



WRITING HACKS FROM TOP AUTHORS



## Introduction

/ BY TIM GRAHL, FOUNDER OF  
OUT:THINK GROUP

Writing is hard work.

It's not hard like digging ditches or taking insurance claims. It's hard in an entirely different way. It's work that's full of hope, excitement, self-doubt and fear. It's all mental.

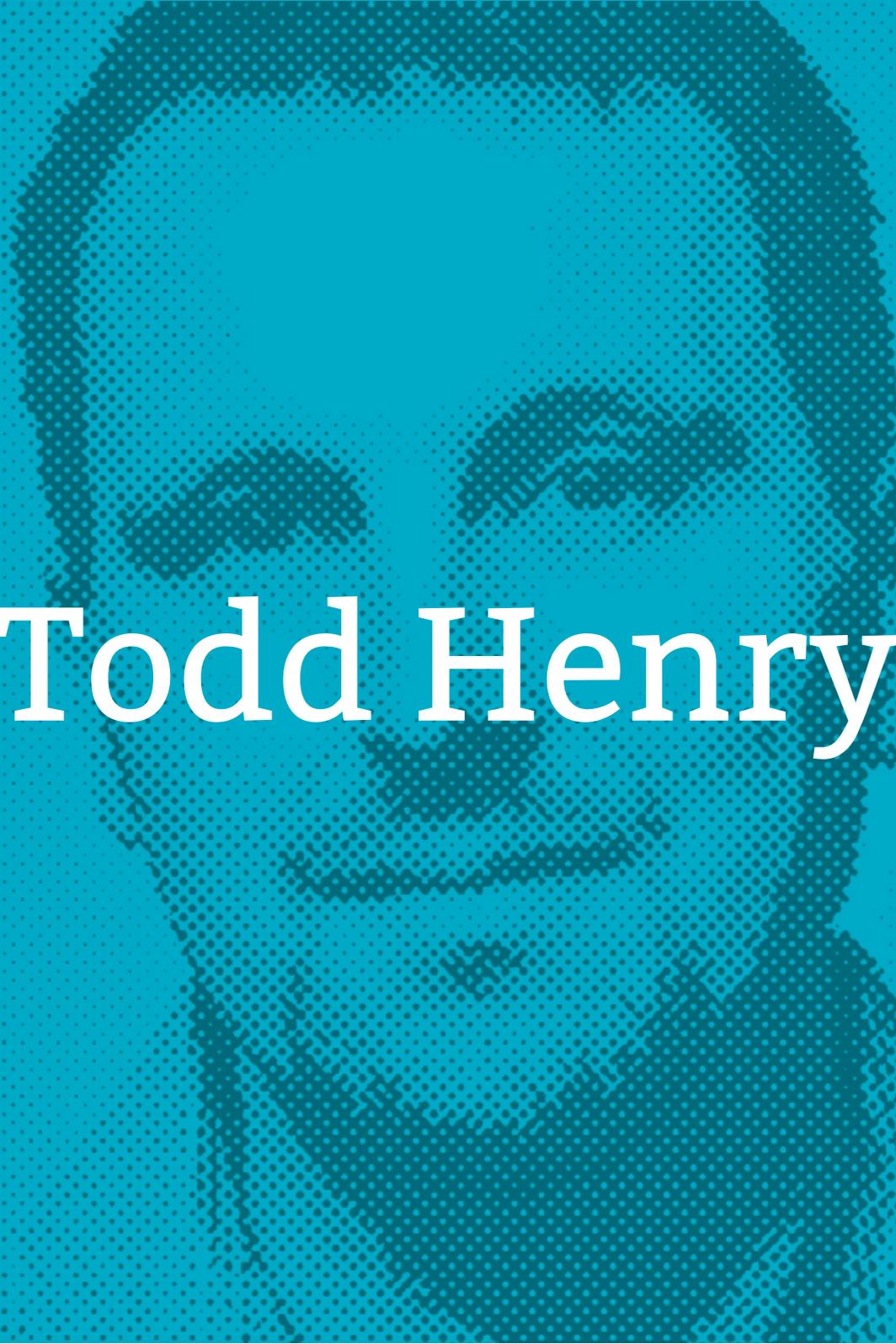
I've worked with over 100 authors over the last five years and let me tell you, all of us feel it. Whether you're a top best selling author adored by millions, or trying to get your first project pieced together, the process is never smooth and easy.

