



**Finish the  
Damn Book!**

**An Inspirational  
Guide to Writing**

**Free Version!**

**Martin McConnell**

## **Co-Conspirators**

I want to give special thanks to those who helped shape this work, and gave me their busy time to make it a reality.

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**An Inspirational Guide to Writing**  
**Free Version!**

by Martin McConnell



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## Dedication

For anyone and everyone in my life  
who has ever lit a fire under my ass.

Just paying it forward.



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## **How This Book is Arranged**

The original copy of *Finish the Damn Book* was a thought experiment. It was designed to deliver motivation needed to get the average writer off their ass, and working on their novel, instead of watching Netflix, or playing on the Internet. The brevity of it worked to this purpose, but since I've added a shit ton of content, I had to arrange it in a way that would let the reader find their inspiration in short chunks. Any chapter should be enough to get your blood boiling before a writing session. They are short enough to finish in ten or fifteen minutes, max. So when I set out to revise this book, I kept the chapter length consistent with that idea. Each chapter is its own entity, and you can read the book front to back, or open it to any chapter. One chapter doesn't depend on the last, so find the one that you need to kick off your writing session, and get your ass to work.

The full version is available on Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B06XQM9F6V/>



## **Part I: The First Draft**

Packed full of all the inspirational bits and pieces you need. Finish the first draft of your novel. It is the greatest accomplishment you will make as a budding author. Finish one book, and you'll know that you can do it again. You will propel your writing confidence forward in a way that is otherwise impossible. That confidence is what makes an author.



## **Chapter One**

### **How I Finished the Damn Book**

I'm not a bestselling author, and outside of the bar *Chip's Daquiries* in Opelousas, Louisiana, nobody ever spots me and comes running up with a book in their hands, asking for a signature (okay, there was that one time in St. Louis). I have an okay twitter following, and I sell a few books from time to time, but I'm not making promises about turning you into a bestselling author. This book was designed to turn ordinary writers, perhaps those struggling to finish that first draft, into novelists. Sometimes your first book does well, but for most of us, it takes several novels to perfect our voice.

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Despite the fact that I haven't sold a billion copies, I've never stopped sharing my advice with others, and it's always well received. My author friends don't latch on to me because they think I'm some rising star that will carry them to the top. Hell, most of their books sell better than mine. They like me because I serve as a fountain of encouragement for others, and while I might never get a seven figure contract from a publisher, I will keep writing books, and inspiring anyone that needs a kick in the ass.

You came here looking for encouragement, right? The fact that you are still reading shows that you have the thirst to become an author, no matter how scary hearing the truth may be. I'll tell you what that process takes. I've written several novels, novellas, screenplays, and my hard drive is chock full of short stories and flash fiction pieces. Sometimes I publish them for free because I don't have time to wait on the submission process, and I always have readers prompting me for more stories. I am, as they sometimes call me, a writing machine.

And you can be too. One caveat. If you aren't serious about being a writer, then stop reading, and give this book to someone who is serious. I'm not going to blow sunshine up your ass, and tell you that there is some magic trick that will spawn manuscripts without work and determination. Save the fairy dust for Tinkerbell. Real writers have to sit their ass in a chair every day, even when they don't want to, and crank out words.

Another point. I don't care what your experience level is. Writing a novel is no different than running a marathon, getting a gold medal in an Olympic sport, or winning at a skeet shoot. It requires skill, yes, but that skill doesn't usually come from some innate talent the person was born with. It comes from years of practice. It comes from a devotion to your craft, and your goals. It comes from forcing yourself to fight the good fight, every single day. To claw for every inch.

When I started writing, I knew nothing about it, and now there is seldom a day when some random person, or a friend, or a fellow writer, doesn't make some comment about my

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writing, my thoughts, or the inspiration I create. It's my daily reminder that I have to keep going, keep inspiring, and forever kick the myth that there's some magic trick that you can learn in school that will make you a better writer. There isn't. It boils down to a handful of things, which I'll discuss in this book, but the most important, is words on a page.

When I started writing fiction, I had no background to fall on, no instruction booklet, and I was on a floating oil rig in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. I literally had a word processor, the Internet, and a story. I cranked out my first draft of *The Sword of Valhalla* in 47 days. Think about that. 78,000 words, 47 days, and no, it was not November.

How did I do it? Because I don't have any of the baggage beaten into other writer's heads. I didn't have any idea whether it would work or not, or if it would be good. To be fair, I had read some books, and tried to write some non-fiction stuff in college, but I didn't have any compass steering me wrong. Instead, I Googled something dumb like, "How do you write a novel?" Through that search, I found a website that



encouraged me to finish the first draft in 100 days or less. I even had a head-start, since the story was already outlined. I did it, and damnit, you can too!

Since that first book, I've been through every newbie pitfall an author can ever hope to avoid. I went back to page one, and realized, that because I was learning from instructional writing blogs as I went, that my writing sucked. The whole book needed to be re-written, three times. Then I learned about story structure, and after pitching it to over 100 agents, it finally dawned on me that I didn't even have a novel. I was pitching it to the wrong people, because I was too dumb to know the difference between serialized short stories and a novel. Figure that one out. I cut the sequel short, and had a lapse of "writer's block" for three years. Strike that, I let myself fail, for *three years*.

When I got back into writing, I made the decision right away. I'd failed at marriage, I hated my job, and I wasn't exactly happy that I had gone so long without writing any of the stories bouncing in my head. I was afraid to write another dud.

