



## How I Write

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**S**O, HERE I AM SITTING DOWN to write a script about how I write. And I'll stop right there to reflect on the word 'sitting'. Yes, I do *sit down to write*, but is this where the writing actually begins? Of course it isn't. *Sitting down to write* is the legacy of a redundant idea. I used to think a writer would go about their real life up to the moment they sat down and started tapping at the keyboard. This is what I believed, years ago, when I went to the seaside with my parents to go on holiday while writing an episode of the soap opera *EastEnders*. Simple, get up early and do four hours on the laptop, then forget about the script and be on vacation. Leaving the family asleep upstairs I sat down in front of a window and looked out to sea. As spring sunshine sparkled on the water, I waited for my imagination to lead me to the inner city. I opened the window and sniffed ocean air. I heard gulls, waves on the shingle beach, and voices of children carried by the wind.

I needed to learn that so much happens in the *prewriting* stage when the mind is working in the background, churning ideas and working stuff out. I was sitting down to write like I was clocking on to a shift. I hadn't played with the screenplay in advance and was placing huge demands on this moment. It's no surprise I couldn't think of anything to say.

I've noticed that when children are young they have a natural ability to paint and draw that's often lost later on. I think something similar happens with language: that the rules we are taught somehow get in the way. We import ideas of what is good writing and the concept of simplicity is



forgotten. So I think a lot of the time I'm trying to get out of that mind-set. I use the word 'play' a lot, because being playful with language seems to open up possibilities rather than close them off.

Of course, there does come a time when I have to *sit down and write*. At this stage in the process there's a pattern I recognise. It doesn't matter whether it's a stage play, radio play, book or podcast: I write before I do anything else. Yes, there are emails clamouring for attention and a million other jobs demanding to be done, but the discipline is being able to shut those out and write.

I have three or four good writing hours, which means about 1,200 words. Then, I edit work from previous days. When I'm deeply involved I'll write up to the point where I ask myself a question. When all is going well, I have the confidence to know the answer will be there next day.

And, word by word, day by day the work accumulates until it's finished. Of course, it never really feels like it's finished...but that's another story.