That's why I pulled together this ebook.

I love little hacks that make hard things just a little bit easier. Especially writing.

So I reached out to my author friends and asked them for their little quirks and tricks to get the job done. My hope is you'll find at least one thing in the following pages that will help you more quickly get your words on the page and then out to the world.

Enjoy!



# Todd Henry



## Todd Henry

/ AUTHOR OF *DIE EMPTY* AND  
*ACCIDENTAL CREATIVE*

Having published two books in the last three years (and diving into my third now), there is really only one tool that has been thoroughly indispensable in my writing process. I'm not talking about Scrivener, which is the app I use to do all of my drafting. I'm also not talking about Evernote, which is where I capture the majority of my research for the books. No, this tool is decidedly less sexy than either, but infinitely more adaptable and useful in a pinch.

### **Index cards.**

I carry them with me everywhere. They are cheap, ubiquitous, and boot up faster than any app on my phone. (For anyone who cares about such things, I also carry with me a Pilot G-2 .38 ultra-fine pen for note taking.)

In a world of apps, sync, and nearly omniscient search, why would I rely on something as low-tech as index cards?

**1. They're cheap and durable.** I can grab a handful of them, stick them in my pocket, and use them throughout the day. When I return to my office, I can toss the important ideas and notes into my inbox for later review and filing.

**2. They're non-sequential.** The problem with using notebooks for note

taking is that all notes are in sequential order, whether or not they make sense that way. With index cards, I can re-arrange insights and ideas into any order that makes sense later. I can also file them in any order that meets my needs.

**3. They exist in real life, not just virtually.** While I use apps for some note taking purposes, I've discovered that it's easy to lose track of an insight or idea later because there's no physical reminder in real life. They live somewhere in a database, but unless I look for them I'll never find them. An idea on an index card is a physical reminder of the circumstance that led to the idea.

One of the coolest gifts I've received was from a gentleman at an event in Ottawa where I was speaking. In my talk I professed my love of index cards, and he approached me afterward and said he had something for me. It was a leather wallet with room to place an index card on the front, and a stash of blank ones in a pocket on the back side of the wallet. Now, I simply slip this card wallet into my back pocket when I head out for the day, and I'm fully stocked with a fresh stash of index cards for my research and meetings.

While I love (LOVE!) new technology, I've discovered that my best insights are often the result of my use of decidedly low-tech tools. Give it a try!

# Hugh MacLeod



## Hugh MacLeod

*/ AUTHOR OF IGNORE EVERYBODY  
AND EVIL PLANS*

Invest in some really nice, expensive stationery, and a really expensive fountain pen. Keep them somewhere safe but handy.

So next time, instead of doing the usual turning-on-the-computer and staring at the blinking cursor sorrowfully for hours on end, grab your expensive pen and paper and get writing.

Compared to the blink-blink-blink of the laptop, writing more than 100 words by fountain pen is a real chore. But I find using this lovely-but-slow medium really alters the pace of my thinking. It calms down my brain, which is exactly what you need to bypass writer's block.

You've heard of the Slow Food movement; this is sort of like the Slow Writing movement. Same idea.