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I vowed that I was going to commit this time, and I didn't give a damn about the consequences. It was in that moment of fury, with a little provoking from my big brother, that I became an author. I hammered out three drafts in a year, worked with them, and then scrapped the pile to start on a new book. My publisher appeared out of thin air one day, responding to a short story I had written, and that story became the Viral Trilogy.

I kept writing, and started three or four new projects. At the time, I don't even give a shit about being published. I wanted to write my stories, work with them, shape them, and do it full time. I even dropped my high-paying oilfield job to write, because I realized that it doesn't matter what I write. Words are words, and each one is like an experience point in a role-playing game. You get enough words on paper, and you level up. Digesting learning material like blog posts, books on writing, instructions, classes; all of that shit is like power-ups and bonus items. It's all good, so do all of it, but the experience points come from actually writing.

I sat down one day, after scratching out a bunch of blog posts for a client. I was tired, and I wanted to write, but nothing new was coming into my head. I had gotten into some kind of discussion earlier in the day about writer's block, or motivation, or something of the like, and it was really bothering me. There are so many people out there who would be awesome writers, if someone just stepped up and told them what to expect. If they had a boost of motivation. I didn't want to work on stories, because I wanted to put a message out. That message became this book, and I cranked out the first draft, six chapters, in a few hours. I immediately tossed it up online, and it started getting downloads. People were resonating with what I wrote. They didn't give a shit about the typos. They cared about the message.

One of my friends told me that it was just the kick in the ass he needed, and proceeded to make his word count goal for the night. He was having a rough time that day too, I suppose. I knew that I had something worth sharing, so I'm expanding it. I'm adding a bunch of extra chapters, revising or killing some chapters, and making this the best damn

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writing book that I can make. If you came here looking for verb suggestions, this book won't help with that. But if you need a pissed-off muse to lace your coffee with octane booster, I'm here to help. Muster up that desire, sit your ass in a chair, and...

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*This is how you do it: you sit down and you put one word after another until it's done. It's that easy, and that hard.*

-Neil Gaiman

## **Chapter Two**

### **Write Something Every Day**

Write every day. Simplest thing in the world, right? Except the real world is filled with bills, kids, the day-job, the spouse, the lack of spouse, peer pressure, obligations, scout meetings, PTA meetings, clubs, dinner dates, taxes, phone calls... It's a wonder we can get anything done at all, let alone writing.

Here's the hard part: forget all that bullshit. We are human beings, we're all busy, and yet we still make time for things that we really want to do. I'm floored every time an aspiring author tells me that they don't have

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time to write, and the next subject of discussion is binge-watching some show on Netflix. That's why you're an *aspiring*-author. I tell myself that when a person like that decides they really want to write something, they'll make time to write, instead of watching TV.

There are exactly 24 hours in every day. Most spend 8 at work, 8 asleep, 4-5 hours for hygiene, commuting, and basic life stuff. Then there's homework, house work, and time with the kids. We get maybe an hour or two to ourselves every day, and what do we do with it? Watch television, play games, hobby shit, or take extra time to make special meals.

I was sitting with my cousin one day, trying to convince him that a day-job isn't a bad idea while working on his real-estate stuff. I made two budgets, one for money, and one for time. It took all of five minutes, and he was floored by the results, realizing that he had way more unused time than he expected. Time he could devote to chasing his dreams, even with a day-job.

Some people have more time than others. In the oilfield, my shifts were 13 hours long,

and I had no weekends. The nearest grocery store was typically half an hour from the rig, and we never really knew how long we'd be out there, so I ended up running back and forth every second or third day; another hour lost. I budgeted for 8 hours of sleep, because I had to. If anything was wrong with my equipment, the night-hand would wake me up, I'd squash whatever bug had invaded the surface system, and try to get back to sleep.

I think the reason I work so hard on my writing pursuits in the morning is a direct result of that job. I woke up an hour or two early every day, even if they got me up in the night. If there wasn't some looming disaster waiting for me, I could guarantee myself an hour or so of writing time, while eating breakfast.

I did it because I had to write. I didn't watch television, and I still don't. I saved a lot of the social media junk for five minute breaks during the day. I wrote, because I had to get words in, and I had no guaranteed time to do it. I had to take advantage of every available minute, quite literally.

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Nowadays, my conversations with people about why they don't have time to write go something like this.

Them: After I get off work and help the kids with their homework, and bla, bla, bla, I just want to relax and wind down. I don't have any energy left.

Me: Then go to bed! Set your alarm clock an hour early, go to bed an hour early, and you will have an hour to write in the morning.

Them: But I can't write when I wake up.

Me: Buy a notebook, and take it with you to work. Scribble on your lunch-break.

Them: But then I can't go out to eat for lunch.

Me: Pack a lunch.

Them: But...

Am I the only person who sees where this conversation is headed? It reminds me of a conversation I had with a jobless thirty-something in a bar. He was upset. He had a degree, skills, and in his own words, he knew



how to math. What was the problem? He couldn't find a job. I had to probe further, and I already finished my scribbling for the night. I think I was working on Viral Ember edits at the time. I'll give you the short version.

He got a job in his field, he loved the work, but he was getting paid the same as lesser humans who didn't have his degree or his skills, and he wanted to make more money. I told him I could make a phone call and get him a six-figure income the next day (my old boss called earlier asking if I knew anyone who was willing to work). He said the job didn't line up with his skills, and he wouldn't enjoy it. He didn't want to work even a part-time job while looking, and to be honest, he wasn't looking. He had given up, but he liked talking about having a dream job that probably doesn't exist, because every job that matched what he wanted was confronted with another deficiency that suddenly became a deal-breaker.

