



The Write Life

Quantity vs. Quality

Get It All Out,
Organize Later

Is Less More, or Is
More Less?

Midnight Writing

At The World's End

**Volume 2,
Issue 6
June, 2010**



The Write Life

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About Us:

The Fairfield County Writers Group (FCWG) of Connecticut was founded in 2008. Originally created as a regional chapter of National Novel Writing Month, FCWG grew into a local community of writers who are committed to writing not just in one month of the year, but every month of the year.

This magazine is an extension of that appreciation. It provides writing prompts and inspiration to craft new ideas; articles on how to better your writing skills, overcome writer's block, survive the life of a writer; and short stories.

Visit <http://www.FCWriters.com> for other offerings from FCWG.

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Muse Food

It's The Size That Counts

Some say it's not the size that counts, it's how you use it. I prefer to think that more is better, especially when it comes to writing. The more you write down initially, the more you have to work with later.

No one has a perfect memory. If you don't write down all the ideas and bits and pieces that come to you when writing, you're not going to remember them all when it comes time to edit and revise.

Try doing five minutes of stream-of-consciousness

writing. Just continue trying anything and everything that comes to mind, regardless of what it may be. Then try ten minutes, or even fifteen.

Eventually, you'll find a nugget of gold amongst all the rambling. Use that nugget in your next story, or whatever you happen to be working on at the moment. It could be just the thing you need to get your story moving.

One Words

Try basing a story with one of the below words:

Creatures
Telescope
Guitar
Wedding
Nerd
Cub
Gorgon
Sanctimonious
Fortnight
Skewer

One Liners

Try starting a story with one of the below sentences:

Love plays tricks on your memory.
Now is the time.
Welcome to the neighborhood.
Lies and slander!
Whoever thought that camping was a great idea should be tossed off this cliff.
I'm still not quite sure how I got dragged into all this.
Just leave that stuff behind, it's not important anymore.
Don't worry, the burning means that it's working.
Live your life, don't let your life live you.
Pick me up at 8 PM, and remember your keys this time.

Photographic Inspiration



Use an image as a starting point for a new story or to help jumpstart a sluggish scene.

Muse Food

D a m n t h e T o r p e d o e s . . .

Sometimes, writing full speed ahead is the best way for breaking through a writer's block.

Put your fingers to the keyboard and just keep hitting keys for a pre-set period of time. I prefer ten minute writing sprints. It's long enough to gain momentum, but short enough for you maintain focus.

I use a software program called "Write or Die" which blacks out your computer screen, blocking access to any potential distractions, and forcing you to write to a

pre-set goal, or face an annoying pop-up warning, ear-aching sound clip, or vanishing words - depending on what setting you put it to.

Take five or ten minutes and start writing. Don't stop until the time runs out, or face the consequences. Set up some sort of consequence if you don't make it through. Like ten minutes of cleanup, or ten pushups. Something you won't be eager to do.

Try your own writing sprints and see how it works.

O n e W o r d e r s

Try basing a story with one of the below words:

Commandeer
Raggedy
Tree-house
Imitation
Narwhal
Vessel
Outlaw
Name
Wonder
Custard

O n e L i n e r s

Try starting a story with one of the below sentences:

Your pleasure is our business.
Coffee and cigarettes: breakfast of champions.
Who actually carries a brick in their purse?
This jungle gym looked smaller when I was on the ground.
I haven't quite figured out how to reach perfection.
Stop telling me who I'm supposed to be.
I don't know where to find my "happy."
Let's see what we can do.
Sometimes you just need to break things.
Better late than never.

P h o t o g r a p h i c I n s p i r a t i o n



First Class

Get It All Out, Organize Later

One thing that can make it very difficult for writing is the idea that you must write in order. Thinking that each new scene must follow the one you just wrote to keep the plotline consistent. This style of writing can be helpful if you have no idea where you want the story to go at all, but it also can make a story stall. Once your story stalls, it becomes more difficult to keep writing.

Knowing in what way your muse works best is the first piece of figuring out your own writing style.

There are so many stories that I have started that sit unfinished on my computer.

My usual pattern is to write in order, to not leave the current scene until I've figured out what is actually happening in it. Yet my muse gets bored easily

and often these half-way started stories fade and never get completed. I've slowly come to realize that my tendency to do this is why I never seem to be able to finish a story.

