

Increase your writing productivity by following these five, simple rituals.

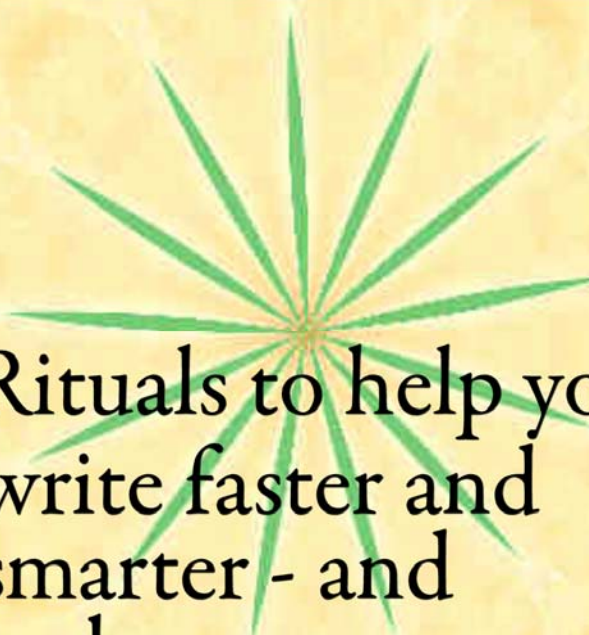
Writing Rituals

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Writing Rituals

For Freelance Writers & Copywriters



5 Rituals to help you
write faster and
smarter - and
make more money

Nick Usborne

Writing Rituals

**A productivity guide for commercial
writers and copywriters.**

By Nick Osborne

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Introduction

I started thinking about this guide a while ago, out of necessity.

I have been a freelance copywriter for almost three decades now. And although I have always made a good living, my level of productivity has not always been consistent.

To be honest, there have been times when it has fluctuated wildly.

I remember good days when I would get more work done before 10:00AM in the morning than I had achieved during the entire day before.

I survived that way, but I didn't do as well as I could.

I also discovered something else. It wasn't just my levels of productivity that varied. The quality of my writing work varied as well. Although not true all of the time, I often found that assignments which were completed during a time of strong focus tended to be better than those I had written while feeling distracted.

What's happening here?

As a commercial writer I'm certainly not alone in struggling with an inconsistent level of productivity.

I have corresponded with dozens of other writers and copywriters who have had the same problem. This applies both to writers who are employed, and freelancers.

The biggest problem is that we are constantly losing FOCUS.

We lose focus when it comes time to start writing on a particular assignment, we lose focus during the course of writing and we lose focus as we try to finish the task.

What is this mysterious force that drives us to lose our focus?

DISTRACTIONS.

These may be real, physical distractions like people phoning us, meetings, or urgent emails to answer.

But as writers we are also prone to distractions that we create for ourselves.

You are scheduled to start writing on a particular job at 9:00AM on Monday morning...

But as 9:00AM approaches you find yourself suddenly drawn to other, unrelated tasks. You check out a web site or two. You decide to clean up your email inbox. You check your voicemail for messages.

And if you are a freelancer working from home, the potential distractions multiply like crazy.

You fill the dishwasher. You flip through the pages of a magazine. You suddenly feel compelled to spend a little time browsing through FaceBook, or even take the dog for a walk.

We know that it's time to get started on that job. But something is holding us back.

We KNOW we have to get started. But there is this little demon on our shoulders, tempting us with 101 other ways in which to spend our time.

And we LIKE that little demon. We actually INVITE distraction. If there isn't a genuine distraction available to us, we INVENT one.

So what the heck is going on here?

We are falling victim to that range of work ailments that plagues anyone whose livelihood depends on their creativity.

Painters, screenwriters, musicians, sculptors, street artists, novelists and anyone else who makes money from their creativity all have the same struggles.

Novelists get writer's block. Painters procrastinate all the time.

This happens to everyone who depends on the right side of their brain for their income.

But we're commercial writers, right?

Yes we are. We're not writing novels, we're writing ads, white papers, articles, web pages, sales letters and a host of other things.

But we still depend on our inner creativity to get the job done well.

We are still faced with a blank screen or a blank sheet of paper, just like any other writer.

We're not creating whole new worlds of fiction. But we are still having to use our creativity to bring life to our communications.

We are still creating, even if we are given an outline and structure to follow, and an outcome to achieve.

We are creative, but working within the demands of a commercial environment.

An editor may indulge a novelist who is falling behind. A gallery owner may support and encourage a painter who is struggling to get all his or her paintings completed in time for an exhibition.

But as commercial writers, we don't get that kind of treatment and flexibility.

We have to work fast, and deliver on time.

We work within a framework of tight schedules. The right side of our brain is having to perform within a left-brain environment.

And no client or manager is going to pat us on the shoulder and say, "No worries, I know there is a big component of creativity in your work. I understand that. So if you need to take a little extra time, that's no problem."

It might be nice to hear that kind of thing at times. But it very rarely happens.

This loss of productivity impacts us beyond simply struggling to get our work completed on time.

