

academic muse



**HOW I DOUBLED
MY DAILY WORD
COUNT**
part one

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IMMEDIATELY SHIFT INTO ANOTHER GEAR WITH A SIMPLE TECHNIQUE,
AND IT'S THE MOST POWERFUL 5 MINUTES YOU CAN SPEND AS A WRITER

Double Your Daily Word Count Lesson One:
Precognition

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Welcome to the Course

Dear Writer,

Writing is an art of attention. And attention in writing depends on how you frame it.

Creative academic writing is unleashed by shifts in attitude and attention that afford the freedom and success it takes to relax into the creative process. This includes, quite simply, getting results down on the page. Seeing the results of a steady, productive writing habit relaxes the anxious and resistant mind well enough to allow true potential to shine through.

So the first shifts in attention we need in order to be more creatively productive are ones that build confidence and mute fear.

Thing is, it's kind of a vicious cycle. We won't want to keep our attention framed on writing for very long if we feel we are not producing

well. And we won't see results that make us feel like we are succeeding if we don't keep our attention framed on writing.

But this can also evolve into a wonderful cycle, depending on which way the momentum is going.

For the creative academic writer, much is at stake: writing is how you earn your living. It is the source of your livelihood. Yet somehow, writing can get shoved off to the side. Wierd!

The latest theoretical trend, the latest students who need help, the latest research topic you are looking into, all these somehow pop up and they don't have to audition for your attention. They have your attention.

Writing, somehow, needs to make a case. And I am making it here now. That's okay. That's what we are here for. To keep making the case.

Writing itself needs to be framed, over and over, as a distinctly important object of attention that is to be developed for its own sake.

Writing is that important, and a shift is necessary that places it in its proper position. So the techniques in this first course are not simply "how to" writing techniques but, more importantly, attention framing shifts, the power of which may only become obvious to you after you try them out.

Wishing you the best,

Alan

Precognition:
Knowing what
you are going to
write before you
write it.

Attention Shift Number One

...and the Number One Myth
about Creative Productivity

MY PRICE OF ADMISSION

Today's installment of *ACADEMIC MUSE* begins with the one 5 minute daily activity that has helped me the most to boost my productivity.

Now, just warning you, it might sound stodgy. It might not sound like the way you would kick off a course on creative academic writing. But I consider this a good thing. It's the price of admission to this eCourse and I am going to make you pay it up front:

A great way to boost your creative freedom is on the foundation of regular habits that allow you to relax because the eventual outcome is certain.

And the first habit is...

wait for it....

wait for it...

Planning.

There, I said it. Turn back now if you wish.

I know. I know what they say about creative writing.

These days, you can't ride your white unicorn anywhere without stomping on a writing book that says you must suppress your analytic

mind in order to be productive. They're all over the place.

This is a myth you might consider abandoning. Your analytic mind, in proper measure, can be your best friend.

Once upon a time, as was my way of writing creatively, I would go to my desk or a coffee shop, open up my laptop, and then just see what might happen. Several hours later, I might have something. I might not. Or I might have a big mess that perplexed me for several more days or weeks before I had to throw the whole thing out.

Now, those open-the-laptop-and-go days can be fun, a delight, and I'm not saying you shouldn't do this sometimes.

But if you want to write more, over the long haul, then the simple technique that I am about to impart to you will probably do more than anything else to jumpstart things to a new level. It's simple. It's effective.

When I tell it to you, you might think it is nothing. Pay attention! When you actually try it, you are going to think there has been some kind of conspiracy or sick joke played on you, for certainly someone should have told you about it before.

And if you say it didn't help you, then your pants will be on fire,

for you will be a liar!

OPENLAPTOPITIS

I blame, in a way, the copious amount of TV I watched as a child, though I know that many people with the same problem didn't grow up that way.

There is just this way of relating to a screen. There is just something about our culture of electronic screens where we believe that when the screen is on, it feels somehow like we are on, or “game on!”

So we get that “just press on” habit. When it comes to our work it feels, subjectively, like we are “pressing on” with our work, when all that’s happened is the screen is on. We’re not moving on, pressing on. We’re getting nowhere. It’s like we open the laptop and we’ve punched in our punchcard at the auto factory. It feels like we are doing the right thing. We are working.

