

6. The daily task

Setting aside some part of each day in which to write is not easy for most people – the conflicting demands of job, family and social life tend to fill our waking hours with nothing to spare. The habit of writing each day is such a good one to cultivate, however, that it's well worth making the effort.

- Draw a grid with separate squares for each waking hour of each day. For at least a week, keep an hourly record of how you spend your time – job, meals, shopping, visiting friends or relatives, watching TV etc. If there are gaps, why not use those times to write? [Writing every day is essential, writing *at the same time* every day may be a luxury you can't afford.] If there are no gaps, take a hard look at how you fill your time. Do you watch TV simply because it has become a habit? Why not replace that habit with the habit of writing, and become an active TV viewer rather than a passive one? Still stumped? Try getting up an hour earlier.
- Once you've identified your time slots, think about your writing environment. Somewhere quiet helps, but the main thing is a lack of distractions. At a desk near a window that you can gaze out of is not a good idea, nor is a table in the room where the family is watching TV. Bedrooms and kitchens are good places – as long as no-one is sleeping or cooking/eating there at the same time – and writers who have habitable garden sheds should consider themselves truly blessed.
- Don't get hung up about the writing method. The important thing is to get your ideas down on the page, and it's absolutely irrelevant whether you do so via pen, pencil, typewriter, PC, scrap of paper, reporter's notebook, ruled A4 pad, hand-made paper or vellum.
- Beware of the 'sharpening pencils' syndrome – the often unconscious tendency to put off little tasks (feeding the cat, alphabetically sorting your CDs) and then suddenly remember them the moment you're supposed to start writing! It may not feel like fear, but that's precisely what it is – the fear of writing.

Finally, always fill your writing time with writing, even if you feel you've nothing to say. Write down anything – what you've done that day, a rant against the iniquities of a world that doesn't give you enough time for writing, a moan about your 'writer's block' – anything that will get you into the habit of putting your thoughts down on paper. Look on it as a warming up exercise.