



## 7 Habits of Highly Effective Novelists

Acknowledgement to 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People' Stephen Covey.

- 1) Be proactive:** It goes without saying that you need to do the work. Sit down and write. Beyond that you need a planned outcome once you finish your work and submit it for publication. It's easy to get caught up in the idea that it is 'impossible' to get published – it's not. It's just very difficult. Your best chance of getting published is write something people will want to buy, to submit to the right publisher at a publishable standard. Do your research, know your reader.
- 2) Begin with the End in Mind:** If you want to just play around with your writing, that's fine and a wonderful book may emerge from that. If you want to complete a full length novel in a set time you will need to come up with a strategy and spend time, not just playing with words, but planning the narrative, time-lines, back-story and subplots. You don't have to know the end of your story but it helps have a clear sense exactly what you are writing about (your underlying premise) in order to identify possible satisfying outcomes for your characters.
- 3) Put first things first:** In his book, Covey talks about getting caught up in the 'thick of thin things'. These 'thin things' fuel the serial procrastinator. Sometimes creative endeavours feel like a luxury but emptying the dishwasher or tidying the kitchen feel like 'real' work. Really? Is that what you'll be proud of in your latter years? To finish a novel you have to, at some point, make writing a priority. The first thing – first.
- 4) Think win/win:** I think this applies to involving those around you in your work. There is often a sense of secrecy involved in writing a novel – blame Jane Austen for this notion! But if you have the guts to write a novel then have the guts to tell your friends and family that's what you're doing and why it is important to you. Make yourself accountable. Get their support. If you make it across the finish line your nearest and dearest will cross with you. They will be beyond thrilled to attend your book launch because they have been part of the journey.
- 5) Seek first to understand then to be understood:** If you want your writing to be about you on your terms without a reader in mind – write a diary and keep it under the mattress. If you want to sell your work you need to have a sense of a reader throughout your writing. Not a chorus of critical nitpickers but somebody who will love your work. Respect your dream reader's intelligence – that will stop you hammering home every point. Respect his/her time – that will stop you being verbose. Respect his/her capacity for boredom – keep it moving.
- 6) Synergize:** This is about making writing a habit and a part of your daily life. Writing will always be that much more difficult if it is completely at odds with the rest of your life. If you don't have a place to write or are not able to set aside any regular time to feed the habit – then you will find that

parts of your life in conflict with each other. What would it take to remove some of the obstacles standing between you and a writing life?

**7) Sharpen the saw:** Don't become a workshop junkie but keep educating yourself and expanding your knowledge of different aspects of writing. It's often said that it takes six years of writing three hours a day to master writing as a craft. Adding further targeted education spices it up and gives you new tools to work with that will keep you inspired.

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