

Don't Plan Your Day, Plan Your Writing

By Ann Charles

Ah, children—adorable beings who can foil a well-planned day and leave you sweating with frustration by noon. There is little use planning your day, especially when you have youngsters. Instead, plan what writing-related project you will do when you have a free five, fifteen, or thirty minutes; or if you're really lucky, one or two hours. (This applies to those of you with full-time jobs, too.)

Let me show you what I mean.

Five Minutes

In five minutes, you can:

- Check your email. These bits of time are great for reading emails and writing quick responses. Email isn't like face-to-face conversations. Reply whenever you get to it.
- Write down your ideas. Remember that scene that popped into your head while changing the sixth diaper of the morning or washing your hands in the bathroom sink at work? Make a brief note of it. You need only enough words to spark more later.
- Brainstorm about media outlets ideal for marketing your book. Again, short notes here. You'll research these when time permits.

Wherever you are, keep paper and pencil nearby. Ideas can disappear as fast as they appear. WRITE THEM DOWN!

Fifteen Minutes

If you are like me and have a job as well as kids at home, the amount of time and energy you can devote to writing is scarce. You must use spare time at work and home wisely.

- Perform high-level research related to your book's setting, subject, or marketing potential. If you have Internet access, look up the average temperatures in Alaska for July, find popular beaches in Costa Rica, or search for motorcycle conventions where you could sell your motorcycle-mystery novel.
- Read writing-related articles. The most recent issue of *First Draft* is waiting.
- Call your critique partner and discuss that scene idea you noted during a five-minute break. You are time-impaired, so keep your chatting to a minimum.

Thirty Minutes

Wow, a whole half hour! Now you're getting spoiled.

- Edit one to two pages (or more) of the chapter you finished last weekend.
- Research deeper. Scan through that library book on 19th century guns or search the Internet for names of rare orchids. The key is to stay on target and avoid tempting headlines (says she who often ends up on some website about alien babies or desert tortoises and wonders how she got off on this tangent and what she originally went online to look up).
- If you've had a scene on your mind for days, find a notebook or computer, mute your internal editor, and let the words fly. Don't worry about spelling, fill the page.

One (or Two!) Hours

Paydirt! The stars have aligned—your toddler and newborn are napping at the same time or it is lunch hour at work. Don't waste this time on email. Plop in front of that computer and focus on your manuscript. If you don't have computer access, grab some paper. No excuses—write! (Or if you have a rough draft in front of you, edit.)

Final Tips

- Turn off the TV. When it comes to writing, I'm sorry to say that TV is not your friend. (This one in particular cuts me deeply, darn it!)
- If your mother visits and offers to hold the baby or watch the kids for a bit, let her. You're a writer, not a martyr.
- Multi-task whenever possible. While changing diapers, filling up your coffee cup at work, or watching *Teletubbies* with your toddler, think (or talk) about writing. Remember, it takes only one hand to put pen to paper (for example, I wrote the draft of this article while feeding my baby).
- Avoid procrastinating. You don't have time for that lovely pleasure.

When time is tight, you have to make use of every spare moment. Plan what to do when your next opportunity to work on writing-related projects presents itself.

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