# Michael Bunker



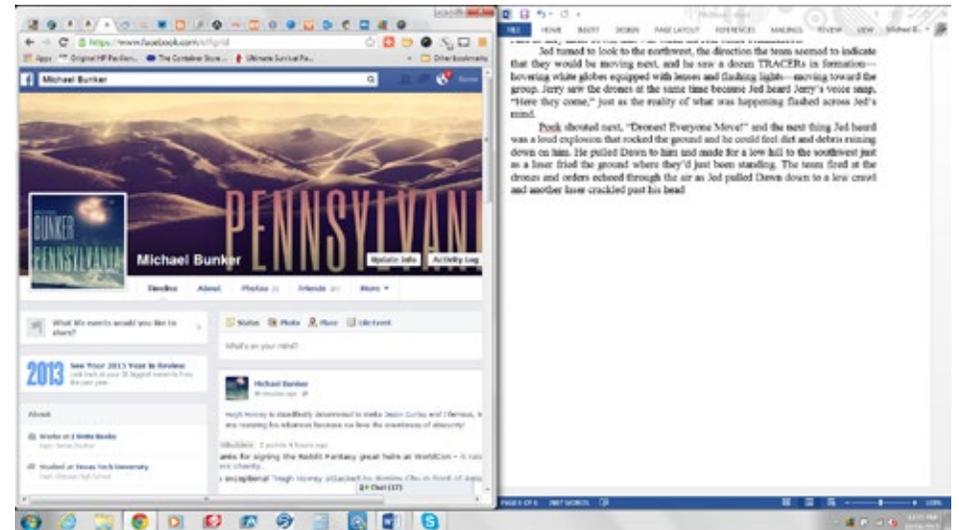
## Michael Bunker

/ AUTHOR OF FICTION BESTSELLERS *THE WICK OMNIBUS*, *PENNSYLVANIA*, AND *THE SILO ARCHIPELAGO*, AND THE NON-FICTION BESTSELLER *SURVIVING OFF OFF-GRID*

Give yourself the opportunity to divert from procrastinating into work!

No matter what kind of writer you are, you've probably suffered from writing avoidance. Call it what you will... procrastination, writer's block, fear of failure, whatever. We all suffer from an intermittent lack of motivation at times that can be founded in fear, doubt, anger, preoccupation with the cares of the world, just about anything. Heck, I get dragged into Wikipedia and I can disappear for hours with no problem at all. I am one of those rare and blessed creatures that gets to write full time for a living - which means that I don't have a boss telling me what I have to have done and when. Every so often I'll have to work on a deadline, but not usually. This means that, if you're like me, whole days can pass without me doing any really substantive writing... if I'm not careful. I can easily fall into a black hole in the Internet, following some Youtube, Facebook, or Wikipedia rabbit trail and not surface until a day has gone by without me working on my next novel.

Here is how I shortcut that tendency to **not write**... Before I do any of my Internet "stuff" I shrink down my web window and pair it on my desktop with an open window showing what I'm supposed to be writing. I find that when I have the writing there before me while I'm surfing the Inter-



webs, I often gravitate over to the work side of the ledger, without even knowing I'm doing it. I see that page sitting there when I'm waiting for a Facebook reply or a Tweet from someone, and I get drawn into writing or editing. Sometimes I didn't even intend to do any serious writing and I'll find myself 2,000 words into some new stuff without even realizing it! You'd be surprised at how many words I knock out without even really realizing that I'm working during my breaks from procrastinating.

Try it for a few days. I think you'll find it works for you too!

