

Building a Daily Practice

A Story Principles Guide



The purpose of this guide is to help you create flow states, those moments when you're so immersed in your work, so fully lost in your story that hours seem to pass by in minutes. These states are simpler to enter when you work at the time of day that you're at your best, in a place you find inspiring, and with a mindset that is elevated – free from distraction, worry, negativity, etc. Find your sacred time, write in a sacred space, and work with a sacred mind.

Sacred Time

Sacred time is time when you're at your best, free to write and work for the proper length of time. Knowing when you are at your best is critical. Toni Morrison had to be up before dawn so she could be there when the light came. She felt an alignment between her creativity and the moment daylight enters the world. For her it was a time when her kids were sleeping, no one would disturb, her and she could concentrate.

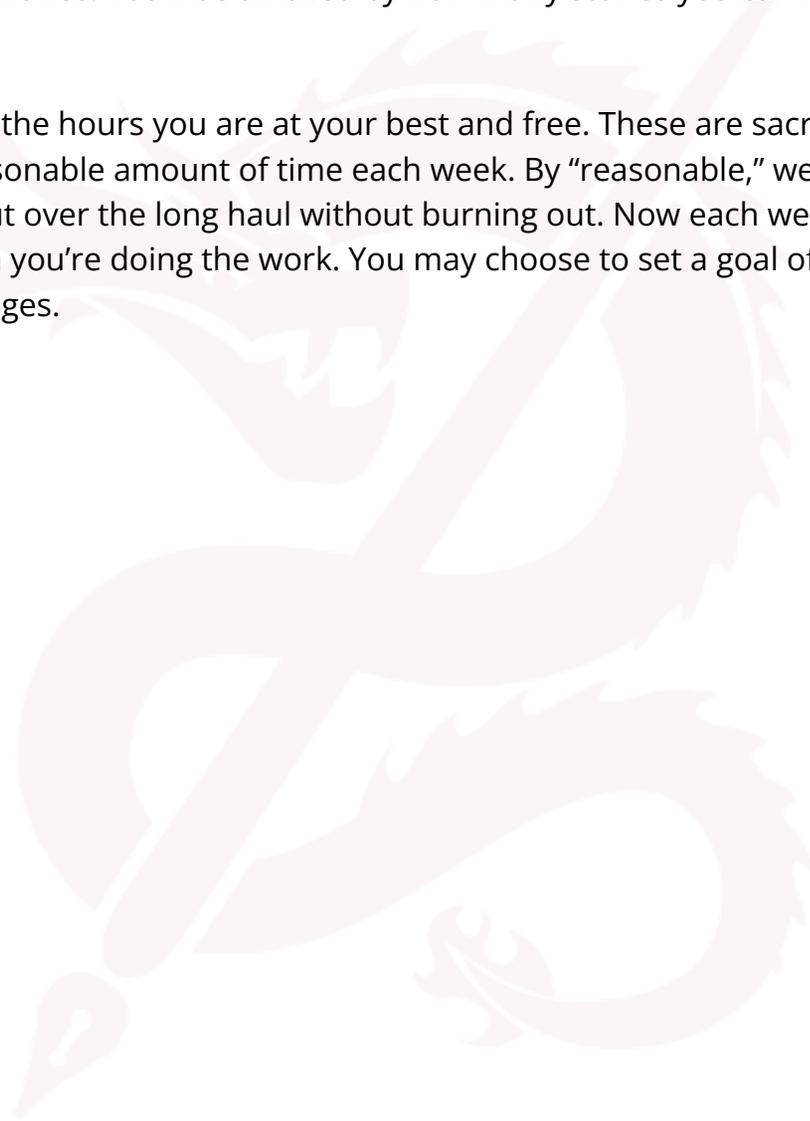
You also need to know when you're free. The hours of the day when you are both at your best and available to work are critically important. And you need to prepare for them in advance. If you know you're at your best *and free* at 5 a.m. you can't be doing Jell-O shots until 2 a.m.

Most great writers worked roughly three hours a day. A few worked much more and some less, but three good hours daily is generally enough to produce a massive body of work. Having an end in sight when you start each writing session is both comforting and motivating. Some writers, like Somerset Maugham, committed to hitting a target number of words each session. For him it was 1,000. Ernest Hemingway tracked his hours to make sure he was honest about how much he wrote. The key is your degree of focus while writing. It's better to fully engage for two hours per day than meandering for ten.



By knowing when you're at your best, free, and how long you can write, you take control of your schedule, set reasonable goals, and build endurance. You'll be amazed by how many stories you can finish if you put in consistent hours for the long haul.

On the following page, block out the hours you are at your best and free. These are sacred. Then make a commitment to writing for a reasonable amount of time each week. By "reasonable," we mean an amount you can really work, week in and week out over the long haul without burning out. Now each week you have a manageable target to hit, a way to feel certain you're doing the work. You may choose to set a goal of working X number of hours or generating a set amount of pages.





Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Midnight							
1:00							
2:00							
3:00							
4:00							
5:00							
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
Noon							
1:00							
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4:00							
5:00							
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							



Sacred Space

Where you write affects the quality of your work and how much time you put in. Logic dictates that if you love your writing space and feel inspired when you get there, you'll go there more often and work harder, more effectively, and with a greater sense of inspiration.

