



## Perfect Place to Write

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**W**ITH ONE MONTH to contemplate the ‘perfect place’ as it relates to my writing, three distinct sets of ideas have broken loose.

As a matter of workaday routine I sit at a dining table in an outhouse. When all is well, I scribble in pencil on A3 sheets or type at a screen, before leaping up to pace. Sometimes I can spew hundreds, even thousands, of words of raw, untreated prose. Mostly, I shed text more like an aerosol, walking or lounging or lying, a mini-cassette recorder in my fist, my eyes half-closed. The outhouse table is used more for transcription and writing than for text generation.

My geographical location, or indeed physical position across, upon or athwart furniture is substantially irrelevant to my writing: what counts is movement and change. I can’t influence text creation by placing my body in any special space or striking any special attitude; on the contrary, it seems my body must follow where the text leads, hurrying to catch up, as if chasing a scent in the air. Once I’ve drafted something at a screen, I stand up to re-read it from a print-out, add to it in pencil as I walk, edit it as I lie down, update it back at the screen, and so on. When I can write at all, I can write anywhere, which means that anywhere is as perfect as anywhere else. When I can’t write at all, place is, well, neither here nor there.

The aspect of place that *does* always matter, indeed absorbs most of my energy, is the place occupied by the winking cursor or, for that matter,



*mutatis mutandis*, by the pencil tip poised over the A3 sheet, or the voiced word landed on magnetic tape. This is the border at which words are added or changed; the edge onto which new material is sewn, the margin at which the text lengthens, shortens, fattens, thins or simply alters. Since I compose text in a two-stage process, transferring segments from pre-existing strands of writing, the business of positioning, however meticulously planned, can feel chaotic and random. Choosing precisely the right piece of text to submit to the cursor's jaw or the pencil's jab is never fortuitous. There are criteria, clear in my mind, that preside over each choice: mood, pace, proportion and what I call the *curve* — a quality of tension I seek to impart to each passage I write.

There is, however, truly one perfect place in which to write, a place not of geography but of mood, morale, psychological equilibrium. This perfect place, this sweet spot, lies mid-way between black-dog despair and fizzing grandiosity. On days when this spot vanishes, all work ceases and when that happens, the desk is desolate, the couch bare, the river, park, coast or forest at best a pleasant distraction, at worst a mockery. To look then for physical or geographical places in which to write is vain: one may as well attempt to make love when stripped of sentiment.