

WRITERLY WIT*



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HELPFUL.

***SOMETIMES WITTY.**

WITH DEINA FURTH
Author, blogger, podcaster, human.

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Writerly Wit with Deina Furth

Ep. 1: Becoming a Writer

Hi, everyone, and welcome to the first episode of the Writerly Wit podcast, with your host—I'm Deina Furth.

I think a few people were wondering how to pronounce my name.

Well, now you know. It's not DEE-na, and it's not DIE-na. Just Dana, spelled differently because that's how you're unique in a world full of other people with the same name as you. You spell it crazy.

Now, before we start, I'd like to tell you just a few things about myself, so you know whose voice you're going to be listening to. I mean, I guess I'd want to know why some person felt the need to talk to me for fifteen minutes, so bear with me while I introduce myself.

I'm an author living in Minnesota in the United States. I am purposely keeping the city vague. So just imagine a snow-covered land where vikings roam freely, and I live in there somewhere.

I have two cats, Ume, a Siamese, and Momo, a snowshoe. They are adorable, though I might be a little biased on that. Although I haven't tweeted many pictures of them, they'll be making regular appearances at the end of my new video series, which you can find on YouTube.

I also have a fiance named Steven, who is studying to become a psychologist. We're getting married in May. Exciting! Until he starts dissecting my brain, that is.

I have been writing for many years, but I just recently started showing my work with the world.

Since coming “online” in March 2014, I've written a novelette called *The Magnum Opus*—a dark steampunk tale about a lonely, alcoholic engineer who builds himself a companion—and *Dysmorphia*—a collection of 10 short stories each embodying a different interpretation of the word “dysmorphia”, many of which focus on mental illness.

I write speculative fiction, sci-fi, fantasy, steam- and cyberpunk, a lot of fusion genres, and I write dark stories and horror. So I cover quite a few genres in my work.

I also run a site dedicated to promoting the works of short story and flash fiction authors with fellow author Mary Papas. It's still in its fledgling stages, but we've already accomplished quite a few things: We have our first anthology out, called "Reunions". We curated a bunch of stories from many, many contest entrants that we had, all talented short story authors. So we're really excited about that.

We also have a collection of story prompts out, called *110 Writing Prompts*. There are 110 of them. Exactly. Go figure.

We also run promotional things and hold writing contests every once in a while. It's really fun and something I'd love for you listeners to check out!

Alright so I think that about covers it for my introduction.

The reason this is called *Writerly Wit* is because I aim to teach something in every podcast.

There are still plenty of things I am learning myself, but I want to share what I'm learning with an eager crowd. If you have any suggestions or would like me to speak about a specific topic, I'll be leaving my contact information at the end of the cast, so you can let me know your thoughts. And if you would like to contribute any content, you can contact me for that as well.

This week's topic is "Getting Started". I've written a few articles on my blog that have gone over this topic in a couple of different ways: Getting over writer's block, plotting out a short story, and editing your work to find out where you can improve.

But I'd like to talk a bit about how to get started writing in general—that is, how does someone get started *writing if they've never written anything before?*

Maybe you've wanted to write for years, but never knew how. Maybe you always wanted to learn but were afraid you weren't good enough. Maybe you were even told at one point that you weren't any good, but you want to try again now—to learn, improve, and show everyone that writer inside you.

There's probably a joke there somewhere, but I won't go there. ;)

So in this podcast, we're going to talk about how you can get started writing and feel confident about what you're doing even if you're a complete beginner.

Step 1: You know you want to write. Say it out loud.

Every writer can probably remember that one special moment: The one where he or she realized that writing was a real goal to achieve, not just some distant dream. With this realization, you would no longer say, "I wish I could be a writer," or, "I've got three unfinished novels on my laptop—someday I'll finish them!"

No. Not that day. That day something clicked, something changed: You were gonna do it this time. Really.

But still, you felt hesitant to call yourself a writer. Because you hadn't written anything at all yet, other than the unfinished projects sitting around your computer, or the half-formed ideas floating around in your head, if those even counted for writing.

