



## The Best Advice I Received as a Writer

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**W**E MIGHT HAVE BEEN HAVING one of our writer-y walks in the local park when it happened...

I was struggling after a sluggish week (or two, or three) and I told my writer friend that I wasn't getting much writing done. She responded, saying that 'Writing doesn't always look like writing.'

Just like that. Six words. *Writing doesn't always look like writing.* I'd like to say that the colours suddenly looked brighter and the flowers more magnificent. But since I can't remember for sure whether we were actually in the park or just trying to write, together, at one of our houses, I can't. Still, something in me shifted.

I thought back to when I started writing for children, with a small baby. I may have found thirty minutes to write in a week, but of course, it wasn't 'just' thirty minutes I sat with a pen and paper and scribbled things down as fast as I could. Things were clearly happening at some (usually very low) level as I was feeding my baby in the middle of the night, or hanging up washing, even when I didn't think I was thinking about it — or anything. *Writing didn't always look like writing.*

And I thought about it more recently when days of what felt like pulling teeth and getting no words down would be followed by a day where everything flowed. Thinking that one day was a bad writing day and another, a good one, stopped making much sense. The days were



connected and the periods where it didn't feel productive fed the days that did.

This realisation hasn't suddenly let me off the hook and made me believe that I'm working (*writing*) if I'm scrolling through Facebook reading what other writers are up to, but it's allowed me to trust in a process, and to exploit it. I stop myself from writing (in the traditional writing *down* sense) after a period of research but I'll come up with questions I'm interested in in the light of the research — and then try not to think about the answers actively. When I'm due to get a first draft of my story in in a week but I've not 'written anything', I know it's already happening — and when I write my first draft in 'just a few hours' out of 'seemingly nowhere', I know that I did not of course write the book 'in a few hours' and it certainly wasn't out of 'nowhere'. If you're interested in this process, I'd recommend Alex Soojung-Kim Pang's book, *Rest*.

It's really shaped my approach not just to writing but to myself as a writer. And when I recently mentioned to my writer friend how I'd told lots of people about her profound 'Writing doesn't always look like writing', her response? She had no recollection of ever having said it, or even having particularly thought it. For many writers, it will be blindingly obvious. So take it or leave it — one writer's stellar advice is another writer's throwaway comment.