



How I Write

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MY WRITING PROCESS has evolved over the years, adapting to each new circumstance in my life. When I began writing poetry I was a full-time English teacher in a sixth-form college. I loved the job, but something was missing. Writing seemed like a guilty pleasure back then, because time was so precious. I'd scribble notes in a journal on the thirty-minute train ride to work, using headphones to mask background noise. I'd steal odd moments at work too, jotting down ideas while my pupils did tests, or using half my lunch hour, locked away in an empty classroom. My writing process was piecemeal at best, but after five years, my first collection was published, following months of rejections.

Publication is just one element of writing, but it definitely changed how I wrote. It meant that I could stride forward with greater confidence. It seemed to justify so many lonely weekends, squirrelled away in my attic, when I could have been spending time with my friends and family. After my second poetry collection was published, I made a huge life change, to indulge my growing desire to live as a writer. I resigned from teaching, and spent a year producing a novel. My writing method adapted again, to fit my new situation. Suddenly I could write all day, uninterrupted. The only way to describe my elation is by using a metaphor. When horses are released from stables after being locked inside, with no sunlight or fresh air, they gallop across open fields, free at last to use their strength and stamina. It felt like I'd been liberated in exactly the same way. I wrote obsessively in that first year of freedom, with pent-up stories spilling at last onto the page. I often worked all day, seven days a week, translating ideas into words.



The elation has tempered to enjoyment over the decade I've spent as a professional writer. My working hours have shortened, so I'm at my desk from nine to five, Monday to Friday. I've accepted that writing around the clock is bad for my physical and mental health, so I take a more holistic approach now. My writing days include walks, breaks, and meals, as well as words, but the old pleasure remains. I still get a buzz from honing my work, until each pared-down sentence shines.

The way I write has also had to adapt to fulfil the needs of my publisher. I write one book a year, which can start to feel like a treadmill, if writing isn't a genuine passion. Publication demands mean that I am always editing one book, while starting to write the next, which is quite a feat. It involves holding two completely separate narratives in mind, never allowing the threads to get tangled, yet it still feels like a privilege. I still carry a notebook on train journeys, in case a fresh idea arrives, while I gaze at the landscape outside.