Twitter Thread by Julian Shapiro

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THREAD ON BUILDING A WRITING HABIT:

If it's hard to get yourself to write,

I surveyed 100+ people to identify how they overcome their blockers.

For writing blogs, books, screenplays:

Blocker #1: Procrastination

If you procrastinate occasionally, that’s normal—forgive yourself.

However, if you procrastinate endlessly, that’s a problem.

Procrastination is the result of two reflexes:

• Indulging in immediate rewards like browsing YouTube instead of writing.

• Avoiding work you perceive to be uncomfortable or tedious.

Let's tackle these two blockers.

A. Avoid distractions

Have you noticed how much writing we can get done on airplanes—despite having our knees and shoulders uncomfortably squeezed together for hours?

Why is that?

It's because there's nothing else to do on an airplane.

This reveals a truth about writing: needing a comfy chair, room, or "the right ambience" is a myth.

If you're waiting until your room is the right temperature to begin writing, you're lying to yourself.

Your blocker is not comfort, but rather distractions.

Two strategies:

First, listen to flow-inducing music with a steady beat and no vocals.

Here’s my Spotify playlist that works wonders

https://t.co/rFljls43iz

It reduces the occurence of errant thoughts popping into my head. Errant thoughts are what lead to time-wasting YouTube searches.

Second, remove the Internet. Disconnect from WiFi and leave your phone in another room. For most people, this isn't optional.

B. Speed past tedium

One trick for getting yourself to write is to only write sections that immediately interest you.

Perhaps it's the middle of a post—that's okay. You don't have to write in order.

Sit down and write any three paragraphs you can. And do it FAST.

You'll find that by forcing yourself to start with speed, momentum carries you forward.

If this doesn't work for you—and you find yourself procrastinating for months—you may have one of three underlying problems:

• You're not willing put in the effort to find interesting things to say.

• You don't want to be a writer badly enough. You don't see the ROI in it.

• You chose a topic you’re not sufficiently passionate about. Choose another.

Writing blocker #2: Lacking good ideas

How to find ideas...

A. Trigger ideas that bug you

Your strongest opinions make for the best writing. Consume others' views (Twitter, news, convos) and note whenever you

strongly disagree.

Now open a laptop and argue a counter-position

B. Capture real stories you tell

Readers love being privy to authentic stories from a writer's life.

If you're comfortable with it, consider writing a vulnerable story you'd tell a friend.

Intersperse cliffhangers throughout.

C. Explain concepts to others

Put yourself in a position to synthesize your experience for others. Teach. Mentor.

While explaining, pay attention to how you explain concepts: occasionally, you'll articulate the essence of a concept beautifully—and that makes for great writing.

Blocker #3: Concerned no one will read

Write first and foremost to make sense of your mind and the world around you.

Accept that most of writing's value comes from helping you clarify your own logic.

The resulting clarity makes you a wiser speaker and decision-maker.

When clarity is your goal, having an audience matters less.

For a writer to have a long career, I find it's critical to approach writing this way.

Fortunately, getting to the bottom of the ideas you truly care about is also how you grow a loyal audience.

Thanks to the algorithmic nature of Twitter, YouTube, and SEO, truly great and authentic content eventually surfaces over time.

Final Blocker: Fear of being judged

Some writers fear their writing opens them up to attack.

They worry that if a reader finds fault in their writing, they are finding personal fault in the writer.

If you're frozen by the fear of judgment, you can hedge against it:

A. Add a disclaimer to your writing: "I'm sharing early thoughts. I encourage readers to share their own experiences to help refine my thinking."

B. Instead of sharing original ideas, curate others'. Many newsletters, blogs, and socials exclusively curate third-party content.

Over time, weave your original thoughts alongside curated ones.

Continually increase this portion until you're comfortable being a dominant voice

C. Write under a pseudonym.

Widely-read blogs like Slate Star Codex and The Last Psychiatrist don't share their authors' names.

This hasn't deterred millions of readers from finding + loving their work.

As you acclimate to reactions, you could transition to your real name.

Recap:

• Focus on ideas you can't get out of your head.
• If you're concerned about judgement, use a pseudonym.
• When inspired, sit down and speed through a few paragraphs.
• Don't worry whether people will read. Writing is firstly for clarifying thinking. Readers = bonus.

For a lot more writing advice, see the other tweets on my profile: @julian

https://t.co/4CzAqQ8v3K

> A framework for good writing.
>
> 1. Use draft 1 to find your novel ideas, which are:
>
> \u2022 Counter-intuitive
> \u2022 Counter-narrative
> \u2022 Shock and awe
>
> 2. Draft 2 is for making those novel ideas stick\u2014via:
>
> \u2022 Stories
> \u2022 Analogies
> \u2022 Examples
>
> Writing quality = Novelty x Resonance
>
> — Julian Shapiro (@Julian) January 1, 2021