Maybe you're like me, unable to keep an idea alive. It takes a while to figure out if it's pure stubbornness to write in order while the muse would rather not, or if your muse gets bored easily. Sometimes it can be a combination of the two, or it can alternate depending on the story. Knowing in what way your muse works best is the first piece of figuring out your own writing style.

It's like doing a puzzle – some start with the corners, and then build the edges off of those before filling in the middle. Others might choose a corner and try to create the puzzle from there. When writing, you of course want to know the characters, and have a basic idea of the plot. Knowing what you want the end result to be is also helpful, that way you can get the story from point A to point B, even if the details of point B change while you write.

Which is why it is sometimes better to write the story out of order. If you have an idea of a scene that happens later in the story, go ahead and write it. It will be writing, and it can help get you out of the stuck place. Later, you can go back and fill in the gaps – just make sure that you mark

them clearly enough that you can find them later.

If a huge detail changes when you are filling in the gaps that later changes the details of the scenes that were written out of order then go ahead, re-write them. Don't worry about changes in character details – that is what editing once you finish.

Organizing the scenes into a logical order can wait. Sometimes just pure writing before you figure out what scenes go where is what can help you figure out a logical order to the story. You still are writing, getting out the words and filling up the pages. The story of your characters is still being told, even if it is out of order when you write it.

That sort of thing has worked, for some screen writers. There are many movies and television shows that utilize flashbacks to tell different pieces of the story. For mysteries, or stories that rely greatly on events that happened in the past this tactic can work and reorganizing the scenes in an out-of-order thus isn't as important. But if you decide to use these tactics just so you won't have to re-organize as much know that stories like these can be difficult to follow.

In other words, keeping the writing in a scene-by-scene order can work, or it can be like pulling teeth without any Novocain. It is a rush when you've been pounding your head against the edge of the keyboard for days and you finally figure out a scene that will get the story moving

again. Who cares if it won't happen for another day in the stories time line, once it is written, you can go back and write the scenes leading up to it once the creative juices get flowing again. Writing doesn't have to be done in chronological order, organizing can wait for when you know what happens.

Writing doesn't have to be done in chronological order, organizing can wait for when you know what happens.

First Class

Organization Tips for the Random Writer

Sometimes people tell me that I'm "so organized." Because my mom raised me to be polite, I smile and thank them, and don't howl "liaaaaar!" The fact is, after a lifetime of struggle, I am fairly organized. I have to be, or I waste too much time searching for things instead of writing. I am not, however, one of the Born Organized. Heaven knows it's taken me years of trial and error and "duh, why not do it this way?" to get where I am. I've bought file cabinets, I've switched notebooks for different projects, I've even attempted the "sort by sediment layer" method.

File cabinets are an invitation to keep everything. Your papers are out of the way, but unless you are sorting as you go, they are still lost in a sea of paper. Switching notebooks is fine, until you can't put your hand on the right notebook fast enough because you have too many things cooking. Sediment layers only work until you can't remember exactly when you came up with that brilliant idea.

First, notes. Often you can tell a writer by the bits of paper scattered everywhere with obscure references or sinister doodles on them. We've probably all tried this, because it's fast and easy--until you want something you can't find. The answer? I've invested in 3x5 index cards (I buy them by the ton) and try to always have some handy. A note at the top of what project it's for, a quick explanatory scribble, and it's done. Another plus of cards is you can rearrange all you like.

If I don't have a card, I jot it anywhere--but I try hard to get those "anywhere" bits collected and into my card file in a timely manner. This is also my answer to switching notebooks. I jot all ideas in one notebook if that's what's handy, and sort it out with note cards later. The trick here, as with most systems is to not let it build up. Do your sorting often, or you'll find yourself never writing because you have to choose between writing without those awesome notes, or jumping in and finding them.

Second, a timeline. If you are writing a series, or even just re-using the same universe, you should really consider a master timeline. I have seven novels in one universe, and while it's not a series, the characters do interact with each other. It's important to know that Donte and Keen didn't bump into each other on Mantixa because Keen was on Goodfella on that date in another story.

