

10 Ways to Overcome Lack of Motivation

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Alone with your blinking cursor or blank page, it's easy to feel discouraged. You want to produce your best writing, but you can't even seem to get started.



Actor Will Smith tells a story about when his father asked he and his brother to build a brick wall when they were teens. The job seemed overwhelming. The way he chose to approach the wall can speak to us writers. "You don't think about building the best brick wall ever built. Instead you think, 'I am going to lay this one brick the best way I can.' You do the same for each brick, and eventually you have the wall."

Here are ten ways to fortify yourself as you build your manuscript.

1. **Surrender perfectionism.** When we say "I can't write because it won't be perfect," our self-defeating subtext is, "I am capable of perfection." One comfort of writing is that revision is not only possible, it's a requirement. Get the words down in any form. Improvement will come later.

2. **Take small steps.** When frozen into inactivity and negative thinking, it's important that you take action, even a small one. Put some words down. Do a bit of research. Read a mentor text.



Anne Lamott says it best. I have her words framed on my writing desk: "When I panic about what to write, I go back to trying to breathe, slowly and calmly, and I finally notice the one-inch picture frame that I put on my desk to remind me that all I have to do is to write down as much as I can see through a one-inch picture frame." --from *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*.

<http://tinyurl.com/lamott-bird>

3. **Create a habit.** Stephen Guise, in *Mini Habits: Smaller Habits, Bigger Results* (<http://tinyurl.com/guise-habit>), reveals the secret for overcoming procrastination. Create a goal so small that your inner perfectionist can find no fault with it. For Guise, it was one push-up a day. Do the pushup. Check the box. Celebrate. Sure, he could do more, and he often did, but one push-up was the goal. The habit of action is more important than what's created at first. Action will lead to results. My daily writing goal is 10 minutes. Then I get a gold sticker on the calendar!



4. **Exercise.** We've got to spend time in our chair, but not for too long. I use a simple Tomato Timer, <http://tomato-timer.com>. A click sets it for 25 minutes. Proceed with work until it rings. Then click "short break." Get up and move, even if just to empty the dishwasher. Or use the desk stretches from WebMD, <http://tinyurl.com/stretchies>. Then return to your work, eager and refreshed.

5. **Choose your optimal time.** When's your most creative time? Carve your 10 minutes from that time. Leave a paragraph unfinished at the end of each writing session. It kick starts momentum for the next session.



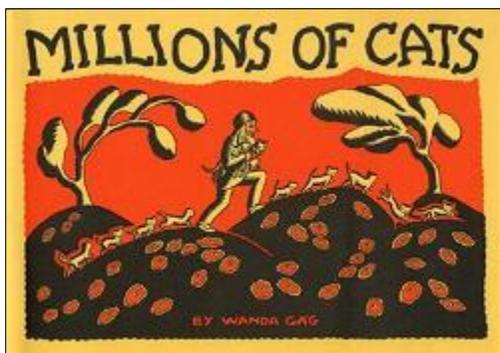
6. **Work when you don't feel like it.** On his way to the South Pole, Capt. Robert Scott required his men to travel as far as possible on good days and rest on bad days. Roald Amundsen required his men to travel 20 miles every day, no matter the weather, then stop. Amundsen reached the Pole five weeks ahead. Be faithful to small time periods of daily writing no matter your feelings.

7. **Be realistic.** The path of progress looks more like a tangle of spaghetti than a straight arrow. Bryan Harris, online entrepreneur, says, "The first time you do something, it takes 100 times longer. Know that. Understand it. Lean into it."



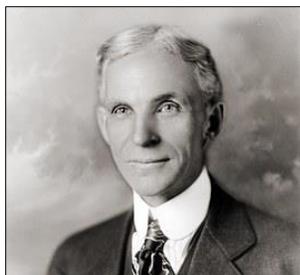
8. **Don't self-limit yourself.** An invisible fence keeps our dog in the yard. An underground wire sends a mild shock to his collar if he crosses it. After two shocks, he didn't cross again. That was four years ago. He hasn't worn the collar for years and could easily cross the line without shock, but his memory limits himself. We do something similar when we tell ourselves. "I can't write nonfiction" or "I can't write while my children are young." Is your perceived "shock" keeping you from crossing into an opportunity?

9. **Don't be afraid of failure... expect it!** Watch a toddler try to walk. It can't be done without lots of falling and getting back up. The same thing will be true of you as you improve your craft. Take the advice of writer Joseph Michael, "Reframe the way you view failure by simply thinking of it as experimenting."



10. **Gather ideas constantly.** In *Millions of Cats*, Wanda Gag wrote about an old man who went out to find a kitten for his wife. He found a cute little kitten and headed home. Then he found another and picked it up. By the time he arrived home, he had hundreds of cats, thousands of cats, millions and billions and trillions of cats. Ideas are as readily available.

Challenge yourself to keep an idea notebook handy. I've recently gotten ideas from a TV commercial, a newspaper article, something my granddaughter said, and from an offhand remark made by a conference speaker. Tara Lazar's StoryStorm provides a motivational post each day in January while encouraging you to simply come up with a single idea per day for one month. You can access it (and previous years) at <https://taralazar.com/piboidmo>.



It's good to remember what Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can do something or think you can't..You're right."

This is the sign I have hanging near my writing desk. When all else fails, type or write this mantra until you have primed the creative pump and are ready to write something else. You can do it!