Writer's do the same thing, or I should say wannabe-writers. They don't really want to write, but they envision how nice it would be to have their name on a bestseller. If you aren't

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willing to do the work, then just don't do it, but don't kid yourself. Writers are weird. We have an addiction to keystrokes and ink scratches. We *need* to write, or we'll go insane. Addicts have their daily bump, alcoholics need their boos, and we need our words. Find me on a night when I haven't finished at least 500 words, and I'm not going to be pleasant.

But just like others, perhaps just like you, I wasn't born with this addiction, I developed it. If you don't have the addiction yet, don't take that as meaning that you aren't a writer, you just haven't gotten hooked yet. Like any drug, daily writing takes time, it has a honeymoon phase. But once you get in the habit, you'll be a rabid addict, just like the rest of us.

It started out so innocently, from my first attempts at comics as a kid, to some non-fiction and philosophical books that I never finished in my early twenties, to a screenplay I wrote after college, to my first novel based on another comic. Then my brother lit a fire under my ass one night to either get published, or he would steal my book, and publish it himself. I started

writing again, and I wrote every day, almost. I tried to write everyday. I found myself thinking about my story every time I lit a cigarette. I told people about my characters when I went out. By the time I scratched out three novels in 2015, I was hopelessly addicted. I can no longer not write. It didn't happen immediately, but hooking yourself on writing is like getting sucked into a television show, or tempting fate by trying crack. You do it every day, and love it every day, until you need it every day. Then you're a writer.

Instead of telling your friends that you have to get home to watch the new episode of whatever, you tell them that you need to get home to write. Your free minutes become writing minutes. A person like that doesn't make excuses why they can't write, they make excuses why they can't do anything else, because they need their writing time.

You make time for the things you love. You make time for things that are important. If your show, or your game, or your social media interactions take priority over your writing time, then you'll never finish the damn book. Sorry.

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The good news, is that you can find this mindset inside yourself. You can make writing a priority. I use fear, the fear that if I stop writing, for even one day, that the habit I've worked so hard for will disappear.

A little pep talk sometimes works too. Whatever it takes to get your ass in a chair. Type one word, then a sentence, then another. Once the rhythm starts, it's easy to maintain.

Do writing sprints, force yourself into that chair, and write crap if you have to, until the words come.

*You must stay drunk on writing  
so reality cannot destroy you.*

-Ray Bradbury

## **Chapter Three**

### **Start Today, Right Now**

If you haven't started yet, start right now. Already started on your novel? Start again. Took a day off? A week? a year? You guessed it. Start, right now.

If you are reading this chapter on your computer, then open up a word processor in the background. Now.

Reading on an e-reader? open your laptop, or notebook, or bust out the typewriter, whatever. Right now.

Not at home? Get your notebook and a pen. Don't have a notebook? Find a napkin, a

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post it, a blank sheet of paper. I don't care if you're sitting on the toilet, there's a roll of paper right next to you. Okay, I might be pushing it there, but you get the point, do not start this chapter without some way of getting words into print.

Go on, I'll wait.

Okay you're back. And you better have a pen in your hand. Scribble down these words, "I will move the story forward."

The rest of this chapter will be broken into sections depending on where you are at in your story. You can skip the ones that don't apply, but by the end of this chapter, I want you to have words on a page. Okay? You promise? Alright, lets go.

### **Phase One: The New Story**

This section is for those who don't have a story idea yet. Look around the room, the bar, or wherever you are, and find a main character. You need some inspiration. You can think later, for now you need to write. It could be anything, your coffee, for instance. I'm going to give you some prompts to get you started.

The hollow cup: Your coffee can feel the end approaching. It's not sure what will happen when it's gone, but realizes that bit by bit, it's level in the cup is draining.

The tyrant: Your pen is ready to begin it's campaign against the paper. That blank page has ruled for far too long, and it's time to turn the tide. With any luck, it will someday rule the page, forever.

The desk: Ever feel like everyone is using you to prop up their work? Unappreciated and passive, but no more. Today, the desk will be noticed, one way or another.

The don't tread on me carpet.

Those two guys on the subway burst into a fight to the death.

The guy in the next cubicle has a secret fetish.

Write. Write until you have filled up a page, and see what kind of ideas you spur up. These exercises can result in short stories, or they can spur thoughts for longer story arcs. They basically free up your mind. Even if you

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don't turn up anything, you've still got words down, and you can go back to brainstorming your novel.

### **Phase Two: I have an idea, but...**

So you have an idea for a novel? Awesome. Break the page in front of you into three parts (mentally, of course, or, whatever). Label each part, the top will be "the beginning: development." Write something down about the main character. Who are they, and what do they want?

Label the next part "the middle: conflict." What happens? Is the kingdom falling into darkness because [thing happens]? Is the hero lost in the woods? Does Jessica secretly love her boss? Jot down some notes explaining why the situation is complicated.

Label the last section "the end: the resolution." The kingdom is saved or lost. The hero finds his way back, or finds a pretty damsel and decides to stay lost. Jessica shags. Whatever it is, jot it down.

Now go back through the sections again, and fill in a little more, and a little more. That's



right, I think you are catching on. You just wrote an outline, and you thought it would be hard. You're so welcome.

Keep working on it, start on page one, or give yourself a pat on the back for getting some words down.

### **Phase Three: The Blank Page**

Writer's block is bullshit. You don't have to agree with me, just agree with me. Just nod, and obey. Say it with me, "Writer's block is bullshit." There, feel better? Now write it, "Writer's block is bullshit." Make it bold, that's control-B on the computer, or run your typewriter or pen back over the letters. "Writer's block is bullshit." There's actually another chapter dedicated to this topic, because writer's block is bullshit. It's a lie, made up by best-selling authors to keep you from finishing your novel.