So people can spend 4-5 hours or even 8-10 hours at their laptop in fits and starts, maybe writing a bit, maybe revising, maybe fiddling around and fussing with things. Other people might find themselves doing the opposite, just not willing to sink into that mire, and so they regularly avoid writing altogether, for days at a time, or weeks. Then they blame themselves for being lazy or irresponsible, when all they did was avoid a futile situation.

With the old method, I did write a lot sometimes. But I would have to throw out so much, because I often couldn’t fit it in anywhere.

So either you work hard at the laptop and feel like there is something wrong with you because you are not making progress, or you instinctively avoid that and just get a different serving of “you suck.”

Or you might be somewhere in the middle, at the laptop but taking what seem like innocent little dive-bombs into other laptop activities that aren’t really breaks, but just more ways to dissolve into the screen.

And no, I’m not going to proceed to talk here about the evils of having the internet on while you are working, or the like. I’m assuming you already have had that revelation. If not, wake up. And take action. You can do it. But I don’t have time to talk about those kinds of things as I have something far more important to tell you:

Have you ever spent a whole 8 hour day stuck with the same chapter or section, trying to sort it out one way, or another way, or trying to fit this piece in here or there, or revising transitions, or figuring out what material will go in either of two chapters or parts or what theories will be raised in what sections? Or... well you can supply a lot more examples.

Or maybe it happened a while back now, and you haven't really been writing lately (for some mysterious reason!) Maybe you cringe so much at just the thought of being in such a state, that you avoid writing altogether. Or maybe you don't know why you haven't been writing. Something doesn't want to. And it's been going on a while like that.

In my case, once upon a time, it was more than a few days in the state of furious effort. It was a whole lot of days— not sure about how to get from A to B. But I was working, if you could call it that, and very hard. Finally one day, I got sick and tired and had had enough. It suddenly occurred to me what a fool I was. It was a flash of recognition, which like all such flashes in life, doesn't sound like much when first put into words (you had to be there).

I could see what I was doing: **trying to figure out what to write, while I was writing!** I was figuring things out while writing, and writing while figuring things out.

How about figuring things out when figuring things out, and writing when... well writing?

Had I tried that, or was I going to stick with a method that guaranteed it would all take the most time humanly possible to do either?

Putting it that way now, I feel kind of stupid. But hey, my laptop was on, so I knew I was working. I was a good boy.

But suffering. So what I did, when I realized what was happening, was close down the screen, take out my notebook, and jot down how it was going to go down. Instead of working it out in words that I possibly

intended my reader to see in the future, I described it in words no one on this earth would ever see but me.

I described what I was going to write, as in: the what. I didn't write it, I just jotted down what I was going to write for the day, but in the future, separated by time, the distinct writing time which was not now but would take place in about 5 minutes from now.

I kept this strict separation: between noting what you are going to write, on the one hand, and actual drafting and writing of the words that a reader might read, on the other. And it was the quickest, easiest, most fast acting thing I could have ever done to boost my daily word count.

It may not sound like much until I explain it more, but if you put it into practice you will see results probably on the first day, and if you follow it through regularly you will see that you have a whole new life.

It takes just about 5 minutes to sketch out what you are going to write before you write it. So it's not like you are gambling with a whole lot of time and effort. If I change my mind while I am jotting things down, I can change it with a flick of the eraser, and I am not wiping out hours of effort.

This is very different than the hours of writing that I would have to throw away, before. And who wants to start all over again, feeling that the next hours of writing might all be for nothing?

How many of us take 5 minutes out before the beginning of our writing session and identify what it is we are going to write?

I am guessing most people begin with a plan similar to my old one:

1. turn laptop on
2. work hard
3. hope for the best

HOW TO DO IT

Well, the first and most important step is to become aware of what your thinking-mind thinks it is doing, when the laptop is on, and you are “writing.” This is why I say writing is an art of attention.

So: is the mind trying to figure out what to do— how to solve the puzzle— or is it time to write?

Be clear about this.

Now this is not a philosophy. So this might conflict with how we have thought about writing and creativity before. And, it’s not a fascist regime either. It’s really about being clear about what is planning and what is writing. It doesn’t mean that you can’t discover what you are up to while writing. It means you don’t rely on that.

So get clear.

If it is time to plan, explore, figure out, then you know what you have to do (if you want to boost your daily word count).

Off.

Or better yet, it was never On. The screen I mean.

It should be a ritual. Before you get to your document.

