

Where to Start with Time Management

One of the major issues people have with writing is finding the time to do so. I have to say sometimes it is a challenge for me. I taught full time at a community college. I had a business building websites, editing our church newsletter, and created new courses to teach online.

Nevertheless, during that time, I wrote the first draft of a novel. Most of us find time to do things which are important to us. None of us have huge blocks of uncommitted time. We simply decide how important some of those commitments are in comparison to writing.

A Time Use Inventory

Before you can make changes, you have to understand how you already use your time. To do this, Each day, write down what you do during each 15-minute time segment during the day. You can use any cheap day planner or use the template included in this lesson.

At the end of each day, review your actual schedule. Using some colored highlighters, mark each 15-minute segment under one of these headings:

Non-negotiable. This Includes your job, necessary family activities (remember not all things your kids or spouse want to do are mandatory), sleep (although sometimes I negotiate this a bit), required appointments, etc.

Negotiable - High Priority. These are things you don't absolutely have to do, but they have a very high priority for you. This could be something like going to the gym, a weekly night out with the guys/girls, church, club activities, etc.

Negotiable - Moderate Priority. These are activities that you like to do, but if necessary you could let go of them on occasion or reduce your involvement. For instance, I like to watch certain shows on TV, but if I haven't been able to get some writing done, I will let those shows go until I get my writing done. With on-demand cable programming, Hulu, Netflix, Amazon, online downloads and DVRs this isn't that much of a sacrifice.

Negotiable - Low Priority. These are things you can easily do without. I sometimes find myself flipping back and forth through the channels on my TV trying to find something, anything, to watch. Those are times I can just turn off the set and write.

Multi-Tasking Times. There are times when you could have been writing while doing something else. For instance, you might have been waiting for a doctor's appointment. You could take a netbook computer, tablet, smartphone, or a pen and pad and write instead of reading a five-year-old magazine. I have a mandatory office hour each day. Since I teach mostly online, nobody ever comes to see me. So, I just count that as extra time to write.

A Writing Habits Inventory

You probably write more in a day than you think. Between emails, Facebook, Twitter and text messages, the total can be pretty high. Most of it is probably expendable. I did this for myself recently. I discovered I wrote more words on Facebook than I did on my novel. To be fair, I do have a couple of business pages that I update regularly, but most of the posts were not related to business. Now, there is nothing wrong with posting to Facebook or Twitter, but it did show me that I had a lot of time for writing that I was using on these past times.

Here's what you do. Keep track of how many words you write right after you finish writing them with a little note. Here's mine for today:

FB 30

Twitter 30

Time Mgmt 39

time Management 435

EmailBus 50

time management 108

Email 100

FB 100

FB Bus 54

Twitter 15

Twitter 5

FB 25

Novel 75

Now, I probably missed a few, but it gives me a snapshot of my writing for today. I'm not doing too badly. I've worked on this course and my novel, but I'm pretty close to the same amount of writing on emails and Facebook.

The best way I found to do this is by using Evernote (<http://evernote.com/>). You can install Evernote on all your devices and computers for free. A note you make on one is synched on all of them. I just leave it open, and as soon as I stop writing, I either count or estimate the number

of words and add it to a note for that day. You could also use OneNote, your word processor, or even a paper notebook.

At the end of a week look over your totals. Is something lopsided? Are there types of non-essential or low-priority writings you could have done without? And the most important question of all is, "If I could find enough time to write 500 words on Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, why can't I find time to write 500 words on my novel?"