Now that's out of the way. Start writing your fucking story. Start anywhere, doesn't matter. Don't worry about if it's chapter one, or if you need a prologue, or any of the rest of that crap. Don't worry if you are starting too early in

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the story, or too late. Don't worry about writing a catchy first line. You're going to change all that bullshit when you come back to edit anyway.

So, let it go, let 'er rip, just start writing the story. Describe the main character. Describe the setting. Tell me something about your new universe that is about to be born. But write, and don't worry if it's crap. It's all crap. Don't believe me? Ask Hemingway:

*The first draft of everything is shit.*

This is one of those moments when you need to let the baggage of a bunch of online writers go. They aren't writing your story, you are. And you will have to revise it like fifteen times after the first draft, so fuck it. Let yourself make some mistakes, and start telling your story. Ready? Go.

#### **Phase Four: I'm not sure what to do next.**

If you go back and start editing the last chapter, and call it "writing time," then I'm going to alert my letter minions, and they are going to jump off this page and attack you in

your sleep. You can read one page of your previous material. Just one, and then carry on.

Check your outline. Where does the protagonist need to be headed? Now put a bunch of demons, firebombs, and critters with sharp teeth all around the poor guy, and get them moving that way.

Pantsing it? You have two options. Scribble out a quick outline, see phase 2, so that you can get some words down real quick. Or, just follow the guy or gal around for a little while. Get in their head. Give them the reigns, and see where they go for a couple pages. The second you get the opportunity, drop a safe, and get them back in line.

There is one other technique that will help. Open up a new document, and write a short bit of prose about something else happening in the world of your character at that moment. It doesn't even need to have anything to do with the story. Write down what the antagonist is up to. Come up with another character, maybe your protagonist can bump into them later.

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Then come back to your story and write one sentence. Any sentence. Add something to your story. Do this daily.

Another tactic is to simply put in a note that reads “finish this later,” and skip ahead to the next chapter. It’s okay. I won’t tell anyone.

### **Phase Five: Almost Done.**

One of my favorite sayings is this: close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades. Don’t take a break, don’t slack up. Keep going. There’s no time like the present. Or, in the words of one of my favorite characters in Patrick O’Brian’s *Master and Commander*: “There isn’t a moment to lose.”

Do not fall into the trap that you can take a day or two off because you are “almost done.” Many a budding novelist has failed exactly at that point. Steven Pressfield is my favorite example. Maybe after you finish writing, you can give one of his books a shot. *Do the Work* and *The War of Art* are good ones, and both are short. He’ll tell you all about the perils of “almost finishing.”

Every day, every spare minute. Don't stop fighting until the fight is done. What's the classic horror trope? Oh, yeah. Turning your back on the villain because you assume he's dead.

This is a dangerous time for you. I don't care what you do after the draft, but please, please. Do not stop the writing process until you're done, or you will end up regretting it.

### **Back to the Story**

The big take-away from this chapter? The main bullet point? It's never too soon to start putting words down, and it's never too late. Once you've started on a first draft, it's of vital importance that you work on it every single day. Making excuses, procrastinating, or putting it off is like some kind of sinister force acting against you. Pressfield calls it resistance. I never gave it a name, myself, but it is something that every writer I know experiences, including me.

The only way to overcome these distractions from writing, is to write through them. Just like in life, you earn courage by being afraid, and doing the thing you're afraid

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of anyway. In writing, you write, even when you don't want to. *That* is what attracts the muses.

*Start where you are. Use what you have.*

*Do what you can.*

-Arthur Ashe

## **Chapter Four**

### **Don't Draft a Finished Novel**

Because it's not going to happen, ever. This isn't something that a novice author wants to hear. Hell, even experienced word pros will argue with it, quoting that editing is easier if extra care is taken with the first draft. And you know what? If you are already cranking out books, and nitpicking every sentence is working for you, have at it. But have you ever tried a faster approach?

I'm going to put it plainly. Nitpicking and editing as you go will result in a tighter manuscript, that's fine. But what happens

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when you suddenly need to rewrite several chapters? Or worse, you have to change a major plot point. That doesn't happen to you, ever? And you can guarantee that? Fine. The rest of us aren't so lucky.

Here's an example. When I'm humping ass, I can finish a first draft of a novel (80,000 words), in as little as eight days. EIGHT! Is this a habit, no? But could I do it? Absolutely. With a good outline, 2 weeks is plenty of time to punch out a novel draft.

With all the time some writers spend nitpicking to decide if their story is even worth writing, I would have hashed out all of the details and made a decision, I can have a first draft, on my desk, and know exactly what it needs or doesn't need. I can evaluate it to see if it's worth pursuing, and I can move onto the next story.

The first editing pass (I usually add a month of wait time here) will be scanning for big blocks of data that need to be moved or tweaked, and taking notes. That could take a week. Then I do the block edit, and make the needed adjustments. I'm a month in (in actual



working time), and I have a full manuscript, and a cohesive story. Someone averaging 200 words per day? They have two chapters beautifully written, maybe three, and a bunch of sentences that they will have to kill later, which they worked so hard for.

Now, a little note here, I'm talking about full bore writing time, with few other projects standing between me and my book. Just remember that I did exactly this, working a thirteen hour per day job. Now, let's just say I spend another month tidying sentences (2 or 3 passes), a month in beta reads, and another month making more fixes and tweaks based on peer review, to ensure that my final product matches the market.

I now have a novel, ready for querying in four months. Sure, I can play with sentences and move commas around, but the novel is fucking done, in four months! Four months averaging 200 words per day? 24,000 words. Less than a third of the first draft. I don't care how flowery your sentences are. You're a third of the way through a first draft, and I'm pitching my story to agents. Let that sink in.

