

How to Find Time for Writing When Your Plate Is Full

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When Julia Cameron wrote the book *The Right to Write*, she knew that most writers were hungering for the same thing: more time.

“If only I had more time,” writers often say, “I would start the novel I’ve been wanting to write,” “I would flesh out that article idea,” or “I would enter some contests.”

But do we really need long stretches of “me time” to complete projects and reach our short- and long-term writing goals? Julie Cameron, for one, doesn’t think so.

“One of the biggest myths about writing,” she said in her book, “is that in order to do it we must have great swaths of uninterrupted time.” She goes on: “Enough stolen moments, enough stolen sentences, and a novel is born—without the luxury of time.”

Renate Wildermuth of Pennsylvania is living proof that it’s possible to meet your writing goals when your plate is already full. While taking care of two small children she has finished a novel and is working on a second one; she has published articles in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Miami Herald*; and she has contributed commentary to North Country Public Radio.

How does she do it?

She wrote her first novel while her youngest child took naps. “The rest,” she says, “I squeeze in in Sesame Street-long swaths.” When an idea pops into her head, she looks for the nearest napkin or piece of paper and jots it down before it has a chance to slip away.

In this seize-the-moment fashion, she then transfers those ideas to a computer, she gets in touch with editors, and she writes query letters. By grabbing onto whatever bits of time she can find—however small—she gets things done and makes progress.

“I think writing is like saving money,” she says. “A dollar here and there adds up, and so does a page here and there. Better to write a little than not at all.”

When I asked author, book editor, and developmental writing coach Lisa Dale Norton if she thinks it’s possible for writers to reach their goals by

making use of whatever time is available, she said, “It depends on what those writing goals are,” but if the goal is to “complete a polished manuscript for publication, the answer is: Absolutely.” You can reach your writing goals, Lisa says, “by carving out little spaces of time.”

Lisa knows this well. She began writing her memoir *Hawk Flies Above: Journey to the Heart of the Sandhills* while teaching full time. The trick is to get the most out of the spaces of time you carve out for yourself. But how?

“First, you must be firm, focused, and dedicated,” Lisa says. “Second, you must leave off each day’s writing in a pregnant place. End on the upbeat, as we would say in music, leaving the creative soul hanging, waiting to respond to the unfinished thought.”

When she’s really busy, Lisa sets a writing appointment with herself, “and then I show up for that appointment,” she says. “I turn off the phone. I refuse to leave the house. I lock my door. I go inside, in every sense of the word. That is the only way I can get any writing done when I am busy with my clients, and speaking and teaching.”

Like many others, she tries to write in the morning before the world steps in with its demands, and she keeps her writing-related materials separated from other work, such as bills, and business or personal correspondence.

Looking at Renate and Lisa, who have both achieved so much as writers by “stealing moments,” Julia Cameron would probably say, “See, I told you it’s possible!”

“The trick of finding writing time is to make writing time in the life you’ve already got,” Cameron says. “If we learn to write from the sheer love of writing, there is always enough time, but time must be stolen like a quick kiss between lovers on the run.”

This article appeared in [C. Hope Clark's FundsforWriters newsletter](#).