Third, a master list of characters. I have a character named David. It's a good name, and I'm fond of it. That's no reason to have four characters named David, who just might all want to turn up in a book together later. A master list of characters helps prevent this. I also have a list of common machines known in my SF universe, and of planets visited or just mentioned, and who has been there and what the place is like, and what the adjustment is from Standard Galactic Time if I've mentioned it. I use spreadsheets for these--so I can sort by any column I want.

When I work, I usually have at least two documents open. The first, of course, is my manuscript. The second is my calendar. Not some fancy program that keeps track of how many heartbeats in thirty-seven hours or anything, just a document with a table on it, seven columns, start date in the right place, and as I write I pop over to it to type in brief descriptions of what happens each day. For instance, at one point Rafe and Taro's calendar was helping me keep track of the infection--and accurate symptoms thereof--in Taro's badly tended injuries. It also reminded me that the next day was Taro's birthday, (so says the master timeline!), an important fact he'd quite forgotten in the fight to stay alive.

I didn't sit down and write all these lists at once. Gleaning such things from seven novels after the fact would be a task of Herculean proportions. I took them from my writing and put them in my lists as I went. So I'll say it again in different words--Organization only works if you work it. Find what works for you and do it. Set a day each week to catch up. Buy yourself the pretty notecards, the filing system that makes sense to you. Your writing--you, the writer--are worth it.

The best advice out there, is to write what you love. Everyone knows that. Butt in chair is another important one. But it's also important to keep track as you go. You will be so sorry later, if you have to go searching through nine hundred manuscript pages to find out if you placed that scar on the left arm or the right, or maybe on the leg--did you even say "scar?" Search won't help, if you don't remember if it was a scar or a mark or just an almost-invisible white line.

By KD Crotwell

Writer's Sphere

Is Less More, or More Less?

Depending on what your preferred writing style is, sometimes less is actually more. No you're not breaking the laws of physics or conservation. It's more a matter of doing what you can with what you've got. I write and copyedit business articles on a regular basis.

...saying "The butler did it, with a freeze ray, in the rumpus room." right out, and explaining later, can be satisfying.

Their writing creed is BLOT - Bottom Line On Top.

Clear, concise, and impactful writing is the key when writing for businesses and professionals. They want to know 'What's In It For Me' immediately. The fiddly bits like details, outlines, and explanations can wait for later.

If you're more of a fiction writer, then it's a toss up. Sometimes less is more, to prevent info-dumping. Unless your readers enjoy reading instruction manuals in Mandarin, they're not going to read through 3 pages of info-dumping about a character's entire back story and familial heritage. Best to space it out over the course of the book.

In most cases, more is more. The more detail and description you put in, via 'show don't tell', can really make a story come alive. Multi-dimensional characters have flaws, problems, and make mistakes. Not all the time mind you, otherwise the climax of the story will never come.

I prefer fiction writing, as it gives me more to work with. I have characters who save the world on a weekly basis, but get easily distracted by shiny objects. Pirates with a knack for losing more treasure than they steal. I even have various physics-defying machinery, like cameras which actually steal soul pieces, or solar powered dirigibles.

Business writing has its own advantages sometimes. Instead of wading through pages and pages of plot and speech to find out who that shadowy figure was back in chapter one, it's all right up top on page one. There are times when coming right out and saying "The butler did it, with a freeze ray, in the rumpus room." can be satisfying.

You of course have to follow up that slanderous claim with proof of some sort, lest the butler go after you next, presumably on a dark and stormy night. Writing the bottom line on top, or just getting to the heart of the matter right at the beginning allows you to see the light at the end of the tunnel, before ever even entering the tunnel in the first place. It just requires you backtracking through the twists and turns later on, to provide the full picture.

An important part of concise writing is that your brain theoretically holds all the little strings, arrows, diagrams, and explanations for everything that you put down onto paper. Your reader, unless a high-level telepath, will not necessarily be able to understand how you know the butler owns a freeze ray and happened to hide it in the rumpus room. Make sure you write down enough for readers to sufficiently connect the dots. Otherwise that butler may go after them.

No need to go into detail about where the freeze ray was purchased, or how the butler spent three weeks subtly moving the rumpus room's furniture around for the best hiding spot. That is unless it is vitally important for the reader to know such things. In which case, by all means, detail away.