How do I get done so fast? Because I'm not editing. I'm not rushing back through all of the other chapters to figure out who was wearing what, and what happened to the suitcase, and editing typos. I'm writing, and pushing the story forward. Following are a few tips to help you knock out a first draft quick.

1. Buy a notebook. I know that it seems silly and out of date, and if you prefer opening a separate document on your computer, that's fine. Keep a chapter by chapter play book of what is happening, and what all the characters are really up to. Keep track of items, such as jackets, clothing, and other ancillary items that you might mention later. Keep a running tally on everything.

2. If you forgot to jot something down in the notebook, and you can't remember, then guess. Yes, I realize that this puts a screw-up in your novel that must be fixed later. On the same token, if you think of something that needs to be changed, pretend that it is already changed, and move forward. Jot a note about it in your notebook, so when you go back to edit, you will know to fix it.

3. Writing time is sacred. This is your job, and even if you can only offer up an hour per day, make sure that you keep to that schedule, every day, until the book is done. Put in extra time as you get it. Writing every day will keep the story fresh in your mind, and you will lose track of less of those annoying details.

4. Don't be afraid to write badly. There are times when I'm on my fourth or fifth editing pass, come across an annoying sentence, and suddenly, I know exactly how to word it. I didn't waste hours on the previous passes trying to find the right words, I let them come to me. If it's not the final pass, then it isn't worth spending more than a couple minutes on any sentence. Sometimes if they are really frustrating me, I just cut them altogether.

5. Don't listen to the experts. As a matter of fact, don't listen blindly to me either. Temper every piece of advice that you get. If it sounds like a good idea, try it for a week. If it sounds like a shitty idea, then dump it and move on. Just smile and nod at the advice giver.

6. Do NOT doubt your talent. Even for a second. Don't give up. If you notice a fault in

your writing (and you should from time to time), then work on fixing it, but keep moving forward. This is how we grow, not by speculating, or going back to page one. We become authors by putting words on a page. Allow yourself to make mistakes as you go.

7. “That’s what the editing phase is for.” Anytime I catch myself making some silly mistake, or even a huge mistake, I shake it off and repeat this mantra. Any minor worry about the book. What genre does it fit into? Finish the book. Is my word count on target? Finish the book. Been using semicolons wrong all along? Finish the book. Don’t have a name for that character? Finish the book. Don’t fret about all those irrelevant details. Everything can be fixed with editing, and you will know better how to fix it. So, just finish the damn book.

8. Don’t go back to page one, ever. Trust me on this one, okay? If you finish a chapter, and edit, and do another, and edit, and another, and back to page one, editing, you aren’t ever going to finish your book. Some people are going to disagree with me, let them. But every time I’ve tried to write a book this way (and I

*have* several times in my youth), I have never managed to finish the first draft, and never realized the wonder that is editing.

The gleaning point of this chapter, is that as an author, you must be brave. You must be willing to stumble, and make mistakes. Trying to cover them up is going to cost time and energy. It's going to drain your motivation, and cripple your ability to finish. It's going to let all the monsters of self doubt out of their cages to run free over your psyche, and eventually they will convince you to quit. Finish the draft, before it finishes your author career.

*Fortune favors the bold.*

-Latin Proverb



## **Chapter Five**

### **Writer's Block is Bullshit**

Inspiration is bullshit, too. I sit down everyday and write. I regularly crank out thousands of words. Why? Do I have some supernatural ability? Nope, but I like getting paid. When your job is writing, you constantly have to blast content. My clients don't care if I'm tired or sick, or I need to have my teeth cleaned. They want output, and they want it on a deadline.

I knew going into the freelancing world would be writing from the trenches, and it is, but I also knew that I could draft articles and PLR reports, write short stories, or dress up

dull content with cute and witty commentary. I knew this because of how I write novels.

I read, edit, and sometimes completely re-write work that my clients paid for, and lost money on, so that I can turn it into something they can sell. The more I do this, the easier it is to sit down and go to work, even if the muse is taking a day off. When I started writing my first novel, I didn't know how writers did it. Through helpful daily writing quotes from a blog, I learned to make use of my time and tell the story, instead of over-thinking the process, which I'm usually terrible about.

I write everyday, all day, and when I finish with my freelance work, I concentrate on my stories and books. The stories are the good stuff. They aren't scratching your head trying to come up with a witty headline for your blog that will appease the Google gods. They aren't droning out on coffee and retyping shitty words because the original author couldn't speak English. Writing a novel? That's the fun stuff, so stop fretting, and start enjoying it.

In the last three years of writing nearly every day, I've never experienced this thing



called “writer’s block,” though it hit me in the early days. Even though a muse does occasionally drop by and kiss me on the cheek, that’s not the norm. I don’t think it’s ever been the norm, for any writer.

When people ask me how I come up with ideas to write about, I usually tell them what I do when I really need an idea fast. When I got my commission to write *Viral Spark*, it was still this humble little short story about some kid living in a shitty apartment with cool special effects. I had to turn it into a series of novellas, and fast. Here’s what I did.

I ordered a pizza with extra pepperoni. I scrounged up every sci-fi DVD in my house, and I bought a case of beer. Not kidding. I set an alarm on my phone for 4am, and another one for 9am. I started drinking, binge watching science movies, and scribbling every stupid idea for a story that popped into my head. After going through the process, I can’t say that I recommend the beer.