Some writers need to work in crowded, public spaces and feed off the energy. Stephen King blasts heavy metal when he writes. Others need total silence. Marcel Proust would close all the drapes to kill distraction and put cork on the walls to dull sound. Some writers enjoy clutter and being surrounded by things. Novelist Patricia Highsmith used to sit on her bed to write. She'd place a donut, cigarettes, a big mug of coffee, and a plate of to faround her and called it her womb. Jane Austen wrote in the sitting room with her mother and sister nearby. She would hide her work in a drawer when visitors showed up and slip back into writing when they left. Some writers keep sacred items – a gift from a child , a photo of a deceased relative, an object from travel – on their desk. Others need their space empty, clean, and spare. Singer, songwriter, and Zen Buddhist Leonard Cohen wrote about his ideal creative space in the lyrics to the song *Tonight Will Be Fine*:

*I choose the rooms that I live in with care
The windows are small and the walls almost bare
There's only one bed and there's only one prayer*

Let the line, "I choose the rooms that I live in with care" be an inspiration as you design your ideal space. And if financial constraints keep you from building the ideal space, focus on what you can control – the type of chair you sit on, your desk, the objects you put nearby. What can you do to make your space feel inspired? This is about respect for the work you're doing. If you feel this respect immediately upon entering your writing space, it will make its way into your work.



Building a Sacred Space

Review the following list of keywords and use it as inspiration to generate ideas for building your sacred space. This should be relaxed, fun, and something you consider and adjust for the rest of your career. A sacred space is built over time and evolves as your needs, tastes, and style change.

- Solitude
- Bustling with life
- Darkened, sealed off
- Bright, open, airy
- Type of desk
- Bookshelves & books
- Wallpaper
- Paint color
- Lighting
- Windows, view
- Urban, rustic, modern
- Window treatments
- Spare
- Cluttered
- Smells - flowers, candles, incense
- Flooring
- Art and photography
- Trinkets, knickknacks, etc.
- Music – albums, CDs, streaming
- Furniture, chairs, couch, bed
- White board, cork board

Invest as much or as little time as you'd like designing your space. There are countless sites and magazines dedicated to interior design. Add anything that's not listed here that's important to you. And consider the fact that countless great writers took this extremely seriously. On the first night Arthur Miller spent in the little writing studio he built in the woods, he wrote the first act of *Death of a Salesman*. If he didn't have his sacred space, he might never have written that masterpiece.



Sacred Mind

You should feel energetic but relaxed, receptive, determined, confident, purposeful, clear, and of course, inspired. You're free to go wherever your story needs to go – the Arctic, a war zone, another planet, the bedroom you spent your childhood in. You can become anyone you need and fully inhabit their being. And you can switch from the most raw, intense emotions as you change voices. One minute you're a child screaming and playfully jumping into a lake, the next you're a 100-year-old woman on her death bed. A sacred mind is an expansive mind. Again, this course is about practical application, not theory. Here we don't scratch our ass and hope to just stumble into heightened states. We make consistently intelligent decisions about when to write, where to write, and how to focus our mind as we write.

Think of this like creating a software program, a recipe, or a mathematical formula – when you do A, B, C, and D, you feel E, with E of course being inspired. Use the following list for inspiration and idea generation then create your process for creating or entering a sacred state of mind.

- ★ Eight hours of sleep
- ★ Tall glass of water
- ★ Coffee, tea, matcha
- ★ Eat for health or joy
- ★ Journal freely
- ★ Clean, dust
- ★ Organize
- ★ Walk
- ★ Workout – Cardio
- ★ Workout – Strength
- ★ Prayer, meditation
- ★ Read
- ★ View Art
- ★ Set goal: (# Pages, Hours)
- ★ Shower, Bathe
- ★ Sing
- ★ Recite poetry
- ★ Primal scream
- ★ Adult time
- ★ Other....



Putting it All Together

You now have a strong sense of how to structure each writing session. When you find your sacred time, build a sacred space, and have a specific process to develop a sacred mind, you become a very different kind of writer. Studying structure – mastering world-building, character design, dialogue, plot construction, and theme are invaluable. But if you write when you're exhausted, frustrated, stressed, resentful, or distracted, you're far less likely to execute at the top of your intelligence.

Again, as always, have fun with this. Relax and enjoy it. Living the writing life takes courage, commitment, and above all, self-respect. That's what designing a daily practice is all about. When you work at a sacred time, in a sacred space, while in a sacred frame of mind, this elevates your work. It flows through like a current. And this current leads to the fulfillment of your potential, to your greatness, to realizing your masterpiece.

Do you ever feel like your story already exists and that you are glimpsing something real when ideas come to you? Our theory at Blackbelt Writing Academy is that you can take conscious actions and make better decisions to take that idea from the ether, to carve it from the stone, to fully and authentically express yourself.

Here's a seven-step game plan:

1. Review your schedule.
2. Identify the hours you are both free and at your creative best.
3. Block them off.
4. Tell friends, family, and coworkers you are unavailable during this time except for emergencies.
5. Review the section above, "Building a Sacred Space." Sketch out, in as much detail as you like, your ideal writing space, the one that makes you feel most relaxed and inspired.



6. Build your space. Don't just half-ass this. It's okay if you can write anywhere and don't need to get too particular about this. That's fine. Just be real about meeting your needs. And value yourself and your writing process high.
7. Write out the steps for getting into flow states. I once read about a playwright who must get completely naked and scrub his hardwood floors on hands and knees with a brush prior to writing. At four in the morning. You want to have something like this: Wake at X time, drink coffee, mediate for 10 minutes, play classical music, get arse in chair, go.

"Take it easy. But take it. And you'll win." – Bob Dylan