



How I Write

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HOW I WRITE DEPENDS on what stage I'm at with my work. When I'm editing, I can't wait to get to my desk in the morning and am reluctant to leave it in the evening. Often, I work into the early hours, possibly damaging my health by sitting hunched over my keyboard and staring at the screen for long periods without a break. I love the editing process, seeing the work improve before my very eyes as I redraft and polish.

But when I'm writing a first draft, I'll do almost anything to delay starting work. My house is cleaner and tidier than at any other time; my emails are meticulously up-to-date and my food cupboards are fully stocked. Sometimes, I justify the delay by engaging in what I call 'productive procrastination', so instead of watching cat videos on Facebook, I'll watch TV to pick up ideas for characters and plot twists; browse on Rightmove to find the perfect house for my characters, phone a writer friend to chat about my plot, or go for a walk in the hope that putting one foot in front of the other will help stimulate ideas. Often, all of this non-writing activity takes up so much of the day that by the time I've finished, it's too late to start work.

So how do I avoid this avoidance? Most writers have a daily goal, a number of hours spent at the keyboard or a desired word count — usually a thousand words. I can do the 'hours' thing — it's easy to spend a few hours rereading and tinkering. But it doesn't move the novel forward. A thousand words is realistic when you know where you're going and the



prose is flowing, but it can be daunting when things aren't progressing so smoothly. So although I *aim* to write more, I set myself a much smaller daily goal. The rule is, I aim for a thousand words, but I mustn't go to bed until I've written at least 250 — and they don't even have to be good words.

Now, if I *only* wrote the minimum, it would take far too long to write a novel. But by writing at least 250 words every single day, even when it's midnight and I've spent the entire day distracting myself with non-writing activities, I become more productive at those times when I do put the hours in. What happens is, even if the 250 words are rubbish and I end up deleting them, they help to keep the story and characters alive in my head, so that each time I sit down to write, the sentences flow more easily, and I don't waste time rereading and reminding myself of what I've written so far. While I can argue that I sometimes struggle to write a thousand words, no-one can pretend that writing 250 – with no quality control – isn't doable.

So 'how I write' is little by little, small goal by small goal. And it works, so I'm fine with that.