So what came next? Where could you start? How could you confidently refer to yourself as a writer?

Well the obvious answer is that you have to start writing, right? Right.

But first, tell yourself that this is something you really want. I mean, say it out loud. You can do it in front of the bathroom mirror in the morning with the fan and shower water running so your kids or partner or pets or whoever can't hear you. You could march in the door after work, do a dance, and loudly say you want to be a writer. You could even solemnly let it out over dinner during the holidays.

You have to say it. You have to believe it. Because if you don't believe it yourself, who else is gonna believe it? You have to show everybody.

Step 2: Form your author identity.

First, you have to decide what you want to write.

I'm not talking about plotting out an entire novel at this point. When I realized I wanted to write, I'd tried my hand at short stories, poetry, and I'd even written some novellas during high school (which will never, EVER see the light of day).

I almost became overwhelmed trying to choose a single direction to go in.

For me, the best choice was to start with something that would give me a deadline. I

found a contest I wanted to enter and I began to plan a story that would fit within those guidelines. As the story developed, I ended up publishing it on my own, because I didn't want to give it up to someone else. But the fact that I'd used a structure gave me direction to go in, which made my vision much clearer!

I don't think this is the right route for everyone, of course, but for me, it gave me much-needed structure in a time when I felt very alone and uncertain. I chose a contest that allowed me to write in a genre I was interested in, and I selected a word count that seemed challenging yet still achievable.

So if you feel like you need a little bit of direction, maybe it would be a good idea for you to try looking for a contest that can give you some ideas for content.

I've heard other people say that they've had an idea in their heads for years—a story always yearning to be told. If you have this, that's wonderful. But before you tackle a full-length novel, I think you should ask yourself a few questions:

- Am I really ready to start on a project this big? Am I setting the bar too high? (If you've never written anything before, you might have eyes bigger than your stomach, so to speak, and it might not be a good idea to start with a full-length work.)
- Is this idea something I can build an entire world and story around, or do I have just a little scene—a fantasy—that wouldn't really work as a novel or lengthy piece? A lot of people have ideas about what they want to write about, but they haven't thought the plot through well enough to realize there might not be a full story there.
- Is this story too personal? That is, if I write it, will I be able to deal with the editing and critique process? Sometimes things are a little bit too close to our hearts, and it can really, *really* hurt to have it shredded by an editor or agent or however you're planning on going about this. That's something you'll want to think about before you start writing.
- Am I writing to make money, or am I writing for fun?

Now, I'm not saying you shouldn't write a story close to your heart. I'm not saying you shouldn't write a novel if that's what you really have in mind.

What I am saying is that sometimes we want too much, too fast.

Which brings me to the next point:

If you're thinking you can write for quick money and success, let me tell you: You're choosing the wrong business.

There's writing for writing's sake—the hobbyist, the artist. And for these writers, self-censorship and editing are often not on the table. They want to express themselves freely without anyone else's input.

Fine. Money is probably not on the top of your list, anyway.

But my podcast is more for writers who want to start making a career of writing—that is, making it the sole (or a large part of) your income.

When you made the decision to be a writer and got your first idea in your head, you made a commitment to a long and difficult road ahead of you. This isn't some get-rich-quick scheme, and it takes a lot of hard work and dedication.

So when you start, make sure you're committed to an idea and choose something realistic for yourself. If you want to make money, then you might need to make some adjustments.

But that's okay, because the sooner you have a clear vision for your project, the sooner you can get to creating the real product.

After all of this, you'll have to decide whether you want to use your real name, initials and real last name, or if you'd like to come up with a pen name. Many erotica writers choose to do pen names, but some authors choose pen names just because they think they sound better than their real names. Still others, especially women, choose men's names for marketing purposes. It's really up to you. This is your writer identity. This is important.

Step 3: You make an area for yourself to write in.

This probably seems like a silly step.

But trust me, it is not.