In situations like this it is very helpful to have a beta reader. One who will read your first or second draft and provide feedback as to where others may not be able to figure things out. Just be sure it's not the butler, otherwise you may find yourself the next frozen victim.

A balance is never easy to accomplish, either in

writing or in life. But it is worth working towards. Just be sure to have a heat source nearby, lest the butler get the best of you.

A balance is never easy to accomplish, either in writing or in life. But it is worth working towards.

By Charles J. Muir

Writer's Sphere

Walking the Quality / Quantity Line

It can be hard sometimes, writing as much as you can instead of the "perfect words". But it's worth the time and effort involved with writing more to begin with. Quality comes with revision and a red pen. Quantity must come first.

But if you've already gotten through your first draft or even your second, there's still a need to clean up those ratty edges of the plot. Maybe shine the tarnished edges from some of your characters. Perhaps even shine some light in those still darkened corners of the world you've created.

Consistency

One way of upping the quality of your work is editing for consistency. Make sure that your character names don't grow any random extra letters. The same goes for any place names or specific plot points referenced throughout the story. Keep track of such things to ensure you don't break the space time continuum due to a misplaced city.

Continuity

Unless your characters are riding in a blue police box, telephone booth, or a nuclear-powered DeLorean I suggest you keep the plot in chronological order, or as close as you can get to it.

Spelling / Grammar

One of the easier parts of maintaining quality is spelling words correctly and handling basic grammar issues. A good portion of grammar is a matter of style. When it comes to a matter of style, pick one and stay consistent. Don't go switching between contractions and no contractions every other page. It looks tacky.

Magic Bullet - Ammunition Logistics

We've all seen those magic weapons. They somehow manage to fit seven bullets, despite being a six chamber gun. Or the shotguns that never need to be reloaded, regardless of how many zombies happen to be in your way.

If the weapon your character has needs to be reloaded after six shots, then have your character reload after six shots. Don't go around giving divine firearms, unless of course they are in face magically imbued to be self-reloading. If

that's the case, then by all means carry on.

Timing - Sleep is needed after 72 hours, or else

On that same vein, time progresses at a more or less constant rate. Keep in mind that days eventually turn into nights, and vice versa. All characters will eventually need to sleep, especially if human. Unless of course you want them to start hallucinating and go into a sleep coma after three or four days.

Suspension of Belief

The best stories have the power of suspending belief. The concepts that we'll eventually solve all the world's problems and move into the universe.

If your materials is capable of making the reader overlook any current lack of technology, knowledge, superpowers, temporal paradoxes that allow your plot to be feasible, then you've done your job. Work towards it, strive for it.

Cut the Fluff

I'm not talking about that marshmallow filling you can buy in supermarkets, that fluff is downright tasty. I'm talking about the unnecessary bits and pieces that stick to your plot like the fake cobwebs you can buy for Halloween. Unnecessary recaps of the plot, extraneous words, and potentially even an extra character or two. It all depends on just how much you have in your story, and just how much of it is actually necessary.

Return of the Revenge of the Re-Animated Summaries

If you're writing a sequel, prequel, or part of an -ology than be incredibly careful. Countless continuations of a story or plot have been massacred because the writer wrote the book simply for the sake of writing it, because they could. If you're going to build on a story, then do it properly.

Make a relatively-stand alone novel, which builds on previous or future events from the other book, but is not 100% solely dependent on them. Otherwise it'll come off as cheap and tawdry. And no writer wants to be associated with cheap or tawdry.

By Charles J. Muir

Write Life

Midnight Writing

Many of us have been there at least once or twice in our lives. We've settled in for the night. The lights go off, the world's volume knob gets turned down to "shhh, it's sleep time" level. You're ready for sleep after a long day of surviving humanity. And then your brain wakes up.

An idea, out of nowhere. Either a complement to a work in progress, or for an entirely new literary endeavor. If you don't write it down now, it could be lost to the ether forever. But if you do get up, turn on a light, fire up the computer, open up a new document, and start typing, sleep will become but a fleeting memory.

