

Writing Effectively by Doing LESS: A Simple 5-Step Plan of Action

By Tijana Salaj

It's not easy to write an article or a book especially if you usually sit in front of computer for a long time without any ideas or inspiration. That's why, for most people it takes too much thinking to come up with an effective article. But whether you are a blogger, a business expert or an article marketer, you need to write effective articles quickly.

The key is not to confuse being busy with being effective. Here are five steps to pay attention to when engaged in the writing process:

1. Select the Right Topic

First start with a topic. If you were assigned one, that part is already done for you but if you have choices, you'll need to pick one and then stick with it. Caution: What you know most about may not necessarily be the easier to write about because you could end up writing a research paper and not a simple 1000 words (or so) article. So pick what you think you'll have an easier time with, then write down any and all ideas and... take a break! Do something unrelated to writing for a while, then get back to your ideas later. That's because "amazing" ideas do not always seem

so amazing after doing some thinking. Give yourself a chance to retain or reject your original ideas.

Secondly, know your topic. Do research ahead of time so you are not going back and forth between writing and researching. It's less efficient that way and takes up more time. Instead, by doing research before writing the article, you'll more likely write an effective article. But remember too that research is another way of exploring new things and ideas. Thus you may stumble upon something interesting and/or inspiring, and relevant for your topic. By knowing your topic well, you give your article some depth.

2. Set Time Limits

Preparing a schedule will help you save time. Set time limits for each stage of the writing process. It helps of course that most essays and articles are given a page or word count by an assigning editor. So if your page count is 4 pages and you turn in an 11-page paper, odds are pretty good you'll be told to cut it down. To save time then, try to stay within the assigned count.



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Also, set yourself a time limit for your actual writing. You probably have a fair idea of how fast you write, so judge accordingly. If you know you typically write one page per hour, set this as an objective, i.e., that you will write one page in your first hour. Or maybe if your must be limited to 3 pages, set a limit that you will finish in 3 hours. Then proceed at your natural pace.

3. Minimize Distractions

Close every other application on your screen when you begin writing your article. Close or disable instant messaging applications too as this may very well be where you spend most of your on-screen time. Close your email too and all other applications, with the exception of your writing software. Keep them closed too while writing the article. It might be OK to open your browser when you want to look for some reference but if you do, close it again as soon as you are done!

Similarly, if you want to look up research on the Internet, one trick is to use split screens. That way you'll be able to do two things at the same time. Your goal of course is to minimize interruptions as much as possible, so block your "time-wasting" websites and focus on what you are doing so you can get it finished.

4. Be Sure to Edit and Proof

When editing yourself, concentrate on what is important. Sometimes it's not necessary for you to edit every paragraph or sentence. Pay attention to language usage and some major grammatical mistakes but try not to change the voice or style of your writing, especially if it is a very significant style for your article or book. Likewise, if your article is too long, do not obsess over details. If you have time, ask someone else to read it and tell them to recommend what they think you should leave out.

Another idea for cutting down time spent on the overall writing process is to split your article into two articles! By doing so, you can end up

with a wholly different second article so that you won't have to start from scratch next time around. And this tip, you may be surprised to learn, is very easy to do. Here's how:

While reading your original, make notes as you think of points to add or to change. Next, try applying your notes to your original article, changing parts of it as needed. Now you will have two articles rather than just one, affording you the opportunity to pitch both to chosen editors. Writing quality articles in a short time is not always an easy task, so by preparing yourself with this kind of structured process, you may soon be writing like there's no tomorrow!

Finally, proofread your article at least once, if not twice or thrice. Many people actually skip this step due to a perceived lack of time (or maybe due to lack of patience!). But once you finish writing your essay or article, read it over. In fact, proofread everything you write, such as your emails and blogs.

5. Think Blurbs

Create a one-paragraph "blurb" for your article for the purpose of promoting and presenting your article idea to others. When crafting your blurb, remember two words above all— "be specific." Clarity is probably the most important thing here but brevity is vital too. Remember that many people now read email on their Blackberries so a good subject line can be critical.

Apply this notion to your blurbs too. You are trying to catch an editor's attention so you must clarify and specify what your article is about

right away and in only a few words. To help you with this, you might again make some notes. But notes should not look like novels! Put down on paper everything that you find important but do not go into details. For a fuller explanation, consult *The Experts Edge: Become the Go-To Authority People Turn to Every Time* by Ken Lizotte, which clearly describes how to write blurbs effectively and how to pitch article ideas to editors.

Of course, it's easy to read about and absorb such tips and tricks as these but much harder to make them into habits and a part of who you are. Once you do, however, you will find yourself with more time to enjoy the other aspects of your life and less unnecessary time spent on the writing itself. This in turn will insure that all your writing projects are worth the effort.