



Debunking the Writing Process

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ONE OF THE SIDE-EFFECTS OF being published is you're asked a lot of questions about your writing process.

The trouble with that is you have to come up with a way of talking about it. And when you've articulated it often enough, you believe it. That can make you think there's only one way you can write. But recently I've had a breakthrough.

After six books and countless stories, I finally acknowledge the only way to accomplish writing is to sit down and do it.

Previously, I manufactured periods in which I could write in an intense burst. Usually, these would be blocks of about three weeks, during which my partner would leave the house for days at a time, and I would immerse myself entirely in the task.

I first wrote in a garden shed, then in a writing room built into our log cabin. No other person ever came into either of them. They were sacrosanct.

But then we had a baby, and, a few months later, I fielded a commission.

There was no way I could disappear down a rabbit hole for the months it would take to address the work; the original shed had evolved into more of a clerical space I couldn't imagine writing in; and the room that had become the 'only place I could write' was in a house that now had an infant in it...



In the face of the work ahead, I spent three weeks prevaricating. I must buy a new shed. I could modify a shipping container. I even looked at pimping an old VW camper so I could sleep in peace, parked in a field, and wake up to write. Because (hadn't you heard me, on my process?) it was the only way I could go about this.

When the commission was confirmed, I had to grow up. There was pressure, and a deadline. I sat down and got on with it.

Recently, I emptied out my things and moved the wall of the writing room a metre and a half down the house to make a bedroom big enough for our baby.

The debris from the room is packed into the old shed. I have to go into the shed sideways and squeeze between the piles of stuff.

Now, I write amongst the boxes and the extra furniture. And, astonishingly, to the pitter patter of the tiny feet of a family of stoats nesting in the roof. At five o'clock I try and put the pen down.

This has made me question whether my past approach was fraudulent. But, no.

What's clear is that if the imperative to write is strong enough, the way you go about it can evolve. And when inability to apply your trusted process is *itself* the thing that prevents you from writing, you have to adapt. You have to strip the *real* truth about your process from the bullshit you might unwittingly have buried it in.