

SUPERCHARGE YOUR WRITING ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

Where do you write?

Some writers work at the kitchen table; others on the sofa. Some write in bed.

The place in which you write – your writing environment – can make a surprisingly big difference to how fast you write, how well you focus, and even how much you enjoy your writing.

And yet writing environment is something that a lot of writers don't really factor in.

If you feel like you always procrastinate, can't sit down and focus, or even can't find the time to write ... then the problem might not be with you. It might be with your writing environment.

In this kit, the third in the Supercharge Your Writing series, we're going to take a deep look at your writing environment, and of ways to make the most of it – so that the space around you helps you to focus, rather than getting in the way of your writing.

I'm definitely not going to assume that you have the space for a home office or lots of money to spend on revamping your bedroom or writing space. But whatever your situation looks like, there will be ways to tweak things to make your writing environment at least a little bit more welcoming.

Let's get started.

SUPERCHARGE YOUR WRITING ENVIRONMENT

In this guide, we'll be covering:

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#1: What Really Matters With Your Writing Space?

There's no one right way to set up your writing space. Some writers can't work unless their desk is clear and tidy; others like to have lots of books to hand, pens, scrap paper, trinkets, and so on.

Some writers like complete silence. Others like really loud heavy metal. And still others like the background chatter of a coffee shop, or the drumming of rain on the roof, or the TV or radio on low.

There are some things that, in almost all cases, will help make your writing environment feel comfortable and productive. These include:

- **Being physically comfortable as you write.** That could mean a good chair – but it could also mean a standing desk or a Swiss ball. It includes things like having your room at the right temperature for you.
- **Having a door you can close.** If you have a family – particularly if you have young children – then being able to go in a room away from everyone else can make a huge difference to your focus.
- **Being able to control the sound (or lack of it).** I don't know anyone who can write easily with building works going on next door, or with music that they hate blaring out.
- **Not being overlooked.** If you are in a room with other people, simply positioning yourself so others can't see your screen can help if you feel a bit self-conscious about your writing, as many writers do.

For me, and for many writers I know, those things make the biggest difference. There are lots of other things that you might find helpful, too – like having scented candles burning, or having inspiring artwork in front of you – but they're not going to help much if your chair is hideously uncomfortable after you've been writing for half an hour, or if the neighbour is hammering away at a new garden shed.

During the rest of this guide, we're going to focus on (a) changing the things that you *can* change about your writing environment and (b) where possible, making the changes that will have the biggest impact on you.

Identifying and Using the Writing Space That You Do Have

Perhaps your ideal writing space would be a little cottage in the middle of the countryside, or a dramatic castle overlooking the sea, or a luxurious hotel room filled with candles ... and it's nice to dream!

But, realistically, we all have to make do with what we have. And you may not have the luxury of a spare bedroom that you can dedicate to writing, or a garden shed that you could convert into a small office.

Here are a few possibilities that may work for you:

- **Could you fit a desk or table (even a small one) into your bedroom?** A bedroom often works well as a writing space, because the rest of your household is likely to be somewhere else.
- If there's no space in your bedroom, **could you make some space in your living room or kitchen?** That might mean writing at the kitchen table – which can work well if you're able to write while the rest of your household are at work/school, or after young children have gone to bed.
- **Could a room do double duty during the day?** When we had a smallish house and a toddler and baby who'd disturb one another in the same room, the baby had a cot in a tiny bedroom that doubled as my office.
- **Can you write sitting up in bed?** Personally, I tend to fall asleep if I stay in bed for too long ... but some writers love writing in bed, and find that it helps to make their writing feel more like an indulgent treat than a chore to put off.
- **Is there an unused or under-used room in your house that could become a home office?** Perhaps you rarely use the dining room, for instance, or you have a utility room that's only used for laundry.
- **Could you take over part of a room for your writing?** Maybe you have a long family room and you could use one end of it, or you have an L-shaped room with a nook that could fit a small desk and bookshelf.

Your writing space doesn't need to be large. Realistically, it needs to give you enough room to sit and write (probably on a computer, unless you prefer to write by hand).

Your space also needs to be reliably vacant for a decent length of time – so deciding to write on the living room sofa, when family members are always wandering in and out to watch TV, may not work too well.

Getting More Out of Your Writing Space

Once you've identified a space that could work, see what you can do to make the most of it.

In our house, that generally means tidying up! Because I write for a living, I have a (small) bedroom that's my home office, and I spend the bulk of the day there. Before the kids are up in the morning, though, and when I'm writing fiction in the evening, I work at the kitchen table. That means keeping it reasonably clear from all the clutter that tends to accumulate there, so I can physically have space for my small laptop, mouse, cup of tea, and so on.

Your family may well be tidier by nature than mine ... but you might still want or need to do some work to make your writing space as usable as possible. If you don't have a comfortable chair, for instance, you might want to buy one – or if that's out of your budget, you could look at alternatives like sitting on a Swiss ball. (I started doing this eight years ago to help with my backache when I was pregnant, and I've never looked back.)

Next, we're going to take a look at some useful equipment to keep in your writing space, and at some ways to make your writing space more inspiring.

#2: Useful Equipment for Your Writing Space

If you have a whole room for writing, then it's fairly easy to keep all the things you might conceivably need to hand. You can have stacks of notebooks, pots of pens, towers of books, plus staplers, paperclips, sticky notes, and pretty much anything else you want to keep around.

But if your space is smaller – or if it's something like the kitchen table or the living room sofa, which does double-duty – then you'll need to be a bit choosy about what you keep to hand.

If you're going to be writing somewhere away from home, or if you'll be moving around the house to write in different areas at different times of day, it's helpful to keep your equipment in a bag. I use a shoulder bag that fits my laptop, money, phone, water bottle, plus plenty of pens, notebooks, etc.