I work from home for my day job. At night, I sit in the same spot and write. It actually does wreak havoc on your sanity. Even though I have a customized little space to work in, I can't separate myself from my day's work and my creative work at night.

When I worked in an office and came home at night, I did freelance work and played games at my desk. It didn't help me separate my mind from the day's stresses or from my hobbies.

What you have to do is find a spot to write and ONLY write.

If you live in a city, you can bring a laptop or tablet to a place where you feel comfortable. You can go onto a campus and work if you're a student. If you've got a library card, you can use your city's library as a great workspace.

If you live rurally, you'll have to find another room in your house to use (or, some writers have actually built porches or other enclosures where they can write—Chuck Wendig actually put a tiny shed outside where he could have his own space to just write—you can check out his blog at <http://terribleminds.com/> and read about it).

There are tons of tutorials available for you to turn a tiny closet into an office space. Even getting a tablet and finding a quiet corner to retreat to can help. Whatever you need to do to get your head out of your days' worries and into your writing haven.

Some things you'll want access to:

- **Wi-Fi.** But get a blocker and schedule out time when you should be writing for the internet to be completely blocked. We tell ourselves we're doing “research” far too often. Make sure you have something in place that will help you stay productive.
- **Tea, coffee, wine, something to sip on.** I mean, you probably shouldn't get trashed, especially if you're working in a public place, but having something there to sip on helps a lot. Keeps your brain working better.
- **Music, if music helps you.** You can create playlists for different scenes (action, love, battle, death, where you need to be weeping to write it). If music doesn't help you, sometimes getting a white noise machine or just playing ambient music can help. I do not work well in utter silence. But not everyone is like me!
- **A candle or something that smells nice always helps me relax.** After I've been writing for a while, sometimes things just start to feel stale. Lighting up a candle or using some wax warmers really makes me feel more comfortable and focused. I actually have a little skull lamp that sits next to

my speakers. His name is Spooky. Spooky has warm wax on the top of his dome, and seeing his smiling face just makes me feel all warm inside and creative.

- **Ample lighting.** Your eyes and head will thank you. Write somewhere you can be as physically comfortable as possible.
- **A great chair.** Your tiny office might not accommodate some big fancy chair. But you can get a nice little office chair with adequate back support (or add back support with a lumbar cushion) to make sure you're not destroying your spine while you're hunched over your computer.

So once you've decided on where you're going to write and you've made it comfortable and welcoming and conducive to creativity, you now have to make time to actually *do* it.

Step 4: You carve out time to write.

Before you can write, you'd better make sure there is time for it.

Most people have a lot of disposable time. Everyone today says they're very busy, and you know what? A lot of us make ourselves busier than we have to be. We say “yes” to far too many things we think we're obligated to do, when most of the time, we aren't.

We spend too much time watching TV.

Too much time playing games.

Too much time at the office when we don't need to be.

We never seem to be able to unplug.

An important part of being a writer is being able to unplug. You have to be selfish in this way. **You need to take time and use it only for yourself.**

I understand that there might be financial constraints for some listeners. Maybe you're a single mom with three kids and two minimum-wage jobs. You have the cards stacked against you, and it sucks. But maybe you have time over your lunch break to take out your phone and record some voice notes. You can type them up when you have time, or just keep dictating your ideas as the days go on, until you have a chunk of time to sit down and work out your writing. Or you could record in the car, or work on writing if you

take the bus or train into work.

Maybe you're a stay-at-home parent who takes care of kids all day and is EXHAUSTED. Writing down a few ideas before bed at night might help you—the ideas tend to marinate while you're sleeping. When you get some time—during kid's lunch, naptime, when your partner takes the kids away for an hour or two—you can easily jot the ideas down and build from there.

Maybe you're just a person who works a regular office job with a crap commute and you have very little energy when you get back from work. You could try getting up a little earlier to get some writing out of the way. If you have space on your lunch break, go ahead and break that tablet out, or you could do voice dictation, as I mentioned above. You can find ways to squeeze your writing into your work day.