Losing focus can have a very negative impact on our lives.

Here's a scenario that plays out all too often.

1. You have struggled with your last two writing assignments. It felt like trying to sprint through treacle. Every line was a struggle. You constantly felt distracted and lost focus. It took you a lot longer to complete the job than it should have done.
2. You start to feel a slight loss in confidence. You begin to question yourself. The bottom line is that you're beginning to feel bad. Your loss of productivity is dragging you down.
3. You wake up each morning feeling depressed. You don't look forward to your writing tasks for the day, because you fear that today will be just like all those other days...a struggle.
4. The cycle perpetuates itself. Each bad day feeds the next.

If nothing like this has ever happened to you, you're lucky. This happens to a lot of commercial writers, particularly freelancers.

A while back I conducted a survey among commercial writers, asking whether they ever suffered from depression related to their work.

Over 50% of the respondents said they did.

Here's how the 5 Writing Rituals can help you.

I first started developing these rituals for myself. I needed and wanted a way to establish some consistency in how effectively I used my time.

I wanted each day to be as close as possible to being a "perfect productivity" day.

How did I arrive at the 5 Rituals?

First, I looked at how other professionals planned their days and their tasks.

There have been dozens of books and guides written for business people who are looking for ways to use their time more productively.

The popularity of these books really took off with the publication of Stephen Covey's book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People".

Another book published more recently, is David Allen's "Getting things Done".

These are both excellent books.

But I wanted to find something a little different. While books written for business people in general carry some excellent lessons, I wanted to create a structure and process that was customized for writers. I wanted to create a productivity guide that would suit a right brain working in a left-brain environment.

So I thought about my brother, who is a cabinet maker.

A cabinet maker?

Yes. And the nature of his work has some strong similarities with commercial writing.

- Like us, he works to a budget and a deadline.
- Like us, he is provided with a briefing and a description of the required outcome. ("Kitchen cabinets to fit in this exact space, please.")
- Like us, he follows the directions provided, but is also expected to contribute some of his own, creative input. ("What wood would you think is going to work best in this space?" Or "What can we do with the corner cabinet to make it easy to store my pots and pans?")
- Like us, when it comes time to get started, he's on his own. (We have our blank sheet of paper, he has a pile of lumber.)

However...

There are some HUGE differences in how we prepare and execute our respective assignments.

As writers, many of us simply "get started". We read the briefing materials, we do some research. Maybe we'll do a little brain storming with some colleagues, if we are employed.

But once we have absorbed the brief, we generally open a new file on our computers and start writing.

Is that how my brother works?

Absolutely not.

He prepares. He plans. He visualizes.

He draws up plans. He measures everything precisely. He works out how best to use his time and his materials. He pins the plans up on the wall in his workshop. Every last element is included and measured.

He never starts until everything is in place, until he can see the final product in his mind's eye.

In a sense, he has already created it. All that remains is to bring it to life with the lumber he has purchased.

When I look at his approach compared to my own, and that of many other commercial writers, I find myself appearing to be undisciplined and sloppy in my own approach to work.

This is where the 5 Rituals came from...

Watching my brother work gave me the inspiration to create these 5 Rituals for writers.

Like a cabinet maker, we can do more to prepare for each assignment. We can plan more thoroughly. We can schedule our writing time with more precision. We also can visualize our outcomes and see what it is we are going to create, before we face that blank page.

It is by applying a more disciplined approach that we can minimize those lapses in focus and productivity.

By planning our work more thoroughly, we can keep our eyes clearly on what needs to be done next. We can follow a clear process, step by step, whatever the writing task may be.

When we give ourselves this kind of structure, we become far less susceptible to distractions, whether they be external, or of our own invention.

Why "Rituals"?

Why do I describe the steps and processes in this guide as rituals, and not habits?

The distinction is deliberate.

Habits are often random. Some are positive, while others are negative. We have good habits and bad habits.

A ritual is very different. A ritual is deliberate, not random. And a ritual has a deeper meaning.

Buying a coffee on the way to work is a habit. It's neither good nor bad. It's just a habit. Part of our morning routine.

Reading to your kids at bedtime is a ritual. It's deliberate. It has meaning. And your kids will always remember you reading to them, even when they are adults themselves.

Putting up a Christmas tree is a ritual for Christians. It has meaning. It defines a time. It carries the promise of gifts and celebration.

A habit is something that happens without thought.

A ritual is something we think about.

That's why I want this guide to be about rituals. I want each of the five steps in this process to be thoughtful and filled with meaning.

By applying the rituals, one after another, you will find that your work experience is transformed.

You will no longer be plagued by distractions or lack of focus.

You will find yourself writing at a consistent pace, with clear targets to achieve, within a specific timeframe.

The entire writing experience will become "cleaner," better structured and more deliberate.

Finally, you will find yourself becoming a great deal more productive. You'll also find the quality of your work improving.

And, particularly if you are a freelancer, you will find yourself making more money.

And enjoying life more.

Increase your writing productivity by following these five, simple rituals.

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