

Desperate Measures to Keep You at the Desk

excerpted from Write Your Heart Out by Rebecca McClanahan

1. Lower your standards. Rather than saying “I’m going to write a beautiful poem about my month in Paris,” say “I’m going to write a poem.” Period. Then write it.
 2. Think quantity, not quality. Set a timer and write until it goes off, or decide on a set number of words or pages per session, and don’t get up from the desk until you’re finished. (Anthony Trollope wrote seven pages a day, forty-nine pages a week, sticking so closely to this schedule that if he finished a novel on page four of a day’s work, he started the next novel on page five.)
 3. Be your own writing instructor. Give yourself writing assignments, then do them.
 4. Hold yourself hostage at the desk. Don’t comb your hair. Dress in such shabby clothes that you wouldn’t dare answer the door or go out for a paper. Then stay at the desk until you’ve accomplished your task.
 5. Set short-term rewards for yourself. Draft six pages=a cookie. Write two hours=a walk in the park. Finish chapter three=a new hat.
 6. When your writing is really cooking, don’t stop until it’s done, no matter how long it takes.
- Or:
7. When your writing is really cooking, make yourself stop. Stop at the most exciting point, when you know exactly what will happen next. Stop in the middle of a phrase if you have to. Then you won’t have to start from scratch on your next writing day; you can continue on the high point at which you exited.
 8. Eliminate the fear of the empty page by writing a few opening lines the night before a writing session.
 9. Right before you go to bed, reread the last thing you’ve written. Write a brief response or jot down questions the writing hasn’t yet answered. Who knows? You might dream the answers.
 10. If all else fails, write down all the reasons why you can’t write. Go ahead, get it out of your system. At the end of the session, you may discover that it takes more energy to avoid writing than it does to write. At any rate, you’ll have filled some pages, a task you were convinced you couldn’t do.