It's always a tough call whether to write when inspiration strikes or to try and hold onto the grains of sand which hold your new shiny ideas. As aggravating and terrible as movement and lamplight might be, I find it best to give in. Metaphorical grains of sand are just as hard to hold on to as real grains of sand. Go on, try and get a fist full of sand and hold onto every grain with just one hand. They slip through the cracks. And the harder you hold, the more grains slip out.

Get up, settle in, and write what you have while you have it. I've lost many a world-shattering plots because the siren call of my bed was just too strong.

It's not even remotely easy to write when the inspiration strikes you, because it'll strike at the most inopportune moments. In the shower, while you're driving, when you need to defuse a bomb with some nail clippers and bubble

It's not even remotely easy to write when the inspiration strikes you, because it'll strike at the most inopportune moments.

gum. The usual scenarios. It can also strike when you're busy at work, or out with friends, and my personal favorite is when you're at a movie, in the middle row, surrounded by others where there's no escape.

It helps to have a notebook nearby and a pen of course to write with. But if you're waking up at 3 in the

morning with ideas of what to do with that secret agent man with the yellow slicker and robotic eye, you're not going to want to turn on the light to write it down, no matter how convenient a setup you've created for yourself.

And never mind about how a significant other may react if you turn on the light to start writing down words. There's no way to convince them that their lack of sleep is beneficial to your word count and absolutely necessary for the sake of your characters.

You could always try a small flashlight and write short hand. A few quick notes keep the main bits and pieces of your idea together. The rest can slip back into place after the sun rises and you've let your body rest a few hours.

I've settled for a stenographer's notepad - a 6" x 9" pad of paper I can jot ideas down in semi-legible scribble. As I have no significant other to startle awake with blinding lamps, it's not too difficult to jot down ideas when I need to. It's more a matter of focusing my eyes long enough to not see double, and make sure that I'll be able to read my writing later. There's been a few times where I merely managed a few badly done hieroglyphics on the page and didn't realize until later.

I strongly suggest that you at least set up a notepad or scrap of paper by your bed. Something to write on, even if it's leftover napkins from that Chinese food you had last week and a broken crayon that you stole from Friendly's because it was called "Pixie Powder" (Yes that's an actual Crayola color). Even if you use it one time out of twenty, that's one more idea that you'll be able to look back on and try to work with. Give it a shot and see what dreams your brain will encourage you to make into novels.

By Charles J. Muir

It's always a tough call whether to write when inspiration strikes or to try and hold onto the grains of sand which hold your new shiny ideas.

Killing the Inner Critic

You're on a roll, the words are spilling out of your brain and onto the paper almost faster than you can write them. And then a little voice pops up in your head. Not the one telling you to go become a circus clown. Not the one reminding you to buy more cheese. The inner critic. The little nagging voice saying "you can't use *those* words." or "you're really going to write *that*?"

One of the most dreaded foes of any writer, equal only to the writer's block itself. - The Inner Critic. Destroyer of Dreams, Killer of Creativity, and many other nasty names that probably shouldn't be printed lest a younger audience view them.

As far as intangible personifications of a person's psyche goes, I dislike this one the most. My inner critic doesn't like anything I write, unless it's been revised several times. And sometimes not even then.

This is of course to be differentiated from the inner editor. The inner editor make relatively constructive criticisms on how to revise or change your work. The inner critic just likes to chew your words with a bit of Tabasco sauce for flavor.

There's always that 'one more thing' that needs to be changed, or doesn't sound quite right. Over the years I've found a few methods for distracting my inner critic, for short periods of time.

Blind & Deaf

If I close my eyes and start typing, my inner critic can't quite figure out what I'm writing. Apparently it needs the visual stimulus to figure out what to complain about.

The blind typing technique requires a bit of keyboard skill on the writer's part, otherwise there'll be a lot of typos once you open up your eyes again. I've gotten relatively proficient in this technique, but there's always a few wrong words.

Musical Transference

Another possible technique is music, loud music. I sometimes turn on the radio (yes people still listen to FM radio these days) and use the background noise as a distraction.

My inner critic likes peace and quiet, the music and lyrics throw it off a bit. It's possible my inner critic just can't multi-task

between the music and my typing.

If you try this method, be aware of volume levels, especially if using headphones. We don't want you going deaf while trying to drown out the voices in your head.

