

Frequently Asked Questions

***Write-A-Thon: Write Your Book in 26 Days (And Live to Tell About It)***

by Rochelle Melander

**How did the idea for Write-a-Thon come about?**

I've always liked marathon style writing. In college and graduate school, I chalked up my all-night writing marathons to procrastination. But in the past 15 years, I've been blessed with publishers who have given me insane deadlines! I've completed nearly every one of my thirteen finished books (ten of them published) in less than three months, most in 6 weeks, and one in just nine days.

When I found out about National Novel Writing Month, I discovered that I am not the only crazy person who likes to write marathon style. Every November (and now during the summer Camp NaNoWriMo), a whole bunch of folks attempt to write a 50,000 word novel in 30 days. I signed up, figuring it would be one way to finish my mystery novel. I failed miserably—my poor victim is still languishing naked in a hunting cabin in the mountains of western Pennsylvania because I couldn't find the courage to have my murderer kill him.

So, I tried to figure out how to succeed at writing marathons. I began researching writing, how famous writers worked, and what psychology had to say about how writers could work faster more efficiently. In 2007, I taught a class to help other writers successfully complete National Novel Writing Month. I have taught that class in local bookstores every year since. In the meantime, I began collecting all of my research and ideas in a project notebook. I had been thinking about writing a book on writing since 2006, but I was not sure what kind of a book I wanted to write. Then it hit me: I'd write about writing books fast. But could I do it fast?

**Did you write Write-A-Thon in 26 Days?**

Yes! I wrote *Write-A-Thon* during the 2009 NaNoWriMo (in just 26 days)! In January 2010, I wrote the book proposal for the book. During the long Wisconsin winter, I revised the book—cleaning up prose, clearing out repetition, and adding new material. Writers Digest Books accepted the proposal in February 2011. I had a month to add 25,000 words to the book and finish revisions.

**What makes Write-A-Thon different from other writing books? (Or, why do we need ANOTHER book on writing?)**

I wrote *Write-A-Thon* for people who want to write a book but don't know how to write a book, manage their crazy schedules, or finish a project. I wrote to help these writers overcome their excuses and doubts and finish their book projects. Write-A-Thon is different from other books in several ways:

\**Write-A-Thon* presents a complete system for training for and writing a book in 26-days.

\*The book is about HOW to write. It's not written just for people who are already writers (though it can help them, too). It's written for the ordinary person who wants to write a book but does not know how.

\*The book is packed full of tools and ideas for getting writing done. No more excuses!

\**Write-A-Thon* includes information specifically designed for two groups of writers: those who want to plot and write a novel and those who want to research and write a nonfiction book.

\*The book is easy to use and follow. I recognize that people who pick up a book on writing want a tool they can access quickly. For that reason, *Write-A-Thon* is divided into short chapters.

### **Some people criticize your work for promoting bad writing. What do you think?**

Most people never finish their books because they are paralyzed by the fear that it won't be good enough. Writing fast, with the aim toward finishing rather than perfecting the book, supports the writer in getting the words down on paper. Of course the book will have tons of mistakes and poorly written parts. But once those words are down on paper, they can be fixed. You can't edit nothing. Most writers cannot write a great, publishable book in 26 days. But they can write a first draft. After that, they can revise the book and make it great.

### **When do you write? What's your schedule like?**

I'm a morning writer, so I try to get most of my writing done before I check email, play on Facebook, or see clients. In the summer, I get up early and write before anyone gets up. When the dog wakes up, I take him for a walk and then come home and write more. During the school year, I take my daughter to school, stop at the Y to exercise, and then write all morning. When I am on deadline, I often spend the rest of the day researching. Sometimes, I will even write an extra chapter in the afternoon or (gasp!) in the evening.

### **How would you describe your working environment?**

I work in my home office—which is a first floor bedroom in a 1912 bungalow in Milwaukee. I have two desks, one for my computer and one for writing by hand. I usually write on the computer and coach at my writing desk. Behind my computer desk, I have shelves dedicated to each of my writing projects. That way, everything I need is easy to find.

### **You talk about doing research and keeping it in a project notebook. How do you research your books? What kind of stuff do you keep in a project notebook?**

Once I have an inkling that an idea might become a book, I start gathering material: books, articles, ideas, Websites, and anything else I think I can use. When I read, I take copious notes and, if I can, indicate where in the book I might use the material.

In **Write-A-Thon**, I recommend that all writers keep a virtual or actual project notebook. I have both—and a big old shelf too! For every book I have written, I have a three ring binder with pocket page dividers. In it, I put all of the research I do, any ideas I have, and finished writing pieces. I also use the folder to hold information I might use in a book proposal—complementary and competitive books, marketing ideas, and product dreams. In addition to the binder, I keep books and magazines on a project shelf in my office. On my computer, I keep online information and PDF files in designated folders.

### **How do you deal with writer's block?**

I write. Most of the time, my deadlines are so tight that I cannot afford to be blocked. In addition to writing books and articles, I write a weekly writing tip newsletter and blog. For me, inspiration tends to happen after I have started writing and not before. If I get 30 minutes into a piece, and it is still not flowing—I take a break and go for a walk. Or, I work on a different part of the writing project. I try not to check email or go on Facebook, because that just drains my energy. If I take a good break or do some other writing, by the time I get back to the piece, it flows easily!

### **What advice would you offer anyone who wants to write a book fast?**

Read my book! Seriously, start with an idea that you are passionate about—something you would write just for the fun of it (because at this point it is just for the fun of it). Figure out what you want the book to look like—how long will it be, how will you structure it, and what will each small piece look like. Create a schedule for writing the book—when, where, and how you do it. Got that? Great. Now do it! If you need some extra help, my site enables you to keep track of your word count. You can also sign up for free tips and publishing classes there.

### **What do you like to read?**

I read everything from fast-paced mysteries to the back of my cereal box. I read all the time. Back in 1993, I set the goal of reading a week. I read 83 books that year. Every year since then, I have tried to read at least one book a week, sometimes two. I usually have two or three books going at once. In the mornings, while I eat breakfast, I like to read nonfiction—either a book of great ideas or a book about spirituality. In the afternoon and early evening, I read mysteries and other fiction. At night, before bed, I like to read slow books—the diaries or letters of famous writers or comforting memoirs. Lately, because I review books so much, I've tried to take a reading day once a week just to catch up on my stack of books!

### **What are you working on now?**

I am spending most of my time working on marketing **Write-A-Thon**—speaking, guest posting at blogs, and speaking to writing groups. But, in the early mornings, I am working on revising last year's NaNoWriMo project, a series of novels for 7-9 year old girls.