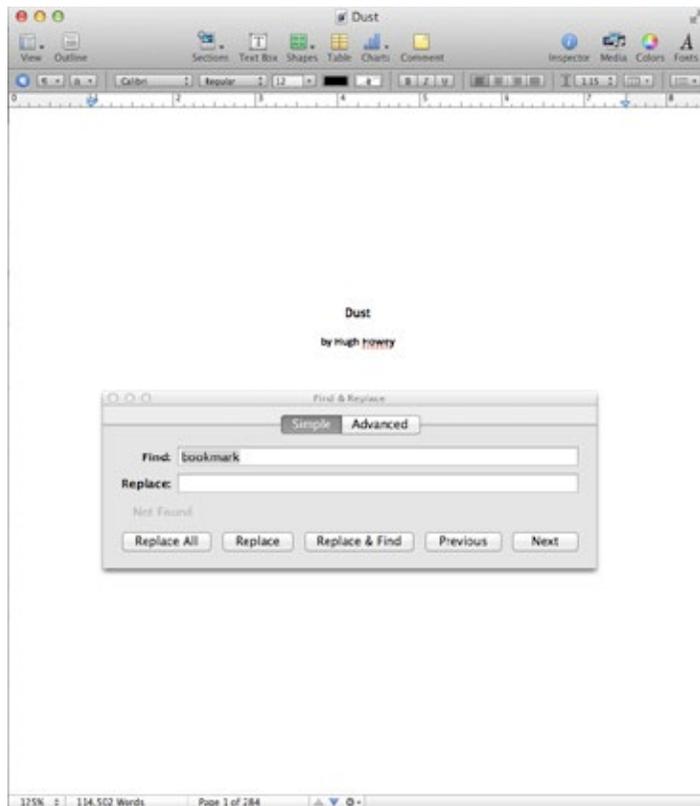


# Hugh Howey



## Hugh Howey

/ AUTHOR OF *WOOL AND SAND*



I have a funny little writing habit. Well, I have a bunch of them, but one is this habit of writing BOOKMARK anyplace I need to come back to the text to clean something up, add a scene, or pick up with tomorrow's writing. That way, I can just search "bookmark" and find the next thing I need to work on. When I get into the last phases of a project, I can jump to the top of a document, do this search, work on that bit, search again, and keep doing this until I reach the end.

Inevitably, I'll add one or two BOOKMARKs for every one I clean up. Which means the last few weeks of revisions and edits will see a dozen or more of them. When I get to the end, I can jump back and find that I still have a lot of work to do. I whittle away; the draft improves; I move on to the next BOOKMARK.

Until I do a search, and I see this screen.

Not Found! And then I know I'm just about done.



Srini Rao



## Srini Rao

/ AUTHOR OF *THE ART OF BEING UNMISTAKABLE*

I turned over thinking I would go back to sleep. I opened my eyes and I could see the sun rising. Suddenly I wanted to get up. This is one of my favorite times of day. Just me, the blank page, coffee and the sun rise.

It's the only time my mind doesn't race.

It's the only time I can find the intense focus required to write

It's quiet in my world and I actually enjoy it.

It's one of the few times I prefer being alone.

It doesn't last very long, so I treasure it.

I don't judge my words. I recommend you don't look at the screen. Anytime I do, that's when the judgement starts to come in. Of course spell checking is a pain and you make lots of typos. But lots of typos is better than struggling to get the words on the page. Of course I have days where I wonder if I'm going insane and just saying the same thing over and over again. I wonder if other writer's feel this. Sometimes it feels like familiar territory.

Haven't I said this before?

Haven't I written this before?

Am I even saying it differently?

Would they miss it if it was gone?

Is it any good?

How did I end up here?

Creating great art is fueled by self doubt to some degree. In the pursuit of mastery, we're never satisfied. We look at what could be improved. We're constantly modifying little things here and there for a big impact. Sometimes it works. Other times people don't notice. But you have the satisfaction of knowing something was built from high quality parts.

I don't always hit 1000 words on a single piece of writing. I just know I've reached the end of a particular piece. And when you get to the end of the page, press save, "new file" and start over. Rinse, wash, repeat. Do that and you'll have more words than you know what do with.

And while you're at it, enjoy a bit of coffee, a sunrise and the blank page.



# Josh Kaufman



**Josh Kaufman**

*/ AUTHOR OF *THE FIRST 20 HOURS*  
AND *THE PERSONAL MBA**

**Keep research and writing separate.**

I maintain a research database of material on topics that I write about, and save everything interesting that I find in a database. When I'm stuck, I review the database entries for ideas. You can use any system that's simple, fast, and reliable. Here's the system I use: <http://joshkaufman.net/research-database/>

Then, once you're ready to write, **turn off the internet.** Completely.

No Wikipedia, no Facebook, no Google, no random surfing. The easiest way to distract yourself from writing is hopping on the net to "do a little research." Make it physically impossible to succumb to that temptation. Programs like Freedom ([macfreedom.com](http://macfreedom.com)) and Self-Control ([selfcontro-lapp.com](http://selfcontro-lapp.com)) make temporarily disabling your connection easy.

If that doesn't work, unplug your router.

