



Is Lockdown the Perfect Time to Write?

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Created *May '20*

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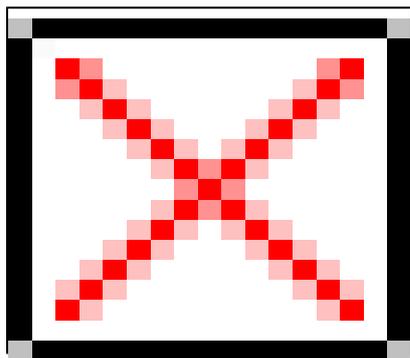
Article Category:

Opinion

Byline:

Writing under Lockdown: Matt Brown struggles

Is lockdown the perfect time to write? It's not even close, says author **Matt Brown**.



Things I've learned during lockdown:

1. Tea without milk is surprisingly good.
2. I give little-to-no tosses for the ten albums that have influenced my friends' lives.
3. Being creative, right now, is really, really hard.

To give you some idea of how hard I'm finding it, I started writing this article two hours ago and I've managed sixty-four words.

Wanders away to make tea for everyone

It's sometimes difficult to remember how long this lockdown has been. As I'm writing these words, in my pyjamas at three o'clock in the afternoon, it has been nearly six weeks since the lockdown started in the UK. That's a whole school summer holiday and still no end in sight. Or, to put it another way, this lockdown has been so long that chats with friends about how annoying Joe Wicks is and the fate of Carol Baskin's ex-husband seem like a long-forgotten dream.

Shuffles off to sort out home-schooling issue

Since the beginning of the lockdown, non-writing friends have all been saying the same thing to me. They joke about how this is pretty much what my normal life is like and how many books I'll have written by the time we emerge from

our homes. But it hasn't felt like that at all. For the most of the last six weeks, writing has felt almost impossible, and the near-impossibility of it was really hard to understand, or even talk about. In fact, it wasn't until about week three of lockdown, during a chat with the author, Danny Wallace, that I was first able to admit how unproductive I was being. And that was only after Danny had revealed how unproductive he had been during the lockdown. It felt good to laugh about how little we were writing and how that was maybe, just maybe, okay. Danny wondered if it was because writing felt very small and insignificant alongside the sacrifices we were seeing being made on a daily basis by nurses and doctors and supermarket workers and delivery drivers. He might just have a point. For me, it's the constant interruptions. They really are the nails in creativity's coffin. One thing Danny did admit to doing though that I had to share, is that when he twists the stalk out of a pear, he imagines that he is taking a pin out of a grenade. I can now vouch that this is incredibly satisfying and works well with apples too.

Accepts pub-quiz Zoom meeting

A few days ago, Jo Nadin, the brilliant author and lecturer in creative writing, posted a diagram on Twitter of [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) [3]. If you don't know this, it's a theory that states that your basic needs must be met before you will be motivated to achieve your higher needs. In other words, we're all so busy being anxious about making sure we have enough food in the cupboards and staying safe with a new killer virus on the rampage, that we aren't in a state to think about being creative. In fact, Jo told me that her low point was when she stopped teaching for the Easter break. I felt that if I didn't write, I would worry that I would never write again. I don't believe in writer's block but for the first time in my life, sitting down at a computer with a blank page suddenly felt insurmountable.

Jo is one of the best planners I know, the way she plots her books is legendary. So, like a montage in a Rocky movie, Jo used her ability to plan and structure to ease her into writing. I wanted to write the beginning of a novel, so ten thousand words in two weeks. But I had everything planned. So, the first day of writing I wrote the first line, which I already had, and typed up the notes that I'd already got, and by the end of the first day I had two hundred and fifty words. It was tiny but it was a first step and it made it easier to sit down at the computer the next day.

Tries to convince teenager to stop shouting at a videogame and come for a dog-walk. Goes for a dog-walk without teenager

So, pity the author on a deadline. Tamsin Winter is an award-winning author who is in lockdown with her four-year-old son. One week in lockdown is like five years in normal time, she told me on Skype yesterday, whilst her son added up every number he could think of. I've totally thrown out my daily routine. I have zero childcare and so have no time in the day to write. So, after I put my son to bed, I have a shower and a coffee and write from 9pm to 3am. Then I'm up again at 7.30am. It sounds hideous but I'm about four days away from finishing the draft.

So, I can tell you that right now is definitely not a great time to finish your novel. It's not even close to being a great time to finish your novel. But it is a good time to do some stuff. Like drinking at lunchtime. Or yelling at jigsaws. Or reading, which is what Jo Nadin has found. Reading is part of writing. Reading is breathing in and writing is breathing out. I can't read anything literary at the moment because I can't concentrate on the language. I've just read crime novels back to back because I want to know what happens next.

In a world of uncertainty and anxiety it is good to know what happens next.

And breathe.

Matt Brown's latest book [Mutant Zombies Cursed My School Trip](#) [4] (978-1474960236) is published by Usborne.

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