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## Self perpetuating cycle

Procrastinating? Here's how to break the pattern of putting off your writing. by Katie Davis When the year begins, all fresh and shiny, we tend to make promises to ourselves. When we first took over the Institute for Writers, I wanted to help our community of writers--our students--so I polled them. I asked, "What do you think the top two reasons are for not starting (or continuing) your book?" I thought the big answer would be "getting an agent" or "lack of publishing knowledge", or something like that. The top answer by far was procrastination. Procrastination can grab hold and become a habit. It can allow you to play mind games with yourself. If you don't ever finish that book you're writing, you never have to face rejection and you never have to face bad reviews. But if you can employ tools, understand, and be mindful, procrastination loses its edge. You gain power. The worst part about procrastination is the self-fulfilling prophecy it creates. You put (fill-in-the-blank) off, and when you finally sit down ... nada. Bupkis. Zilch. Nuttin' honey. You get stuck. And then you procrastinate, because being stuck feels terrible and is the perfect catalyst for a fridge run. I'll share a little secret: I was actually supposed to write this article for publication on this blog last fall. Go ahead. I'll wait for the inevitable jokes, the laughter, even derision. But really! I wasn't stuck and I wasn't procrastinating. I was busy. Other stuff took over. That doesn't count as procrastinating, right? I'm not sure if it counts or not, but does it really matter what we call it if the writing still doesn't get done? Regardless of the moniker, it can happen any time, to anyone. Because of that, I'm excited to share some tips on getting your BIC (Butt In Chair). First you might want to figure out why you're procrastinating. Your idea needs to marinate a little. You're a perfectionist. The manuscript you're working on is no fun. It's boring. It's difficult. You're afraid of not succeeding. Or afraid of succeeding. You lack motivation because there isn't any goal. You have no energy. Anything sound familiar? Diagnosis: you're human. Give yourself a break, figure out why you're procrastinating, and then reframe your habits. Use these tips if you really want to get that work done. Tip #1 - Know Your Passion If you're writing on topics that bore you, this tip should help. Back when I lived in L.A., I volunteered for the Starlight Foundation, granting wishes for critically, chronically, and terminally ill children. We were assigned the wishes but allowed to embellish them. Mine was granting a wish for a little boy named Tomas\*, who had made a wish to go to Disneyland. I was so excited to see his reaction when I arrived at his home to tell him all about how he was going to have his wish come true: the Magic Kingdom in all its glory, Mickey Mouse, Pluto, Goofy, and everything. I told him he'd stay in the Disneyland Hotel and-- This is where Tomas interrupted me. He asked, "What is a hotel?" His family had never stayed in a hotel so he had no idea what to expect. After I got home, I wrote and illustrated a picture book for him (something akin to a book dummy). It was called What is a Hotel? I read it to him on my next visit; the story was fun and funny. He loved it, and it got him excited about his upcoming trip. After his reaction, I knew I wanted to connect with kids like that. And I wanted to be published -- from then on, I was writing and illustrating on a regular schedule, determined not to let myself procrastinate no matter what. I knew what my passion was. Finding my passion gave me the motivation I needed to dig in. I stopped procrastinating. I was compelled. (Here is a great TED talk by Simon Sinek on Finding Your Why.) Tip #2 - Reminders This may seem obvious but make your writing time a priority. Schedule your writing time into your calendar. Use post-it notes, alarms, alerts, or whatever will not let you forget. Fit it into your life the same way you fit your workout schedule or any other important appointments. Have your calendar send you alerts. Tell people who aren't supportive, or don't think what you do is important (I guess that's the same thing!) that you're busy. You can just say the truth: you've got an appointment. Tip #3 - Create Accountability From the reaction of our accountability group (The Writers' Block, which we started after that survey I mentioned above), groups really work well. Join an accountability group. Enlist an accountability partner. Tip #4 - To-Do List I've tried 37 different methods to keep a to-do list that I actually check and follow. Choose the method that is right for you, and if having a to-do list makes you feel overwhelmed, just put one thing on it: WRITE right now! Tip #5 - Dangle that Carrot It's important to build in rewards if you respond well to that--I know I do! You need those little rewards to motivate you toward the