

A WRITER'S DAY READING

Read the text and then match the questions below with the sections A-E. The sections may be chosen more than once.

Which writer ...

- says that he is not the kind of writer who wants a solitary existence? (29) _____
- avoids showing his work to anyone before it has been thoroughly revised? (30) _____
- thinks that some people may have the wrong impression of a writer's life? (31) _____
- no longer feels uneasy about the kind of life writing involves? (32) _____
- points out how much revision can be involved in writing a novel? (33) _____
- says that on some days he knows in advance that writing will be difficult? (34) _____
- says that he has a limited amount of inspiration? (35) _____
- says that it is essential, for a writer's sanity, to spend some time in the company of others? (36) _____
- admits that he does not actually work for the whole time he spends at his desk? (37) _____
- says that he finds it difficult to assess his own writing in a critical way? (38) _____
- forces himself to get something written when he is having difficulties? (39) _____
- thinks that he writes better when working at a fast pace? (40) _____
- draws a contrast between days when it is easy to write and those when it is not? (41) _____
- requires little persuasion to reward himself for work he has done? (42) _____
- says that he feels comfortable with the kind of writing day that he has established for himself? (43) _____
- does not look forward to reading published opinions of his work? (44) _____
- always tries to delay the time when he has to start writing? (45) _____



A WRITER'S DAY

We interviewed five contemporary male novelists to find out how they approach their writing and how they typically spend their day.

A I'm no good at mixed days - it's either work or play. If it's a work day, then I'll start with a huge mug of strong black coffee and then I'll go to my study at the top of the house. It's completely lined with books and has a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door.

I've learned to start writing early and to have a scene hanging over from the day before. I'm obsessive about silence. I can't talk in the middle of work - if I talk, the morning is over. Momentum is important to my novels - if I'm too leisurely, I can feel the tension fading away. Dialogue is the best - blissfully easy, like hearing voices in your head and taking dictation. A few years ago, I was writing 5,000 words a day - now, though, it's only half that.

When I go out, I do all the things you're supposed to do as a writer, like going out to London clubs. But when people see you at book launches they forget that being a writer is also about that little thing in between - sitting on your own all day. But you've got to have contact with the outside world and real people or you can go completely mad.

B I'm completely envious of people who write in the mornings and do what they like in the afternoon. I work through the day and treat writing like an office job. If it's not going well, I keep pushing at it and get it sorted out. I don't get a lot of ideas. I tend to get just one and then run with it. Towards the end of a book, when I think I've got to get an idea for the next one, I start to feel panicky. But something always comes along.

My office is in a flat about ten minutes from our house. It's good to have a geographical break between home and work. I arrive about 9 am, have a coffee and then I'll just get on with it and work through until lunchtime. There's a definite post-lunch dip - that's when I have another coffee. But in the end, the only way I get concentration back is by pushing it.

My wife picks me up about 6:30 and we go home together. I've been doing this for ten years now. It's a routine that suits me and, to be honest, I'm always a little worried about breaking it.

C My seven-month-old daughter, Matilda, gets me up around 6:30 and I'll play with her for a couple of hours, then go to my desk. I officially sit there for three hours, but I'll do an hours work.

Like a lot of writers, I tend to get a great sense of achievement very easily. One good sentence entitles me to half an hour off - two or three lines means I can watch day time TV. My study is at one end of the flat and my wife and daughter are at the other. In theory, no congress takes place during lunchtime, but actually we pop in and out all the time. I've never been one of those writers who likes being isolated - I want people around

me all the time. At the moment, I'm plotting my next novel and am in a dreamy state. It's hard to convince people that I'm actually working but this is a crucial part of the process.

A book takes me about three years in all. I always start out very slowly and then gather speed towards the end. I don't think this is a good way to write at all.

D I have a really slow start to the day. I'll do anything to put off starting work. I have toast, read newspapers - I have to do the crossword every morning - and deal with my post. I write quite slowly and not in chronological order. I've structured the story before I start, so I can hop around, which I think keeps my writing fresh. Sometimes I wake up and just know it's not going to work - because I'm just not in the right mood - but I know that it's only temporary. Once you've got the first draft down, you know that it's going to be OK. It's awful having to relinquish it to my editor but I'm curious to know what other people think. I find it impossible to be objective about my own words.

When I started writing and just stayed at home I felt incredibly guilty but now it feels normal. Lots of my friends are creative and don't go to offices, which helps. When we go out we don't talk about work - we gossip about the people we know instead. But if I want to use anything my friends have told me I always ask.

E I start writing at about 10:30 am. I don't open any mail before that so I haven't got anything on my mind and the desk is clear. I write until 1:30 pm. Sometimes getting the words out is like pulling teeth - other days it all spills out freely.

Someone once said that there was no such thing as writing, only re-writing. For my first book I did no less than 12 drafts. With the first draft of a book, I just try to capture the energy and try to get something down which I can work with. I would die of embarrassment if anyone saw it.

At lunchtime I like to get out of the flat. It's odd going into the outside world - you feel as if you're in a light trance. But after a ten-minute walk in the drizzle, I'm usually all right. I spend 90 per cent of my time on my own. My contact with the outside world generally happens in great bursts when I go abroad to publicize my books.

I've just finished my third novel and it's a nerve-racking time. I really dread being at the mercy of book reviewers. But when it comes down to it, I know what my book is like - I don't need to be told by other people.