I woke up at four o’clock, went outside for a smoke, and wrote down more ideas nursed by the crazy dreams brought on by greasy

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pizza. When I finally crawled into my hangover later the next morning, I had pages and pages of ideas. I chose five that looked good, drank a ton of water, cleaned myself up, and went straight to Barnes & Noble to start drafting. I cranked out 8,000 words, despite the hangover. The next day I did another 6,000, and I finished the first draft on day three. Three days, from brainstorming to done, and the only real inspiration was a headache that refused to go away.

Joking aside, I think my real inspiration was finding someone that liked my stories. This is why I'm an advocate of show and tell. Somehow, in that moment, the years of hard work leading up to it was enough to inspire not only that novella series, but everything I've written since.

My outline for Viral Spark consisted of a two-page spread, with four headlines across the top: the best of the dozens that I had written in the night. Under each headline was a story arc. "Virus hacking people, virus becomes self-aware, virus helps Robert." That kind of thing. An outline doesn't have to be some elaborately

detailed list with a fancy indentation scheme. I filled in some of the blank space with a few extra details, and went to work.

Steven Pressfield calls it resistance. I call it lack of drive or motivation. But it *can* be overcome. The blockages are real, they happen, but the stigma of this being some kind of wipe that arrests the mind of a writer from the outside is a cruel fabrication. It gives us an excuse not to write. We don't have to feel bad if we throw up our hands and say, "writer's block." We can sleep easy, because some force beyond our control has denied us the ability to create.

I've never, ever, believed in that sack of crap. I'm here to drop it on your doorstep and set fire to it, if that's what it takes. Writer's block doesn't come from some mythical outside force. It's that age-old mind trick of your inner dialogue talking you out of something because it involves work.

The fact that it's a lie isn't a pass, and I'm sure you didn't read this chapter to hear me make fun of it. Blockages are a real problem,

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but they aren't crippling, and they aren't random.

Blockages can come from things like a death in the family, loss of a friend, a break-up, or maybe someone that pissed you off earlier. They come from being tired or dehydrated. They come from eating too much junk food. They come from a resounding sound byte cycling through your mind, clogging up all the bandwidth.

If you're tired. Sit down. Open the document. Tell yourself that you are going to write one sentence and then go to sleep. That first sentence might spark another, but write one sentence, and consider it a win. Your first victory against the dreaded writer's block. The battle that turned the tide forever.

All it takes is one sentence. I've had days where I literally added three words to my manuscript, and then went to bed.

Can't get work done where you are? Move. Take your notebook or laptop, and go to a coffee shop, a bookstore, the park, a

museum, a library. Anywhere but where you are, and grab some caffeine on the way.

Train with treats. Grab a bag of candy, and eat exactly one piece after each paragraph, or each page, or whatever. Any kind of positive reinforcement will work for this, but my favorite is SweetTarts.

Follow the main character. Don't worry about the excess crap words. Just picture your main character in your head, and write what he or she is doing. They might stumble around for a while, but once the words are flowing, they tend to create more words, and before you know it, the story is moving again.

Work on something else for a while. Write one sentence on your story, and then draft a piece of flash fiction about something else. You can write it about writer's block. You can start a journal. You can write up a news article and post it on Facebook. Whatever. Then get back to your story.

Let me tell you what writer's block really is. It's the monster under a child's bed. The novice writer is the child, terrified to go to sleep,

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and no night light or teddy bear is going to save you. You fight off the monster by standing up to it. Toss off the covers and shout, “do something.” When you call it out, you’ll realize that it can’t hurt you, because it isn’t even real. You’ll take a stand, and come up with your own creative ways to fight it off. You’ll be writing, just to annoy it, the way it has annoyed you. It’s your way of telling the monster that you aren’t afraid. Adapt that mindset, and Writer’s block will crawl back behind the screen, and you can get your work done.

*Inaction breeds doubt and fear.  
Action breeds confidence and courage.*

-Dale Carnegie

## **Chapter Six**

### **No, I Don't Need a Day Off**

It's not okay to not get your words in. When you are drafting a novel, one single day missed can sometimes be recovered from, but too often, it turns from one day without writing into two, into a week, a month, and then forever. I wrote this booklet because all too often, I see this happen to otherwise good writers. By the time they come back to finish the book, they've forgotten the story, and have to re-read the whole damn thing to get caught up again. Their brain figures out how much work it's going to be, and internal dialogue derails their efforts.

Anytime someone tells me that it's okay that I missed a day, I might force a smile and a nod, but on the inside I want to chew them out. I want to rip into them about exactly how okay it is not. I've left too many books behind in this fashion. After your rack up two or three half-novels, you'll know what I'm talking about. It's never okay to miss a day of writing, unless it can't be avoided, especially when you are drafting a novel.

I've gotten to the point now where I will refuse to miss a day out of terror. Trepidation rings through every bone in my body, and every soft tissue attached, that if I miss just one day of writing, I won't finish the book. I told my brother once that I draft fast because I have to. If I pick up any new project, writing or otherwise, and don't finish it in 90 days, then it'll never get done. I lose interest. I lose my passion. You might have a longer attention span than I do, but you should still beware.

I remember being at my mother's house one day. I often stay there, because it's close enough to my property to serve as a base camp, where I can work on my professional writing gig



in-between trips. I was upset. I don't remember what happened earlier that day because it doesn't matter, and it wasn't as important as writing.

I said something about taking the rest of the day off, and relaxing with my favorite video game, Kerbal Space Program. I was exhausted from the fast-paced events of the morning (probably scrambling to finish something for a new client), and I felt spent.

The previous chapter is about writer's block being a load of donkey dung, and it is, but that doesn't mean that we, as writers, don't get bogged down from time to time. It doesn't matter whether you are logging trees, or working a cash register, there are days when you finish your normal daytime stuff, you want to call the day "over," and just go to sleep. I needed to refresh.