big rewards. Bait yourself. Tell yourself that after you write 5 pages, work an hour, do a chapter...whatever, you'll let yourself (fill in the blank). It's just human nature: We like to do what is pleasurable, and if something is all pain, we are just not going to create that habit. You can even create little reward tickets - go to the spa, take a day off--write your bait on your tickets. It's hard to remember what things we accomplished and very easy to focus on the negative. ("I didn't finish my book!" or "I didn't keep my schedule of writing five hours every day!") Every new year I create a little gift to help writers succeed. This year we gave away what we called the Success Journal. It's got other stuff in it too, but the primary focus was to offer a place for writers to record even the smallest of successes ("Yay! I revised a paragraph into one great sentence today!") And we even included those aforementioned reward tickets. It's not available anymore, but as a reader of this blog, you can download it here. Tip #6 - Clean Up How messy is your workspace? It will drain your brain to have a big rat's nest to work in! Declutter that nest now. Take 15-30 minutes (set a timer) and attack the mess. Do a little every day if doing it all at once will derail your efforts. After you do that, get all that digital hoarding straightened up too. Clear your emails, delete the copy of the copy of the copy of the first manuscript you ever wrote (and make sure your files are backed up!) Tip #7 - Unplug Yes. That's what I said. Try out one of the following programs if you really can't do this on your own (and I feel you, I do). Freedom Offtime Self Control Cold Turkey Tip #8 - The Head-on-the-Pillow Test I like Alyce Cornyn-Selby's "head on the pillow test." When you go to bed tonight, ask yourself, "I just traded 24 hours for what I got today. Am I happy with the trade?" Tip #9 - The "I Remember When" Game I made up this game and use it for all kinds of situations in order to get perspective. The game goes like this: I'm 97 years old and I'm telling someone about my life. I'm looking back on the situation of the moment (whatever I'm trying to get perspective on) and talking about how it turned out. What am I disappointed in as I "look back" on my life? What am I happy I didn't put off? by Katie Davis (@KatieDavisBurps) January 13, 2019 What about you, scriveners? Do you fall into the procrastination trap? How do you get yourself motivated? Did you make any New Year's resolutions to get yourself going on a project you've been procrastinating? \*\*\* Katie Davis Katie Davis is the author/illustrator of picture books as well as a middle grade and YA novel. She has created digital courses and products for writers such as How to Create Your Author Platform, Video Idiot Boot Camp, and Launch Your Book Blueprint. She also co-created Picture Book Summit, (the first live online conference of itskind) held annually the first Saturday of October. Brain Burps About Books was Katie's first podcast, created in 2010. Her second is Writing for Children, full of bite-sized, craft-oriented lessons. Katie has been honored to speak everywhere from a maximum security prison, to elementary schools, to university level, including UCONN and Yale, and has keynoted conferences and fundraising galas. She now runs the 50-year-old Institute of Children's Literature and its sister school, the Institute for Writers, where, as of this writing, over 470,027 people have taken college-level writing courses and learned to write for both children and adults. \*\*\* Check out the Institute of Children's Literature and the Institute for Writers. They are highly recommended and have been going strong for 50 years. Here's a thread at SCBWI full of praise from ICL students. OPPORTUNITY ALERTS! The Mary McCarthy Prize for Shorter Fiction. \$2000 prize plus publication by Sarabande Books and 2-week residency at their Kentucky retreat. Submit a collection of stories or novellas or a short novel of 150 to 250 pages. \$29 entry fee. Deadline February 15, 2019. Wid Women Story Contest \$20 entry fee. \$1,000 prize and publication in TulipTree Review. Write about "women who are the heroines of their own lives." Submit a poem, a story, or an essay of up to 10,000 words. Deadline: February 23, 2019. Glimmer Train Fiction Open: Fee \$21 1st Prize \$3000. 2nd Prize \$1000. Any genre. 3000 to 28,000 words. Deadline: February 28, 2019 SEQUESTRUM EDITOR'S REPRINT AWARD \$15 ENTRY FEE. \$200 and publication in Sequestrum for one previously published piece of fiction or nonfiction and one previously published piece of poetry. A minimum of one runner-up in each category will receive \$25-\$50 and publication. Maximum 12,000 words for prose and three poems. Deadline April 30, 2019. Don't let those published short stories stop working! Here are 25 Literary Magazines that will take reprints. 