Before you write, you should jot down on paper what it is you are actually going to write about. Be specific (more on this later). Do this before you write, every time you sit down for your distinct writing time.

If you already know what you are going to do, because you jotted it down yesterday and didn’t finish, then read it over again today, circle what you are going to do today, add a couple notes if necessary. Do this before your writing time. Make it a ritual. Enforce it, because it is only 5 minutes and you can do it.

Every time, distinctly separate the figuring-out time from the writing time with the 5 minutes of planning.

Very quickly, you will see your writing ease increase exponentially, and then it will be raining words.

Now, if you haven't been in the habit of doing this, then it might not be clear to you what it is that you are actually to do in these 5 minutes. It may sound like an outline, and it could be, but there are a lot of better possibilities. And there are a lot of skills you can learn which will make this 5 minutes more and more effective over time.

It has to do with how much you have trained in awareness of writing form, which is something you can actually train yourself in, with specific exercises. Still, we already have this sense because we have read a lot things and been around the block. Anyone can do very well with this practice using what they have already ingrained in them now.

We can start minimally here. I will go into the true power of this in just a second here, but let's not skip over a bare minimum effect which is no small matter.

Let's focus on the incredible power of focus that this practice brings.

Because if you are anything like me, there are at least 4 or 5 things you could work on when you sit down to write, not to mention the hundreds of places you could visit on the internet to get information, inspiration, etc. So anything that reinforces in your mind exactly what your purpose is for the next session and narrows it down, is going to be a huge boost to someone who has seen their writing periods fritter away before the eyes, or has seen weeks go by with something like "progress" on 5 different projects but never finishing anything.

So while there are a lot deeper things that I will say here, the first power unleashed is that you consciously choose, and this power cannot be underestimated. This is framing your attention, just about the best

thing you could do.

Still, it's possible to get far more granular in this power of choosing and commitment. And to take the next step, the important thing is not to **over-“how to do it”**: you simply identify the topics and subjects and material you are going to write about, in the order you are going to write them and which seems would work. Remember, you can change it while you are jotting it down, and you can change your mind later too. The important thing is you know the checklist of tasks you are going to do, and when it comes to writing, you are not wondering what it is you are doing. And when you finish some step, you know what to start next. So the best way to get to this level of detail is to go ahead and try it out and you will see it's not that hard.

But it might be helpful to have a few examples, so here are some possibilities...

Imagine that, in a section of a chapter in a book, an author wanted to make a certain point using an example drawn from research. They have 4 hours to work on that today, because it's a Saturday and the partner is on soccer game duty with the kids. Yeah!

But, wisely, before getting too excited about this huge stretch of time, and just jumping into openlaptopitis mode, they jot things down for five minutes, thusly:

Beginning: briefly discuss foucault's account of modern discipline, explain stages, add that quote about endless discipline

Explain how specific it was to French, european modernity. (Cite those three authors who make this point too).

Introduce my objection to them— where is this discipline not present today?

Detailed description of ritual. Start with their concept in the word "x," end with final ceremony.

Return to main point about Discipline. Bring that another quote from Foucault. Explain it. Then restate my main point.

I think you can see in this example that the person who is going to set out to write knows what they are going to write about before they write. You might not know, reading this here, because it is a “note to self.” But the imaginary writer knows what they are referring to in every part. So now it’s fun time: she gets to write and express herself without all the doubt and confusion.

Of course, your style of jotting things down can vary. I recommend something sharper, like a screenplay writer’s “beat sheet”:

- Foucault discipline intro
- 3 stages
- Endless disciple quote
- Specific to fr. modernity— cites
- Question, suggest refute
- intro Ritual
- X concept
- Preparations to start
- Final ceremony
- Main point about discipline
- Foucault quote, explain
- Restate point

Now, this is not an outline, because each of these “beats” are not equivalent structures.

The description of the ritual is going to take up a lot of space. This author already knows exactly how to describe the ritual or they would

have put the beats down in more detail. Or, they may find that this was wishful thinking, and that they skipped over a bit in their 5 minute prep: they have to go back and mark out the beats for every part of the ritual.

But as it is here so far, the explanation of Foucault's concepts, in the author's vision, is not going to be lengthy, yet there are some important twists and steps to it, so those are noted and the beat sheet is quite long on the shortest part of the actual writing.

