

When Getting Ready to Write, Sharpen Your Pencil



IT'S NO SECRET THAT WRITERS EXCEL at procrastination. If we happen to notice an unsharpened pencil or a ladybug making its way up the wall or have a stray thought—that's more than enough reason to stop writing (assuming we've even started) and focus on that distracting alternative.

Sometimes we take advantage of even longer periods of procrastination—and for each of these, in order to deal with the guilt, we have invented a specific rationalization. It's not "meeting a friend for lunch," it's Networking. It's not "vacationing in Hawaii," it's Gathering Important Life Experience. It's not "having sex all afternoon," it's Getting in Touch With Your Emotions and Learning About the Opposite Gender. It's not "going to see a movie," it's Research. Lately I've become aware of yet another form of procrastination, to which I fall victim. This form of procrastination is perhaps the most disturbing and insidious of them all. It speaks to the very heart of who we are, what

we do, what we want. And I'm not sure I'll ever be able to overcome it. Ladies and gentlemen, fellow writers, I hope you appreciate the amount of courage it takes for me to come clean about this, but here goes: I have become addicted to the idea of being a writer.

Yes, sadly, I am passionately interested in and devoted to every possible aspect of being a writer, with one exception—doing the actual writing. Ironic, isn't it? How dare I presume to call myself a writer? Would someone who watched the Food Network all day refer to himself as a chef? And yet I call myself a writer. I disgust myself.

Check out all the writing-related activities with which I fill my time—time that could be spent actually writing:

Books. I must have a hundred books on writing. Have I read even half of them? No. Would I be about 115 years old by the time I finished reading them all? Yes.

Writing conferences and seminars. The best thing about these conferences and seminars: While you're there, you have a legitimate excuse for not writing.

Screenwriting software. The box my screenwriting software came in proclaims, "Write polished professional scripts within minutes of opening the box!" Well, I've had the box opened for years, and apparently, in addition to the software's impressive features, you also need an idea, talent and discipline. But do they tell you that on the box? Noooooo.

Writers Guild of America. I'm a member, so I can attend readings of works by fellow members, tributes to fellow members and a variety of "An Evening With" fellow members, during which, though I'm not actually writing, I'm supposedly gaining insight by finding out how someone else writes.

Writing paraphernalia. I have so many writer-themed mouse pads, T-shirts and refrigerator magnets that any half-decent detective might deduce that the owner of all this stuff is a writer. That same detective would have a far more difficult task acquiring evidence of actual writing on the premises.

You get the idea. I'm circling the writing area. I'm in the writing airspace. I'm holding for writing landing clearance. But I'm not writing. And I'm telling you this so that the next time you see me reading a book on writing, attending a writers conference or power schmoozing with someone at a Film Society screening, you stop me, shake me hard, slap me if you have to, and remind me that I should be at home writing. I have been warned.