



## Writing and Technology

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**I**T'S THE ENEMY.

Let's say you've conjured up a perfect scenario for the ending of the novel you've been working on. It's probably the kind of moment that's been eluding you for a while. Now you hit upon a great idea and you're dying to get to your notebook or laptop to put it all down. The tea is brewing. You are trying to recall the exact words you thought last night, but just then a quick glimpse of the news app or your partner's casual remark tells you a celebrity or attention shark (let's call them Morgan) has said something tremendously outrageous on TV or Twitter. Or more seriously, something quite terrible has happened in some part of the world, maybe not earth-shaking but something upsetting, concerning. For a fraction, your brain tells you to not check, to not log on, and if you listen it's entirely possible you will lose nothing, because most likely you're still in the zone. But you succumb and get online and the next thing you know is that your mind is full of strangers' voices, screaming headlines, protesting twitter storms, a world full of buzzing pixel wars. Perhaps creative catastrophe has not struck yet, but you've certainly lost the thread of the fantastic idea you'd hit upon at night (you were onto something, weren't you?) and are now struggling to hold it all together. The Internet took you away from the breathtaking scene you were about to put into words. You allowed the internet to hijack you.

I once found the image of a t-shirt on the internet that read: 'Being a good writer is 5% talent and 95% not being distracted by the Internet.' It's stayed with me.



That is not to suggest that technology cannot be a friend to the solitary writer. Who hasn't done a bit or a lot of their research online, downloaded PDFs of obscure papers or stories, or indeed written about online lives because it's all a part of our life. How can we not have characters whose hands are at least sometimes attached to a smartphone? There's always someone who is texting or posting words and photos online.

You can't always go to places that you are writing about, so the next best thing is going there via Google Earth and Images. You shoot an urgent email to someone on the other side of the planet and chances are they'll answer your query the next day or next week — if you're nice, that is. All these are a part of our world, essential to our writing lives.

Technology is a friend. Technology *can* be a friend.

It's the other side, the all-consuming cycles of news and views that can and in the case of this writer *have* thwarted the process, interrupted the flow, and sometimes ruined a perfectly normal writing day.

Technology enables, it helps, but only if that pretty glass and plastic thing in your hand doesn't control how you spend your day.

That's the truth.