



## The Perfect Place to Write

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I'M IN A COFFEE SHOP. Not a trendy artisanal venue where the barista has personally picked up the coffee cherries from the forest floor after they've passed through the digestive system of a civet. It's a Costa, on the first floor of a Next clothes shop in Swindon. Even so, as I tap away on my iPad, I can see three others working on laptops.

I'm not sure why, but the coffee shop has become the cliché writer's habitat. If David Attenborough wanted to make a documentary about us, this is where he would hang out. Personally, I have mixed feelings. If I'm on the road, it's certainly the best place to write in. But I rarely make the effort to go to a coffee shop purely for the purpose of writing, because I have a far better environment at home.

In part, I suppose, this reflects the type of writing I do. If it's a book review or a blog post or a short story, a small screen works well for the kind of top-of-the-head writing suited to a coffee shop. But much of what I do involves a pile of research and notes. At my desk at home I have enough screen landscape to lay out a couple of documents, a web page and my notes all at once. This makes for a much more productive writing session when I'm midway through a book.

Of course, I can't deny the appeal of having coffee and pastries on tap (even though it might not be the healthiest way to write). There is a real luxury to having someone make these for you — though I couldn't follow the example of some of my fellow coffee shop typists who seem quite



happy to join the queue for a refill, leaving their precious equipment and wordcount sitting on an unattended table. I'm far too paranoid to get up without packing everything away.

As yet, though, we've ignored the elephant in the room — or, rather, the elephant's trumpeting. Noise. Coffee shops are usually abuzz with hissing machines, talk, seats rattling and small children gurgling. It's not exactly airport runway decibel levels, but no one could describe a coffee shop as peaceful, unless it's so dead that you wonder what's wrong with the place. And that, for me, is a problem when I'm writing a book. I need to have a fair chunk of the structure set up in my head and can only really write in silence. I'm happy to play music while editing (Spotify has opened up a whole new world for me), but when writing a book it's a no-no. And music is far less distracting than espresso-driven clamour.

Having said that, one final advantage of the coffee shop is it gets me moving. The simple act of walking the ten minutes to the nearest place is a great way to kickstart the brain into the creative leaps necessary for writing. Almost all of the first paragraph of this piece had assembled itself unbidden before I sat down to type it. So, maybe, I should write with a flat white more often.