



Lesson 2 | Create a Writing Atmosphere

By S. D. Howard.

No matter whether you're writing Fiction or Non-Fiction, it's important to have a place that helps you unleash your creativity when writing. Not everyone will be able to set up their own room for this, but there are still ways of creating that space for yourself, which we'll be diving into.

One of the important things to remember is not to compare yourself or your situation to anyone else. Some will have entire writing sanctums, while others will go to the local coffee shop or library to work. There is no right or wrong here; it's about maximizing *what you have*.

Establish your writing space

Let's dive into how you can do that depending on your situation. We'll look at three different areas people use for their creative space, and then it's up to you to figure out how to apply them to your unique situation.

Your own room

This is the ideal, right? You have a place of your own you can retreat to in your pj's and ignore the world for a few hours while drinking your coffee/tea as you destroy the hopes and dreams of characters. You can lock the door, have people bring you food and drink. Life is good.

Okay, that is a little over the top, but hopefully you get the picture: it's your space dedicated to writing (or procrastinating in peace, either one). Depending on what you're writing, you'll want to try to decorate (when possible) to match the feel of what you're writing. This can help you get into the mood easier when you sit down to write because you're literally immersing yourself in the 'feel' of your world or subject.

Places outside your home

Now, you might not have the option of setting up your own writing space in your home, or you simply don't find it productive to do so. I get it, there are distractions. Chores, kids, animals, spouses, or any number of things. Sometimes it's better to get out.

A lot of authors will go to their local coffee shops and set up their laptop or open their notebooks and single-handedly keep the shop open because they are there guzzling caffeinated drinks for hours on end. But what if you can't afford a caramel-frappe double shot with almond milk and a bean for \$8.75?

If you live close to a library, that would be your next best option. All you need is a library card and BOOM! Free internet and books for days. And it's quiet, which for some is sweet bliss, while for others, it's like torture.

Pro Tip: bring headphones.

I've even heard of people buying to ride the bus for a couple hours because they had wi-fi and they just wrote as much as they could during that time. It's not a bad idea when you think about it because it gives you the opportunity to observe people and gain inspiration from the world around you.

Your mind

No, I'm not being cheeky here. The best place you can create an atmosphere for writing is in your mind. You do this by doing what Brandon Sanderson calls, "Priming your mind." Basically, you eat, sleep, breath, and think about writing.

Granted, you probably have a job or schoolwork you have to do, so it's not always going to be 100% of the time, but the concept is good. You want to foster creativity within your mind and think of it as developing a skill. Practice at it.

I've been doing this for over sixteen years, and I am still practicing. When starting out, you want to think about your story as much as you can. Think about the story, the setting, the plot, the arcs, the characters, the world, the creatures, what the weather might look like, etc. If you're non-fiction, think about the topics you're addressing, the people you might interview, the sources you will cite, the research required.

Immerse yourself into your story in your mind and train it to stay in this creative mode. The more you do this, the more you will gain inspiration from the little things you missed before. It could be something someone says or does, an event, something you read, or something you do.

There is no stronger creative atmosphere than what lies right between your ears. If you can set that up, you're going to be one step ahead of everyone else.

Assemble your writing tools

Just like the spaces you find yourself in, everyone will have different tools they enjoy using. Which is why it's important to make sure you *have them* wherever you are. There are some things I highly recommend having when you sit down to write, and while it doesn't cover everything, it should give you a good idea of the things you use and what you may be missing.

Laptop/Computer Users

Word: I love using Word for all my writing because I have the ProWritingAid extension synced with it. Now, I have heard this can slow things down, but I haven't run into that yet. Another reason I use it is because I can combine my chapters (which I write separately) into a single doc once I'm finished and it doesn't bog it down, which I have found with using Google Docs. Especially if you're trying to add a full novel in there.

Campfire Pro (old): Back a couple years ago I bought Campfire Pro with the World-building extension to keep track of everything within the story. Now, they have a cloud-based version called CampfireWrite, which I highly recommend. It allows you to build outlines, character profiles, encyclopedias, etc. for your story and interlink everything. I found the outlining feature (called 'Timelines') invaluable when creating the outline for my book. Sadly, Campfire Pro is no longer available, but you can still get the perks through CampfireWrite, so check it out and see if it will work for you.

