

Work Habits of the Great and Famous

Friedrich Schiller, one of Europe's greatest playwrights, was a genius. In his most famous play, he writes about a tyrant who rules over the people of Switzerland, taking away their rights and freedom. The great archer William Tell resists the **tyrant**, who then demands that he shoot an apple off his young son's head with his bow and arrow. That apple, famous as it became, was not the only one involved in the play. While Schiller was writing *William Tell* and all his other plays and poems, he kept his desk drawer filled with rotting apples. Why? Nobody knows. He just couldn't write without them.

The Weird

Not all geniuses have work habits as weird as Schiller's. But some of our smartest and most creative people did have pretty strange work habits. Ludwig von Beethoven took breaks from his composing to pour water all over himself. In the house. On the floor. French writer Honoré de Balzac drank 50 cups of coffee a day while he was working and started his work day at 1 A.M. American novelist Thomas Wolfe used the top of a refrigerator for a desk. (He was the height of an above average basketball player.) The French writer Collette took "think breaks" by picking fleas off her bulldog.

It's difficult to draw any conclusions from these **peculiar** habits. Did Schiller just fill his desk drawer with rotting apples in order to **stimulate** his senses? After all, working alone in a silent room is a form of sensory deprivation. When there is nothing to appeal to the senses—nothing to enjoy hearing, seeing, or touching—human beings become anxious and unhappy. Would a scented candle be just as effective today for a Hollywood screenwriter? Psychologists might be able to come up with explanations for many of the strange habits of geniuses. But the important thing is that these highly creative people were able to think creatively not only about their work, but also about what would *help* them work.

The Workable

Great writers, artists, and scientists also have work habits that are easier to understand. For example, Maya Angelou would go to a small hotel room at 7 in the morning, taking with her a bible, a deck of cards, and a bottle of sherry. She would stay there working until 2 in the afternoon. She did this every day. And many other creative people have shared her liking for either **solitude**, or a strict schedule, or both.

Being alone is an absolute requirement for many creative people. It helps their **concentration**. Alone and in silence, they can stay focused on their work. Mark Twain would go into his study after breakfast and stay there until dinner. His family was not allowed to talk to him or knock on his door. He wanted no **distractions**, nothing to draw his attention away from his work. If his family really needed him, they blew a horn. British novelist Jane Austen insisted that a squeaky hinge on the door near her working area not be fixed. The sound of someone opening it would warn her of any interruption.

Many creative people besides Angelou work a certain number of hours—or produce a certain amount of work—every day. Writer Flannery O'Connor wrote every day from 8:00 A.M. to noon and spent the rest of her time taking care of her peacocks. Kurt Vonnegut worked from 5:30 A.M. to 10:00 A.M., with a break for breakfast. Stephen King writes ten pages a day, whether he wants to or not.

Conclusion

One thing is clear. No two creative people are alike, except in one way: They find what works for them and then they keep doing it.

What is the main idea of the article?

- Creative people do weird things.
- Creative people have habits that help them work.
- Creative people work a certain number of hours each day.

Drag and drop the words to complete the sentences.

distractions stimulate concentration tyrant solitude peculiar

- 1 A prom dress is a thing to wear to a picnic.
- 2 Some people like better than being around people.
- 3 When there are a lot of interruptions, you may lose your and feel your mind wandering.
- 4 The kinds of that bother creative people include noises, questions from other people, and phone calls.
- 5 A cannot exist in a democratic country where people can make their own decisions and live the lives they want.
- 6 Rubbing the skin can blood flow and make the body feel warmer.

Answer the questions, according to the information in the article.

- 1 What did Friedrich Schiller write?

movies
plays
books

- 2 For what purpose did Schiller put rotten apples in his desk?

so that he could snack
so that he could work
so that he could throw them at anyone who interrupted him

- 3 What sense did Beethoven stimulate during his breaks?

sight
smell
touch

- 4 Which of these writers was very tall?

Honoré de Balzac
Mark Twain
Thomas Wolfe

- 5 Why would the author of the article compare Schiller's apples with a screenwriter's scented candle?

They're both weird.
They both appeal to the sense of smell.
They both sit on desks.

6 What do many creative people insist on?

- being left alone
- working in the morning
- having people take care of them

7 Which of these places to work would be good for most of the creative people in this article?

- a coffee shop
- a room with one desk
- an office with one other person

8 What is the most important advice a creative person could take away from this article?

- Work every day at the same time.
- Find a quiet place to work alone.
- Do whatever you need to do to get your work done.