



Ardith's Notebook

February 2011

The writer's computer: Part 2

Have you ever noticed that struggling to read something can make you tired? Investing in a good computer screen is one of the best things you can do for your eyes and for your energy levels. Not only will a good screen keep you from squinting, it will also keep you alert for longer.

So what should you look for in a computer screen? With computer screens, bigger is often better. While mini-computers, like netbooks, make it easy to get work done on the go, consider using a full-sized screen for those longer writing sessions. Also, paying the extra money for an anti-glare treatment makes working much easier on those sunny days.

Have you ever thought about doubling up? Many writers—especially of non-fiction—find having two screens helps a lot with toggling back and forth between an Internet browser, notes, or earlier writing.

How often and how much should I be writing?

This question nags many writers of all stripes, and unfortunately, there is no single answer—there isn't any infallible rule dictating a writer's output. In his book *On Writing*, prolific author Stephen King suggests to shoot for 1,000 words per day, six days per week. Others will suggest something else, either more or less. However, most will agree that some form of daily habit is best.

The actual answer to this question is really up to you. Writing is primarily a craft, not some abstract, mystical art—it's something that requires you to work at it like any other skill or art you attempt to master, whether it be playing the guitar or learning a foreign language. The more you practice, the better you'll get. The more you write, the more you'll produce.

Set your own goals based on your desired outcome. If you wish to write a book, come up with a desired length and then break it down into achievable milestones. Only then will you determine whether 1,000 words per day is something you want to try. Even at 100 words per day, you will eventually write that book if you keep at it. Persistence is key, but don't worry too much if you miss a day or two now and again.

Writing dialogue

You have your plot and your setting, your characters and your big climax. Now, you need to actually tell your story, and one way you're going to do that is with dialogue. Good dialogue moves the tale along, conveys information to the reader, and adds to the picture of the overall scene of the book. Bad dialogue make the reader laugh in all the wrong places, irritates because it's incomprehensible, and bores because it's repetitive. Here are some hints for writing great speech for your characters.

- Listen to the way that people actually talk. Don't be afraid to write down good phrases you hear on the subway, in restaurants, or from passers-by on the street. Being aware of the turns of phrase used by people of different cultures, classes, and other social groups will help you to convey character through dialogue.
- Avoid exact reality. We all use verbal placeholders such as “umm,” “eh?” “like,” and “you know what I mean?” A few of these sprinkled throughout speech will lend authenticity; too many will drive the reader to turn the page.
- Watch out for stereotyping. If your character is meant to be Irish, for example, he or she needn't talk like the leprechaun on the Lucky Charms ads. Instead, the odd bit of pronunciation and a few pieces of dialect will be enough. Similarly, if you don't know what someone like your character actually sounds like, don't make assumptions. Find out.
- Don't overdo the interruptions. “He said,” “he asserted,” and “he insisted,” all mean pretty much the same thing. If your readers wonder how many times you reached for the thesaurus, it's too many. Instead, make the characters voices distinct enough that you needn't always indicate that someone is speaking.
- Make your characters individuals. Perhaps you've included a group of friends in your story. Will the reader be able to tell who's talking without checking every time? Perhaps some will use a particular turn of phrase, a favourite interjection, or a mispronunciation.



Ardith's Notebook is a monthly newsletter for writers and self publishers.

To unsubscribe to Ardith's Notebook email us and ask us to take you off our subscription list at info@ardith.ca

Our mailing address is:
520 Princess Avenue. London, Ontario, N6B 2B8

Our telephone:
1-877-288-0114

Copyright (C) 2010 | Ardith Publishing | All rights reserved.

[Forward](#) this email to a friend