



AN AUTHOR'S GUIDE

TO TIME MANAGEMENT

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Time

Where does it go?...

We know that managing your time is one of the biggest challenges for writers – we hear it everywhere we go. Don't worry, you are not alone, authors across different genres and at all different stages in their careers say the same thing. So how do you tackle it head on?

An author entrepreneur is often a one stop shop, responsible for their own marketing and sales, as well as for finances and promotional activities. Not to mention the hardly insignificant aspect of being creative!

Not only are you expected to wear many hats but there are *a lot* of distractions around. Even worse, many of them are built into the roles you are expected to do (hello Twitter).

So how do you figure out how to divide your time to cover all these aspects of being an author entrepreneur, and resist giving into all those distractions? Here are our top 15 tips to help you balance your deadlines, maintain laser focus, create realistic expectations and multi-task like a pro.

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1. Banish distractions

Switch your phone to silent! Don't check your email! TURN OFF Facebook! We thought we would start with the biggies, but the hard truth is that in a digital age distractions are easily found right in front of you – 24 hours a day. It can't be ignored completely so set aside time every day just to check your e-mail and social media. Building it into your schedule will stop the haphazard perusal of the internet that is such a time suck.

2. Time yourself

We all know that it is better to work without distractions, but equally it is just so easy to flit from task to task and end up not being sure where the day has gone and fearing nothing has actually been achieved. The Pomodoro technique, popularised in the late 1980s by Francesco Cirillo, and named after a tomato shaped cooking timer, is still the best method to encourage short sharp bursts of concentration. The technique consists of breaking down work into 25 minute bursts of intense activity, followed by a 5 minute break. Working without interruption or a change of focus allows you to get lots of work done and be incredibly productive.

3. Get goal-orientated.

Once you know what your work is for the day, put the three most important tasks (M.I.Ts) onto a Post-It Note and stick it by the side of your computer or somewhere where you can't miss it. You'll keep glancing at it all day and it will act as extra motivation. Tell yourself that you have to get those three tasks done, no matter what else the day throws at you.

4. Start with the tough stuff!

This method of working is also known as "eating the frog". It involves pick the one thing you are most dreading and do it first. The idea is that getting this unpalatable job done first will give you such a psychological boost that it can carry you through the rest of the day.

5-8

5. Apply laser focus

If you have lots of different tasks, and indeed lots of different M.I.Ts, think about blocking out your time and schedule 1-2 hours dedicated to each project. The key here is to keep your focus on that particular job during that time and resist the urge to let your mind trespass into another task.

6. Do your research!

Ever been tripped up during a very productive flow of writing because you needed to find out the capital city of Belgium? That's because you forgot to dedicate a block of time to research all the facts you need at your fingertips. Stopping to research along the way will see you waste valuable writing time. So budget for that in your day and let the creativity flow later.

7. Embrace lists

You've got seventeen different tasks to do today and managing when you do them, how long they'll take and even the order you'll do them in makes your brain hurt. Kanban boards take the stress out of the whole process. These handy 'To Do List' boards are a great and simple way to visualise your work progress. They consist of columns that represent the stages of a project, with individual tasks listed on a note that is moved from one column to the next. Your aim? Get that task into the 'done' column and feel the satisfaction course through you. Kanban Boards can be as simple as a white board (or paper) with post it notes, or you can get organised on a site like Kanban Flow. You can't imagine how good it feels to have a full 'done' column.

8. Dare to work differently

For many people, the 9-5 daily grind is the only schedule available. But, by and large, authors have the luxury of breaking the rules and working to their own time scale. There are so many different times of the day that you can work and those times might free you from the distractions of others. After all, it's much easier to get things done when those around you are fast asleep.

9-11

9. Be time wise

Everyone has little pockets of time throughout the day where they have nothing to do – waiting on hold on the phone is a particular favourite of mine! The temptation is to just scroll through Facebook, or have a quick browse on Amazon. But what can you really do with that lost time? Having a list of tasks that can be achieved in a few minutes (and if you are lost for inspiration why not check out our Freebie “20 Ten Minute Marketing Tips for Authors”) means that you make the most of your working day.

10. Develop ruthlessness

One of the most vital tips for a freelancer is to learn when to say “No” (and when you actually mean it!). Some writing jobs are just not worth your time as they either do not pay enough, or they do not move you towards your goals. If you learn to say no to these projects, you will give yourself more time to work on what actually matters. If you protect your working time you will soon find that the working day stretches out before you full of the potential of **GETTING THINGS DONE!**

11. Relinquish that obsession

Learn when something is good enough. I speak to so many authors who are obsessed that their work isn't good enough – that it isn't perfect – and are worried about how inefficient they are because everything takes **SO LONG**. There is a very useful saying that I am going to have tattooed somewhere on me - “don't get it right, get it written!” and if you are one of those perfectionists then I suggest that you do too.

12-15

12. Remember that it's impossible to get everything done. Also remember that odds are good that 20 percent of your thoughts, conversations and activities produce 80 percent of your results.

13. Reward yourself

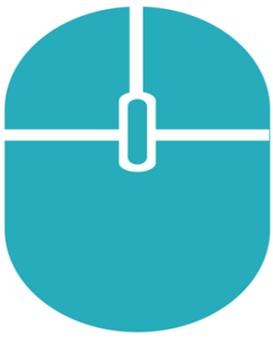
Many writers set daily or weekly goals, and rewards themselves for finishing tasks or meeting deadlines. These don't have to be big ones – even a piece of yummy cake goes a long way to motivation.

14. Beat overwhelm

One of the fastest ways to overwhelm yourself is to think about your massive to-do list. All you can do is break down your work into smaller chunks, then into smaller single, solitary tasks.

15. Outsourcing is a joy

Sorry to break this to you, but you (probably) can't do it all. So if there is something that you really, really struggle with, and that takes up far too much of your time, then find someone else to do it. Use a Virtual assistant to take care of administrative tasks (for example, hire a professional to manage your social media (ahem) or design your website). Sites like *Elance*, *Fiverr* and *People Per Hour* offer a wide range of freelancers who bid to tackle your work and be your personal heroes.



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