Caging the Beast

Some writers can create an intangible cage, to trap their intangible critic in. picturing your inner critic as some relatively intimidating creature, and then placing it in a cage, box, or containment field of some sort can be all a writer needs to start writing without distractions.

I've had little luck with this method as my inner critic seems to weasel its way out of containers better than Houdini ever could. I feel this is more of a temporary solution, more for when I need to do a quick word sprint. 15 minutes or so, at best, before my inner critic is sitting on my shoulder, playing the backseat driver while I try to pound out words.

Strength in Numbers

I've heard a few writers use this method, with relative success. Picture some of your characters, and arm them with medieval weaponry. Then let them loose on your inner critic. The mob of angry characters makes for a good distraction to your inner critic, while you go write what you need to.

I've admittedly never tried this concept, as my characters might kill my inner critic permanently. And as much as I loathe my critic, I still need it during the revision process.

The Direct Approach

If all else fails you could always just try telling the inner critic to stuff it. Metaphorically speaking. The inner critic, along with all the other intangible personifications of the writing process, are all in your mind. And your mind is under your control. Turn your critic into a football and punt it into the back corner of your mind. Or feed it to the fishes. Whatever you prefer and feel would be effective.

The inner critic only has power over you if you let it. Without you, the critic wouldn't even exist, so let it know that you're the one calling the shots.

By Charles J. Muir

Literary Latte

At The World's End

Fading sunlight.

Just Feeling.

Sparkles through grime-spattered bedroom window.

Abstract representations.

Twilight descends.

A humanity lost, edge forward.

Whispers in the dark.

There is no light left to shine upon these lost souls.

A peace-shattering howl rises towards the rooftops.

All creatures, with a capacity for existence, fear.

The shadows grow restless.

Shadows such as these, tatter and fray.

The shadows emerge when least wanted.

Lost to fear, they simply fade away.

When least needed.

Awkward shells.

A simple task.

Cracked open, for the world to ignore.

Carried out dozens, hundreds of times before.

This is not the final day.

Survive the night.

There are still more dawns to endure.

Survive the darkness.

There are more shadows.

Whispers.

There are more whispers in the dark.

Growing louder.

There are "one more chance" moments.

Encroaching on the moment.

Sunrise ascends.

Shadows, coalescing into figures.

Whispers in the dark.

The nightmare children.

A peace-shattering howl rises towards the rooftops.

Never lasting, always longing.

The shadows grow restless.

Longing to be more.

The shadows return when they came.

Longing for life.

Returning to the ether and corner of your eye.

Never finding.

Fading into the void.

Never living.

Ready for tonight.

Just watching.



Upcoming Events:

Upcoming events have been put on a temporary hiatus while we restructure the website, and prepare for another evolution of the FCWriters organization.

Stay tuned.

Next Month:

Next month's issue focuses on the topic of **Handling Character**. We'll also have new writing prompts, articles, and more.

How To Subscribe:

To subscribe, register on our website at:

<http://www.FCWriters.com>

to receive future issues, and read through our back issues, all available in .PDF format.

Brought To You By:

The FCWG is managed, maintained, and run by **Charles Muir** of New Canaan, CT. As Literary Director, he oversees the day to day operations of the writing group, produces this magazine, and schedules local events throughout the year.

The back-end, behind the scenes work is done by our Technical Director, **Calvin Williams** of Brooklyn, NY. Calvin single-handedly ensures that the website and all its components run as smoothly as possible.

Staff Writer **Lauren Welch** is currently a college student in Indiana. When she isn't slaving over class work, Lauren enjoys tormenting her muse to try and get something written.

Staff Writer **KD Crowell** has held some twenty jobs so far, most having nothing to do with writing. This has given her great motivation to complete some nine novels in draft. In the Great Game of Publishing, she has achieved the status of "Agent Passed for Market Reasons." She is actively working towards "Agent Fainted With Joy."

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Expense Sheet

Below is a summary of our monthly financials for not only producing this magazine, but running the online writing group throughout the course of the year.

Our expenses include webhosting fees, magazine submissions, local event materials, and general group maintenance.

Annual Donations to Date: \$535

Annual Expenses to Date: \$480

Total Annual Funds to Date: \$55