World Anvil: Similar to Campfire because it allows you to build out and interconnect your world together, with WA, you can write articles and attach them to kingdoms, build family trees, magic systems, and create a landing page to share with your readers (when the time comes!). I got WA when I realized I needed to track my *world*, not just the outline for a single book. There are many more shiny things, but I'll let you look into those, as it would take up most of this worksheet.

ProWritingAid: Best. Tool. Ever. That's my take, anyway. PWA is one of the best editing tools out there for authors, even though most authors don't take the time to properly set it up. I use this in *every* writing session. Yes, I 'self-edit' as I go, but there is a method to the madness (usually). I hate to write garbage, and moreover, I hate editing garbage, so I use PWA configured to 'Fantasy' and start typing. As I go, it will make TONS of suggestions, not all of which I accept, but it helps me determine if I'm getting my point across.

For instance, I tend to be a bit wordy, so it yells at me because of it. Sometimes, it's right and I accept the edit which smooths out a sentence. Other times I ignore it because the suggestion

doesn't jibe with the sentence or it takes away from it (even if it would improve 'readability'). As with anything editing, you need to take things with a grain of salt.

Grammarly: Admittedly, this isn't the best tool out there, but it has one very useful purpose, which is why I recommend it for first-time authors: Read Time.

I've been writing for a while, so I know how many pages equates out in Read Time for your average reader, but if you've never thought about this before, Grammarly can be a great tool to help you figure this out *for free*. How do you do that? Well, first you'll want to upload your doc into the tool, then go up to your score (ignore the number). Once there, scroll down just a little to see what the Read Time comes out to be. Boom. Game changer.

Why? Because readers have (in general) a short attention span/lack of time. So, if you want to write what I call a 'bingable book' then you want to have the average read time be between 10-15 minutes. You can then tailor your book to your reader.

There are many more tools I can recommend, but these are the top ones for those who use a computer or laptop.

Notebook/Journal Users

Filing system: Bet you expected me to say notebook, huh? SIKE! (Just dated myself, but I'm okay with it)

If you're going to take yourself seriously as an author, you need to make sure you have some sort of filing system in place to keep track of things. Remember, you're doing this all by hand, and if you're like me, you have **way** more notebooks than you know what to do with and things get... misplaced? Stolen by gnomes? Eaten by a pet?

If you have a filing cabinet, that's best, but if not, buy a label maker or create something on Canva and print it out. Mark which notebooks or journals hold the story, which ones have source notes, character bios, etc. This will help you keep track of things (such as plot points or stories that you have to have in your book).

Flash Card/Sticky notes: Whether you use these in the notebooks or as your way of outlining, it's super helpful to create a visual of what is in your mind. Sometimes when you're stuck on a problem, it's because you cannot *see the issue* in your mind, so by putting it down on paper, it makes it 'real'.

Stockpile of pens: By stockpile, I mean a stockpile of the pen you use for writing. Nothing bothered me more than when my favorite writing pen ran out of ink, and I found myself with a 'subpar writing implement of extreme displeasure'. Also known as a pencil. It's the worst.

Pencils: Did I mention I like irony? While I don't enjoy writing a story in pencil (because it allows me to erase things, which causes problems) I love using them for making quick notes for outlines. Sometimes I need to sketch out something in my head, like a map, and I grab a pencil and don't stop until I've finished it.

Notebooks: You didn't really think I would pass this up, did you? I'm about to blow your mind here though, so are you ready? Dollar Store/Tree.

I'm not picky about notebooks, so I will try to buy them at the Dollar Store/Tree whenever I get the chance because, well, it's a dollar. This is a great way to stock up on a ton of notebooks without breaking the bank, not to mention you can get 3-ring binders for your writing as well.

Now, if you're a notebook snob, you can pretty much throw a rock and hit a store that sells them for more. But I recommend you save your money for the next thing.

Journals: Personally, I suggest using a journal for yourself and not for your story. This is the place to rant, vent, rage, cry, laugh, or whatever you want to do with it. Document your journey of writing your book, making sure to date things, and then you will have something pass onto your friends, family, kids, grandkids someday. Or perhaps you simply use it to work through the frustrations of writing (and they are many, believe me).

Takeaways

You should now have a better idea of how you can go about creating your writing atmosphere, and the tools you need when you sit down to write. It's going to take some practice, time, and maybe a little money to do it, but in the end, if you're serious about writing, you'll thank yourself later.

Also, life changes happen, so what works now might not work later on. Don't let those things get to you, though, because you now have an outline for building it no matter where you are!

Now start creating!