



## The Writing/Life Balance

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**T**HE WRITING LIFE prepared me for lockdown. No better preparation could be made unless one had the good fortune to be employed as a hermit in a purpose-built folly for the aristocracy's amusement, and those opportunities are thin on the ground.

As the first lockdown got underway, I smugly looked on at the initial struggles of extroverts and the non-writers. I could go without talking to anyone for days. I already possessed both day and night pyjamas and had essential deliveries in place. Precarious finances, an unstable work environment, a lack of work colleagues and little socialisation: welcome to the club. I was going to walk, or rather lounge, this one out. This lockdown was just the average writer's life on a grand national scale. Even better, no in-person meetings. I would carry on as usual, setting my own hours, sometimes working at night, sleeping by day, binge-watching TV and calling it research, the all-or-nothing regime. Nothing would change in my writer's life, only the world would change.

The writing/lockdown life balance should have remained unchanged, but it wasn't the same. The parts of my writing life that I had classed as distractions proved a big loss. Sitting in cafés, chatting over coffee, people watching, eavesdropping, engaging with others, with life, all gone. Actual real-life meetings meant catching trains and being someplace new. Zoom proved poor replacement without the additional benefits of visiting galleries, catching a show and meeting old friends. I couldn't go to cinemas or live events. I could not read people's reactions or responses when filtered through a screen.



As lockdown hardened I soon discovered that my writing/life balance needed more balance. I missed the students and working through essays. I missed the buzz of campus, my colleagues and the sanctuary of my office that I was kindly allowed to use on non-teaching days. I have never been more productive or in a happier workspace than in my Newcastle University RLF office.

Deprived of these places, people and stimulus, I wrote less. I realised that what I had always considered the ideal writing/life balance, solitude, silence, the removal of distractions was by no means perfect. I needed the other stuff as necessary fuel and inspiration, I needed respite from living inside my own head. The writing life must involve the outside world to remain relevant, productive and engaged. Life cannot be an endless writing retreat.

It is time to stop making excuses and start making pages.