# Debbie Reber



## Debbie Reber

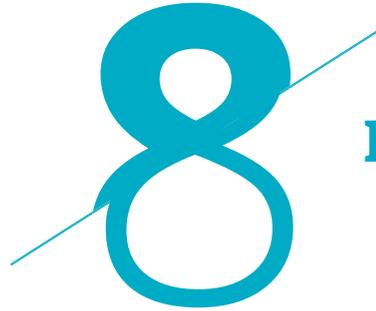
/ AUTHOR OF MORE THAN 18 PUBLISHED BOOKS, INCLUDING *IN THEIR SHOES: EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN DESCRIBE THEIR AMAZING CAREERS*, *CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE TEENAGE SOUL: THE REAL DEAL* AND MANY MORE

Write in super short bursts and build in immediate rewards. Most of my writing sessions are around 30 minutes. Any more is pushing it for me. Sometimes they're as short as 10 minutes. Then I take a break, take a nap, do something mindless, etc. There are long winded riders, but I am a "chipping away at the book" kind of writer. You may be too.

Also, for every book I write I have to designate a dedicated writing spot. It is different for every project and I make writing the book the only kind of work I'll do there. It's my way of shaping the path. If I know my comfy chair is where the writing happens, that association helps me make the mindset switch and allow those short writing bursts to be super productive.

Where's your writing-only spot?

# Kayt Sukel



## Kayt Sukel

/ AUTHOR OF *THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON SEX*

I've got two things that keep me motivated and writing.

The first is my word count spreadsheet. I put my deadline in and figure out the number of weeks and weekdays between me and my due date. Then I calculate how many words per day and per week I have to complete.

At the end of every work day, I put in my new word count to see where I'm at. This lets me see whether I'm going to be able to take the weekend off and spend it with my kids, or stay locked up in my writer's cave.

The motivation is great. Every day I see my progress. The more I write to-

day, the more likely I am to get time off. It's even helping me finish early so I can actually join my family for vacation!

That alone doesn't provide all of the motivation though.

I have a writing alarm clock. When I sit down to write, I set that alarm for two hours in the future. I allow myself extremely brief breaks to visit the restroom and grab a Diet Coke. Otherwise, until the alarm goes off, I am chained to my computer typing furiously.

You can see why that vacation is feeling more and more necessary.

# Tim Grah



**Tim Grahl**

*/ AUTHOR OF YOUR FIRST 1000 COPIES*

I do my writing first thing in the morning. I only have an hour to get my words down so I need to make sure I get started quickly.

Of course, what delays getting started more than anything is my fear of getting started. The first sentence is always the hardest. I fidget and decide to make coffee. Sit down with my coffee, fidget some more, and decide I need to use the restroom.

To break that cycle, here is something I've learned: **Make writing the first sentence automatic.**

I have a system for breaking the delay on getting started. You'll have to set aside two hours one day to do it but once it's done it will save you enormous amounts of wasted time in the future.

Here's my system:

**1. Come up with something useless to write about.** This is practice for real writing, so you need something you'll immediately throw away when this exercise is over. Write about the laundry you just sorted or your

thoughts on the current political climate. You know, useless stuff.

**2. Sit down and immediately start writing.** Before you start, know what the first sentence is then sit down and immediately start typing.

**3. Stop after two minutes.** Set your timer for two minutes. When it goes off, immediately stop writing and get up from the computer.

**4. Wait ten minutes.** Busy yourself. Do anything that will take your mind completely off of writing. Perhaps read a book.

**5. Repeat steps 2 through 4.** The second time you sit down, you get 15 seconds of your two minutes to briefly review what you wrote previously and then immediately start typing. Remember, you're going to throw this away so it doesn't matter what you type.

If you do this for two hours, you'll create a habit of sitting down and immediately writing. You'll turn that first sentence into an automatic response so you can get the most out of your writing time.

# Congrats!

YOU'VE MADE IT TO THE END!

I've got three next steps for you (total time: 3 minutes):

- 1. Share your favorite hack** on Facebook or Twitter with the link where your friends and followers can download their own copy: <http://bit.ly/9writing>
- 2. Pick up a copy of my book [Your First 1000 Copies](#).** It'll help you build your platform, connect with readers and sell more books.
- 3. Give someone a high-five.** You just finished reading an ebook that's going to help you get more writing done!