy. Writing is also imagining; and imagining isn't easy. Writing is also a matter of sound architecture, of creating structure and form; and building solid structure isn't easy. Writing is real work and makes demands on our brain and on our nervous system.

Challenge 5. Routine, Regularity, Discipline and Devotion

It is one thing to only write “when the spirit moves us” or “as a hobby” or very occasionally. It is another thing to write with the sort of regularity, discipline, and devotion such that important projects get started and completed. It is easy for writers to skip days, weeks, months and years because they “aren't in the perfect mood” to write or don't find themselves in the “ideal circumstances to write.”

Challenge 6. Doing Great Work

Because our desire to write is connected to our meaning needs, our self-image, and our identity, we want our writing to be better than merely good. We secretly want it to be great, because if it is great then we are great. Craving excellence is understandable and desirable ... and its own particular danger.

Challenge 7. Making Money

The vast majority of writers can't earn a living from writing. This means that to be a writer is to invite poverty, to create

relationship issues (and distress and discord), to set yourself up for a lifetime of meaningless day jobs or demanding second careers, all because writing rarely pays. This reality produces all sorts of seriously taxing challenges.

Challenge 8. Identifying Other Meaning Opportunities and Investments

Writers often put all of their “meaning eggs” into the writing basket and find it hard to experience anything else in life as meaningful. It’s important that writers get in the habit of making other meaning investments—in relationships, service, activism, etc.—so that their experience of life as meaningful doesn’t rise and fall exclusively on whether the writing went well today or whether they are selling anything.

At some point, take some time and address these challenges in writing. That mindful processing may help you arrive at some viable solutions.

**

45. WRITING (1:30 - 1:50)

This is your last writing stint of the weekend workshop.

You may have done more writing over this weekend than you have done in a long time and you may be “out of words and out of energy.” On the other hand, you may have reconnected with your work and reenergized yourself around this project to such an extent that you are excited to continue.

If you're in the tired place, see if you can generate a little more devotional energy to get you to the finish line. If you're in the enthusiastic place, enjoy! Write for twenty minutes.

**

46. Closing ceremony (1:50 - 2:00)

You're almost at the finish line! Congratulations! Here are a few last questions to ponder:

1. What does your book need from you next?
2. What is your top takeaway from this weekend?
3. What change do you need to make, what new thought do you need to think, and/or what new habit do you need to institute in order to keep on writing?

How would you like to ceremonially end this two-day writing workshop?

If you were in a classroom in Paris, London or Rome with the other writers who've spent a week with you, you would say your heartfelt goodbyes, applaud yourself and one another, do a little hugging, and experience the group one last time, now at a time of parting.

You would have both a group experience and a personal experience. In our format, the group is invisible. But it is there! Maybe you would like to ceremonially toast those many invisible writers who, like you, set themselves down for the weekend and endeavored to live one of their significant life purposes? Maybe that toast would prove a lovely ceremonial gesture!

Dream up your way of celebrating and your way of ceremonially ending this workshop, ending with a pledge to write tomorrow.

**

47. Thank you!

Thank you so much for joining me on this weekend adventure! I hope that you learned lots, got a good deal of writing done, and feel prepared to continue writing in a regular, everyday way from here on in.

**

There are other self-paced two-day workshops in this series. Our current list is comprised of:

Deep Writing Self-Paced Weekend Workshop
Memoir Breakthrough Self-Paced Weekend Workshop
Sharpen Your Pen Self-Paced Weekend Workshop
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