7 PUBLISHERS FOR MEMOIRS! And no, you don't need an agent. From the good folks at Authors Publish. \*\*\* Featured image: "La Parisienne" by Albert Edelfelt 1883. Economic inequality - the income gap between the wealthy and the poor - is increasing. Educational inequity has also increased with low-income students less likely to complete college than their wealthier counterparts. As the gap widens between the education "haves" and "have-nots," those with inadequate education are faced with reduced career opportunities in low-wage jobs. This paper proposes that a self-perpetuating cycle exists among the problems of economic inequality, educational inequity, and reduced career opportunity. It proposes strategies for breaking the cycle and concludes by identifying areas of responsibility for further research and practice. Motivation starts in the mind. Unfortunately, so do cycles of self-sabotage.The good news is that with a little effort, you can shift from an approach that may be keeping you stuck or struggling to one that automatically feeds your motivation.The worst thing you can do for your motivation is to focus on all the stuff you didn't do.We do this all the time - especially when it comes to making changes with stress, overwhelm, and overeating."I fell off track.""I went back to all my old habits.""I am disappointed in myself.""I blew it."Being honest with yourself is important and denial never helps. But cataloging all your weak moments and places you didn't measure up won't motivate you. It will do a number on your confidence, drain your energy and enthusiasm, and keep you focused on struggle.We notice the things we are focusing on and we focus on the things we are interested in noticing.It can be a cycle that's negative, or you can use this truth to build a cycle of motivation.How to build a self-perpetuating cycle of motivation!. Ask yourself what you are doing that's moving you in the right direction.When clients start listing all the things they fell off track with during the week, I immediately ask them about the positive routines, thoughts, and actions that they are continuing to do. Usually, there is a sudden silence. But then, the truth starts to emerge.I've been drinking more water.I'm getting more sleep and really noticing the difference it makes.I'm not multitasking at dinner anymore - that was so hard for me and I thought it would be awful, but I am really starting to enjoy it. I'm checking in with myself and noticing a lot more of the time when I am really hungry and when I am not.Focusing on your positive choices creates confidence and energy and motivation. Even better, it's so much easier to wrap your mind around how to do more of what's working than it is to take a positive action when you've convinced yourself you aren't doing anything at all.2. Ask yourself what is working.A new client told me that she felt helpless with her overeating. As she told it, she was bingeing nonstop. She told me she had no control with food at all and she felt helpless to break the cycle. She was frustrated and disgusted with herself and figuring out how to put an end to the pattern felt overwhelming and almost hopeless.Then we moved the focus from what wasn't working to what was.When you are used to seeing the negative, it can be like refocusing a camera lens. It may take a bit of time to see anything clearly with this new perspective. Stick with it.In this case, when we did some digging and got really specific, it turned out that while my client was overeating in the afternoon and evening, mornings were actually fine. She felt on track in the mornings and actually had a routine and a nutritious breakfast that happened easily. Late morning and lunch were pretty successful experiences too. She never binged in the afternoons when she was at work, which was very different from the unstructured time on the weekends.When you start to see what's working, you can begin to build on it.3. Ask yourself when the best, most successful times are.In the example above, when we figured out what was working and when it was working, we could start to see why these times were more successful than others. What made morning different than the evening? Why was it easier to stay on track earlier in the day?You can shift your energy and build motivation by asking yourself why and when you are most successful instead of focusing exclusively on the failures.4. Ask yourself what you do to stretch and extend all of the above.Make this a daily practice. Ask yourself every evening what went well. What worked?Make an effort to notice the little things that are becoming so ingrained and automatic that they might slip by unnoticed. This is what you're probably craving - automatic habits that don't take effort. Ironically, it's so easy not to see them, but not underlining them, taking credit, and rewarding yourself for these things is one of the biggest mistakes you can make in your path to ongoing success.Call them out. Own them. And then ask yourself, how you can keep growing the good stuff you are already doing.Talk soon,

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