



## The Perfect Place to Write

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**W**RITERS' IDEAS ABOUT what constitutes the ideal place to write differ greatly, that's for sure. For many it is a place of solitude, silence and peace. You've all seen the pictures — a room lined with books, a desk with a view onto rooftops or over a lush garden. Living in a small house, along with a partner, several children and a dog, the idea of such a sacrosanct space within the home remained a remote dream. Instead, I found my ideal place – or places – to write out in the world, most notably on the commuter train I took to work each day.

When I first boarded that train, I had no idea how I was going to stand it. Most of my fellow travellers seemed fuelled by barely suppressed anger, constantly firing off emails of complaint about this or that delay. It was only after a couple of weeks I was struck by the realisation I had finally found what I'd been looking for; the best thing about it being that the discipline required for me to be at my desk at the same time each day was imposed from outside by the railway timetable. After a week or so, the noise of conversation around me faded as soon as I found a seat — with the proviso, of course, that I could always tune back in if a particularly interesting drama was unfolding within earshot. The rhythm of the wheels and the blurring of the view by speed added to the meditative state I find conducive to writing. After commuting for twelve years, I went freelance. I told GWR I had written three books on their train, and that I should be made their writer in residence. To my surprise they agreed, giving me a staff pass that allowed free travel on their network; a book, *Station to Station*, was the result.



Freed from the punishing commute, I was sure my productivity as a writer would go up; I hadn't reckoned on the constant hustle required to fund the freelance life. I also missed the feeling of being part of a vast crowd of humanity on the move, of *going* somewhere before I sat down at a desk. Soon I joined those who haunt cafés, eking out a coffee for as long as their computer batteries last. Instead of jostling for space in one of the many artisan coffeeshops my neighbourhood offers, my favourite place became a faceless branch of a multinational chain. Here there was little danger someone would ask me the dreaded question 'What are you working on now?' Instead, I was surrounded by multiple languages creating the hubbub I crave without the distraction that is the inevitable result of my eavesdropping habit.