She said something to me about how I'd been working too hard. How I had been staying up until after midnight every night and then jumping out of bed at six in the morning. How she never saw me without my laptop. "You need to take a break," she said.

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Now, I love my mother, don't get me wrong, but when she sounds like one of those stupid voices in my head, telling me to slow down and take a break, I tell it like it is. I said something, half tongue-in-cheek, like "That's not what I need to hear today. Or ever. I never need to hear that it's okay to take a break."

As a continuation of the sarcastic communication, she said, "Well fine then, stop sitting around and get your butt back to work! Is that what you want to hear?"

I smiled. That was exactly what I wanted to hear. I still needed to recharge my batteries, so I set an alarm on my phone for one hour. I played my game until the alarm went off, and then took a shower, my second of the day. I changed clothes, laced up my boots, grabbed my laptop, and disappeared into the little writing den. And I didn't come out until I had 500 words down.

I don't even remember what I was working on at that point. It could have been an editing pass for the horror story (in which case I wrote bits of flash fiction between chapters), or some bit of work that I needed to finish.

They say that writers have thick skin. In essence, if you ever want your words to actually be read, then you need to have thick skin. Reviews suck. Criticisms suck. But those sucky bits are necessary for growth and development. We need feedback. But that thick skin serves another purpose. The people around us can help our motivation.

Online, I get it. These people don't live with me, they don't know me, and I don't have to tell them how many hours per day I spend slacking off. My closest writer friends only see a word count, and a stream of motivational energy.

Even so, those closest to you, your friends and family, can have the strongest pull on your motivation, and they always seem to be pulling you away from your target, not pushing you toward it. A long time ago, I started wondering if coaches being soft on me was part of the reason that I sucked at everything. I started pushing myself in high school, and I improved, quickly.

I think that was when my inner coach entered the equation. If you think this book is

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harsh, I should let *that* guy write a chapter. All that voice does is yell at me, constantly, every day, and I love that voice. Anytime I need a quick bit of motivation, I conjure up that cross between Al Pacino and Joe Pesci, to yell at me in a way that inspires. It goes something like this:

“You’ve been sitting there on your ass for thirty fucking minutes. If you would have started thirty minutes ago...”

I’ll spare you the rest, I need to keep my blood pressure in check at the moment. But those little pep talks stir up energy, they seem to create it. They call into existence a fireball that burns in my muscles, boiling my blood and setting me in motion. *That* is what I need to hear.

Say what you want about some pseudo-psychoanalysis of my character, only one important thing matters. That fictional coach in my head is never, ever, going to tell me that I need to take a break.

I guess I have to sleep sometime (gosh, life is so inconvenient), but until I’ve done what

I need for the day, I'm not letting go of any momentum that I've built up. When I'm writing a novel, coach is always turned on. I'm too scared of having to scrap another book to turn him off. My novel infects every aspect of me. Every cigarette is a meditation on how the next scene is going to go, every break at work a reflection on the overall scope of my story. If you really want to see me pissed off, interrupt me when I'm sitting down to work on a first draft.

I suppose I should pad this with the fact that anger isn't a particularly useful emotion, and I've learned to harness it in a certain way that enhances my focus. I'm not even sure I can call it anger, because it doesn't really come with any of the baggage. It's more like fury, just something to get my blood running, to get me moving. There are other (probably more productive) ways to accomplish the same thing.

In the end, just make sure that you know all of the consequences that come with "taking a break for a day or two." An inner coach can help with that. Ensuring that you've scheduled your writing time can help with it. If you know

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that you are going to be tired during your normal time slot, then it's important to do some prep work. Think about your story, and where you want to go. Do some jumping-jacks before sitting down to write. Get some extra-strong coffee. Whatever it takes. And if you don't want to take a break, don't let anyone convince you that you should.

*Don't succumb to excuses. Go back to the job of making the corrections and forming the habits that will make your goal possible.*

-Vince Lombardi

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Ragged Out and Writing**

Tonight is, perhaps, the most perfect opportunity for me to write this chapter. When it comes to blockages, resistance, or whatever you want to call that unholy force that keeps us from getting words on paper, it comes in several varieties. Most all of them boil down, ultimately, to one solution, and the very existence of this chapter stands as proof of that.

Last night, I got about 3 hours of sleep. Not sure about your habits, but I'm not used to that. I couldn't fall asleep, I couldn't stay asleep, and I had to get up early to help out

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with a promotion campaign for a friend, who also didn't sleep much last night.

I did manage to fit in a nap, but on top of the regular promotion, I've been working around the clock to build a couple of new social platforms, and promotion day means engagements on social media. I probably sent over 200 tweets, posts, replies and messages today, maybe over 300. Most of it has not been copy-paste. It wears you down.

At this moment, I feel like going to sleep. The fires are almost all put out. Everything can wait until tomorrow. But what the hell kind of inspiration would I be if I let that stop me, especially in the middle of adding content to this book? I came back to part one, and decided to add this chapter, because I'm getting my 500 words tonight, and there isn't anything else I want to work on, at least as far as my personal writing projects. This is it.

Now, I'm going to be straight with you. It wasn't easy to start typing. Every time I went to start, I allowed myself to get distracted. I probably killed an hour letting my mind get the better of me. Telling me that I needed to



concentrate on this or that instead of writing. Making me believe that I didn't know what to write about. Opening the folder was hard. Opening the document was harder. Putting my fingers on the keys and hitting go? That was the breaking point.