Some beats might be a single sentence. Some might be a couple pages. So the beats don't correspond to page length, as in an outline, but to discreet writing activities each of which mark a new turn in the argument.

A beat is: **where something changes.**

And, **the order and progression of these changes is your argument** (or plot, if it's narrative).

So not only is this 5 minutes important for knowing what you are going to write before you write it, it also reveals how your argument is going to work.

These examples give the general idea. Whether you are a bit more descriptive, or stick to the beats, or a combination of the two, you have narrowed down your writing focus and now all your energy and attention can go into the actual writing of beautiful words.

There is a lot more about **beat-writing technique** that I can get to in the future, but it's important not to get hung up on "how to do it," and just do it, because the most important part is that you have set a definite aim for your writing session, consciously, and in writing. It is now in your attention, and writing is an art of attention.

I think you get the idea here. If I have jotted down anything like the above, when I actually sit down to write I know what I am going to do, and I know when I am going to do it, one after another. Then, I do it. I

carry it out. I write it.

And as I do so, I get clear about writing: what it is to actually experience productive writing. I get a concentrated dose of that experience—it feels closer to the productive essence of the act as an immanent, embodied activity. It's registered in awareness and it gets ingrained. It's conditioned into me, the writing instrument.

Now it's not crucial that you work this way, and only this way, for the rest of your life. But it **is** important, however, to do it regularly for a very long time, to really absorb the conditioning and sharpen your writing attention. Enforce it for a while, to correct your course. It is enough that, for a while, you have some clear, distinct experiences of writing purposefully and accomplishing something. This resets and recalibrates the writing instrument that is your self.

MOVING FORWARD

Of course, I still love to open my laptop and not know what is going to happen. I do it all the time! This is important too, and can be a joy when you feel mysteriously inspired.

What I am writing about here is very specific advice, intended only for someone who has a sense that they simply, flat out, no prisoners, just want to produce more.

Contrary to stereotypical images of tortured writers working on a bender, I'm willing to bet that almost all successful writers that you admire have made writing into a regular habit and a training which they have approached with an open mind to discovering what works best. And a regular writing habit, well conceived, is almost always what they discover in every single case. You can go look it up, because many great writers write about their writing habits.

Now there are three more important points in developing a powerful writing habit that all of the above raises, and these are:

- One, what does inspiration and enthusiasm have to do with this? And is there anything I can do to bring this into it? And the answer to that is, yes, absolutely. It's crucial and it is the subject of the next teaching in this course (coming to you soon). While the technique here works amazingly well, and is probably the easiest and fastest working, it works even better with the next one.

- Two, can I get better at sensing the beats and how their progression and order should fit together? And yes, you absolutely can. You can keep practicing this 5 minute planning. You'll find your way.

And, you can make a special effort to read a lot of books and articles like the ones you would like to write. Both practicing the 5 minute sketching and paying attention to great writing can help form to sink in, enable you to sense, more and more, what is a good form to fit your content into. And if you want to accelerate and deepen that process, there are specific techniques and exercises for that. Some of these are very old techniques, almost long lost now, from Ancient Greece. Some are newer techniques circulating among writers and some are born out of my own experiences and from my teaching of students.

- Three, all this sounds great, but like all techniques, it won't work if you don't do it regularly. **How can I be sure to do it regularly and stick through it to the end?** That will come up soon, in future installments of this course. So just stay tuned for the next installments of this course, and you'll find lots of things you can do to stay on track. It's all about follow through.

So discover this for yourself: a power of clarity takes your productivity to a new level when you clearly separate the act of figuring out what you are going to write in the immediate future, on the one hand, and actual writing on the other. That's how you double your daily word

count, right away.

This is, remember, not a philosophy of creativity. It is very specifically advice on how to get your writing productivity in gear, if that is what you are seeking. You will find that it is a lot easier to keep writing on the front burner of your attention, and thus your life, when your words are rolling out well. And likewise, when writing is in the frame of attention consistently, your writing output improves. The feedback loop becomes a powerful force in a writer's life, and starts to function automatically. That is why I put this one first. I hope you follow through and set this force in motion.

See you soon for the next one,

Alan

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online juice to finish
your creative academic
book, dissertation, article

Creative academic writing groups to keep you accountable and on track, combined with coaching, supervision, and tracking tools that your group can use to help each member move on with their goals and their life.

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