The fact is, something's going to have to go if you want this dream to come true.

You're going to have to trim the fat so that you have as much good, uninterrupted time to write as you need to get your work done.

Step 5: Repeat.

All right, another obvious statement. But hear me out:

You NEED to have a schedule. You need to do this regularly. I knew a woman who wanted to write very badly. She sat down at night, wrote 100 words, and felt really productive and creative. Then she skipped two nights. Then she felt like starting another project. Did 100 words there. Then she didn't write again for a few weeks. Then she didn't know where to go--

You can see how this works. You need to pick a schedule and you need to stick to it. Now, I know I was kind of harsh in step 4, but you really do have to be honest with yourself and force yourself to work. **This IS a job. An extra job on top of all the other jobs you already have**—whether that's being mommy or daddy, being office manager (or drone), being caretaker to an ill parent, or anything else. We all wear a lot of hats—doesn't matter who you are. Find space for the writer hat in the pile, and put it on regularly. You'll probably look really good in it.

Step 6: Develop a plan to promote yourself.

If you're doing this for a living, you're going to have to promote yourself. The easiest way to do so is to start a blog.

Now, let me tell you: I hate blogging. I do it all day for my day job, and by the time I'm off, I don't feel like worrying about coming up with topics and making pinnable graphics and tweeting a whole bunch.

Thankfully, I am chock-full of resources to make your social media and blog management life much, much easier, should you choose to go that route. I'll talk about that in another episode. :)

Lots of people argue about whether a blog actually is necessary to have as an author platform. I don't think that it is, actually.

You can promote yourself on social media and use a website as your central hub. As long as you include links to your works and information on how people can contact you, you're fine. There are some authors who simply have a static website with links to their works and that's it. Some have a website and social media, but no blog.

Most of these writers are famous and already have a platform, but I won't say that it's IMPOSSIBLE to do this yourself if you're just starting.

However, a blog will keep the writing wheels oiled and it will also help you network. Having fresh content out all the time really does keep readers coming back for more. It helps them feel connected to you in a way that they might not feel about a more closed-off author.

You're going to get lots of advice from other authors. Depending on whether you plan to self-publish or do traditional publishing, you'll probably hear wildly different things.

But if there's one thing I want you to remember, and one thing that I think will always remain golden and true, it's this:

There's a lot of noise out there. The more work you put into getting others to hear you, the more likely it is that you'll actually be heard.

You'll be ahead of those who try to leave publicity up to the publishers (guess what? You still have to promote yourself nowadays, even if you do get traditionally published).

You'll be ahead of those who release a single book that dies in the Amazon charts as soon as it's uploaded, because the authors didn't bother to promote themselves. This happens to so many indie authors, and it's *really* depressing. Your book will more than likely remain unheard of if you don't try to market it, no matter how well written it is. And yes, you should start marketing even before you have your work finished. You need to build a platform in order to get sales. Harsh, but true.

All right, so if you're thinking of becoming a writer, those are my tips. You need to move through these steps to create a healthy writing state of mind and atmosphere.

If you're willing to nurture your desire for writing, you'll be rewarded.

In the next episode, I'm going to break down a number of tools that I use (or know of others using successfully) to manage time and productivity, social media tasks, and scheduling content.

There are far too many of them to include here, so I hope you return for that episode. Some real time- and sanity-savers in there, especially for people who are completely brand new to this!

In the meantime, you can email me with questions or comments at deina.furth@gmail.com.

Be sure to visit my site, <http://deinafurth.com>, and the **Short Story and Flash Fiction Society** at <http://www.shortstoryflashfictionsociety.com/> and see what Mary Papas and I have put up there. If you're in need of some ideas to get started writing, we've definitely got plenty of prompts and ideas for you there!

I'll leave you with a quote:

"Don't give up on what you want most, for what you want now."

Not really sure who said it, but it's good, right?

So until next time, this is Deina Furth with Writerly Wit, and I'll see you soon!