The same goes for all blocks when it comes to writing. It's a rare thing, especially in 2017, to have no physical way of getting words down. If you can speak, you can write. But saying it, or thinking about it, is different than actually doing it. I'm still yawning, even through this paragraph. Exhaustion has taken its toll, but I write.

Once I slid everything else to the side, and told myself, "no more Internet until you get another chapter done," in that instant, something hit, and I knew I had to write this chapter. I don't care if I needed to reformat some things to make it fit. Doesn't matter. Tonight was the perfect example of overcoming this monster that people call writer's block. I'm fighting the monster right now, with every word, and every keystroke.

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I went to the table of contents, to put in a chapter title, and the monster fought back. Three or four minutes later I realized that I was on the defensive again. I hammered out a few words that looked something like a chapter title, and moved on. I scrolled down, made a new chapter heading page, and then I was golden. The first paragraph was a hard won victory. I defeated the monster, or so I thought.

This small bout of enthusiasm made me feel comfortable enough to check another social media message, and again I was drawn away from my writing. It was only for a couple minutes, but it may as well have been a day. Not everyone has 2 or three hours in the night. We have jobs. We have lives. We have dishes and dirty laundry.

I went back to the document, and continued writing. Once again, the words were flowing. Once again, I had control. Once again, the monster backed off. At each sentence break, each paragraph break, I have an idea that will destroy my chain of keystrokes. They come in the form of tiny voices of reason:

“I should make a blog post, right now.”

“I should rename the chapter title.”

“I wonder if so-and-so messaged me back. I hope everything is alright with him.”

“Oh man, I forgot to check my other email today.”

These voices are the demons of doubt and frustration. They are the destroyers of motivation. They will be the end of your writing if you allow them to be. I'm even skeptical about checking the word count so far, just to see where I'm at. It will only take a second, right? No, I must go on. I must finish what I started, and I don't even know if the chapter will convey the meaning that I intended. I don't know if it will resonate with the reader. I don't know if it will help. I'm not sure what quote to use in closing. I don't even know if these words will ever see the light of day, yet I continue to hammer away at the keys. The story moves forward, not back.

I'm in a position where aside from correcting typos, I'm encouraged to leave this chapter exactly as it stands. This is the writing process. Everyday. All the time. It's hammering

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away at the keys. It's ignoring those little voices telling you why you need to stop typing, and look at something else. As Steven Pressfield puts it, it's doing the work.

You keep writing, always forward, never back, and at this point I don't care how many words are in this chapter. I've done what I set out to do. I hope this rambling fills a purpose. I hope it inspires you, or at least lets you know that you are not alone. You too, can do the work, turn off the world, and finish the damn book.

*Writing is most of all an exercise in  
determination.*

-Tom Clancy

## Afterward

When I started writing this book, I knew that I wanted it to be much more than a book. I want it to spread. I want every writer out there who is having trouble finding their groove to have a source they could go back to. I want them all to finish their books. So I'm giving chapters 1-7 away for free, as a PDF.

If you know a writer who you think could benefit from this book, send them over to:

[www.writefarmlive.com/coupon](http://www.writefarmlive.com/coupon)

The first seven chapters are right there for download. You don't have to do anything, you don't have to give me your email address. You don't have to sign up for a promotion, just download the booklet. This afterward is included in that book too. Tell your friends.

I plan on using this page in the future for more promotional goodies, so by the time you read this, it might be loaded with discount links or other free offers. Check it out when you get a chance.

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If you loved this book, and you would like to help spread the word about it's benefits, email me at [spottedgeckgo@gmail.com](mailto:spottedgeckgo@gmail.com), see what I'm up to, and how you can help. If you're a blogger and want to interview me or write a post about the book, email me and tell me about it. If you want to stay posted on revisions, updates, and special promotions, let me know that too. I'll let you know what I'm doing with the book, and when and where it's going down.

Most of all, I hope you enjoyed the book. Electronic books can be revised, updated, and made better. That's why I made this an e-book to begin with. If there's something I can do to make it better, let me know about it. Email me at [spottedgeckgo@gmail.com](mailto:spottedgeckgo@gmail.com), that's spotted-g-e-c-k-G-o or use the Google form, there's a link on:

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At the end of the day, I want you to finish your damn book. Thanks so much for reading, there's some more goodies in the appendices. But don't waste too much time. Get writing!

The full version of the text is available on Amazon, and loaded with extra chapters on what to do with your finished draft, how to edit iteratively, and how the publishing process really works. The official launch is August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017, but it will be available for pre-order until then:

<http://bit.ly/buyftdb>

or just search “Finish the Damn Book!” on Amazon. I’m always interested to see what kind of crazy searches pull up my book. So if you have some time, search my book using keywords that aren’t in the title, the weirder the better, and if you find the book, send me a screenshot, and a link that you would like me to blast to my twitter and facebook followers. Maybe I’ll get you a couple new followers in the process. Email the screenshot and the link to [spottedgeckgo@gmail.com](mailto:spottedgeckgo@gmail.com)

## About the Author

Martin McConnell has a degree in Physics, writes non-stop, and is currently earning a living on his words. He's been in and around the novel writing community for over 10 years, has a stockpile of unfinished and mostly finished works, a passion for space and fast cars, and brings his writing shit with him to parties and bars.

You can find him anywhere on social media, though he usually lives online through his alter ego, @spottedgeckgo on Twitter. You can write him an email at [spottedgeckgo@gmail.com](mailto:spottedgeckgo@gmail.com), or find his website at [www.writefarmlive.com](http://www.writefarmlive.com) for all the writing tips you will ever need.

Every good story has a main character who drives the plot. Own your story, and drive your own plot.