



## The Writing Life

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THEY CALL IT a ‘portfolio career’, which is an awful way of saying I’m a jack of all trades and master of none. What it means is that, like the vast majority of writers out there, I don’t make enough money solely from writing to make ends meet. So I have to do a number of other jobs to pay the bills.

But it could be worse. Every other kind of work I do has something to do with writing, which remains at the core of who I am. It’s better than working down the mines, or shovelling donkey crap for a living. No disrespect to all the miners and donkey-shit-shovellers out there. In fact, massive respect to all the miners and donkey-shit-shovellers, I could never do your jobs.

Because I’m a writer. In the last financial year, thirty-three percent of my income was derived directly from writing. That was actually a substantial increase from the previous year, and included a book advance, royalty payments, a lucky German deal, an audiobook contract, a TV option and payments from the PLR for books loaned in UK libraries. I consider myself lucky that anyone is interested in what I write at all.

That money wasn’t enough to pay the mortgage, but I’m also lucky that I’ve managed to pick up other work along the way. I work for the Royal Literary Fund in four different capacities, each of which pays well and on time, a rarity in this business. I also assess manuscripts for The Literary Consultancy, mentor for New Writing North and Scottish Book Trust,



assess funding applications for Creative Scotland, and run workshops in schools, libraries, festivals, prisons and anywhere else that will have me. And I do some journalism too, although that is a vanishing world, both in terms of workload and rate of pay. And I even make some pocket money from the band I'm in, at least I did while gigs were still happening.

All of that other stuff affects my writing life. In fact, it's not really a writing life, writing often has to come second place to the work that has more immediate returns. I learned very early on as a self-employed freelancer that the answer to 'Can you do this paid work?' is always 'Yes'. That ethos has stood me in good stead.

For a while at the start of the first Covid lockdown, most of that other work dried up. Schools and other institutions closed, and everyone struggled with how to move their lives online. During that time, the only work I had was to write the next book. So I did, from April to July 2020, 11am to 1pm, Monday to Friday, without interruptions. And it was glorious.

But that didn't last. The work offers started trickling back in, online workshops, manuscripts to assess, new writers to mentor. And the bills needed to be paid. So it was back to the reality of my 'portfolio career', the jack of all trades.