If you'll be writing in one place at home but need to keep your equipment contained, a small box or basket is an easy option.

What you'll need depends on what type of writing you do, and how you like to do it, but these are a few things that you might find particularly useful:

- **Headphones.** If you like to listen to music – or even ambient sound – while you're writing, then get a pair of headphones that's comfortable and that lets you block out background noise. I find that in-ear headphones work best. They're cheap (around \$10 - \$15), very portable, don't "bleed" sound, and do a good job of blocking out other noise.
- **Notebook(s).** If you like to jot down notes on paper, or if you have a specific notebook for your writing project, keep it with you. I like to have the notebook for whatever I'm working on plus an extra notebook or scrap paper to jot down anything unrelated that I don't want to forget.
- **Planner or diary.** I plan out my writing tasks in a physical, paper planner; if you like to do the same, make sure you keep it nearby so you can easily refer to it.
- **Pen(s).** Make sure you have at least one working pen easily available, if you like to jot down notes by hand. It's a small thing, but having a pen

that writes nicely and comfortably can definitely make a difference to how you feel about using it.

- **Books, printouts, photocopies, or other materials.** If you're writing something that requires research or referencing other people's work, then you'll want to have everything easily to hand.
- **Charger, mouse, or other computer-related equipment.** My Chromebook has a fantastic battery life, but if I'm going to be working on it for a long time at a stretch, I'll want the charger. Also, I hate using a touchpad, so I always have a mini wireless mouse to hand.

There may well be other things you want to add to the list – like your favourite snacks, mints, a water bottle, fingerless gloves, or whatever you need close by while you're writing.

When your writing time is limited, it's easy to give up on writing altogether when you know you'll have to hunt the house first for the notebook or papers you need. It's also easy to get distracted part way if you keep having to get up to fetch a pen, your headphones, your charger, and so on.

Spend a little bit of time getting all your writing gear together, and find a good place to keep it. That way, it'll be easier to actually sit down and write.

If other people in your home are likely to "borrow" your writing equipment, then find a place to keep it out of sight (or even out of reach).

#3: Keeping Your Writing Space Tidy & Organized

I'll be honest – I'm not the world's tidiest person! I'm also well aware that it's easy to end up frittering away writing time by tidying your desk, reorganizing your stationary, or colour coding your bookshelves.

However, like many writers, I don't find it at all encouraging to be faced with a ton of *stuff* when I want to sit down and write. You may well feel the same.

It can be tough to keep your writing area tidy, especially when you don't have time to write. Maybe you'd like to be in the habit of tidying everything away at the end of the writing session ... but you always have to rush to the next thing.

I'm definitely not going to suggest any kind of system for becoming perfectly organized. (If you've found one that works, please do email and let me know about it. I probably need it too.)

Instead, here are the two things that I've found make the most difference for the least amount of time spent:

Two Minute Tidying

If your writing space is currently full of empty coffee mugs, scribbled notes on bits of paper, books, pens (not all of which work), and so on ... then it's easy to put off tidying it, let alone writing in it.

The good news is that – however awful your space! – you don't need to find a spare hour to sort it all out before you can write.

Two minutes is enough.

Now, trust me, two minutes would *not* be enough to sort out everything in my little study. We switched some rooms around in our house shortly before Covid-19 turned the world upside down, so my study still has boxes full of things like old keyboards and ring binders from back when I was taking my creative writing MA a decade ago.

But two minutes *is* enough to clear books away from your desk, stack up papers, and make enough elbow room to actually reach your computer or set down your notebook.

If you have five minutes, or ten, you can get more done (and I'm often surprised how much difference ten minutes can make).

The great thing about this method is that you can go all out on making the most immediate, visual difference to your writing space. You're not aiming to do everything perfectly – you're just going to spend a few minutes doing as much as you can. And then you're done.

Even better, if you do this at the start of a writing session, it can give you a nice sense of achievement before you get a single word down.

For some help getting two, five, or ten minutes of tidying done, check out the "Prepare Your Writing Space" checklists that come with this guide.

Boxes and Baskets to Keep Things In

A great way to keep things at least somewhat tidy, once you've cleared a bit of space, is to grab a few small boxes or baskets.

You can keep things like your notebooks and planners in a larger one, and things like pens and headphones in a smaller one. If you really like everything in one place, keep the smaller box/basket inside the big one.

That way, you've got the things you need to hand, it's easy to find them, you have a ready-made place to put them away ... and you can move them when needed.

I find this works much better than just having everything loose in front of me. You've almost certainly got some kind of box lying around your house that would do (we tend to have at least a few cardboard ones from Amazon).

Even something as simple as a mug to stand your pens in, so they're not scattered all over the desk, can make it easier to keep your writing space organized.

SUPERCHARGE YOUR WRITING ENVIRONMENT

The aim here isn't to have the most beautiful, Instagram-worthy writing space ... though if that makes you happy, go for it! Instead, you want your space to be as functional as possible. If an idea comes to you out of the blue, you want to be able to sit down, grab your notebook, pick up a working pen, and go.

#4: Making Your Writing Space More Inspiring

Having a reasonably tidy writing space that's organized enough to work in is a great start. Frankly, you might well find that's inspiring enough that you don't need to do much more.

But if you're struggling to focus, or if you just want writing to be a more enjoyable part of your day, then it's worth trying out some different ways to make your writing space feel more welcoming and inspiring.

You definitely don't need to do all of these – or even any of them. But I'd encourage you to *try* each of them at least once. You might find that something you were initially sceptical about is actually helpful for you.

#1: Quotes or Affirmations

Some writers find it really helpful to have inspiring words in front of them: things that make them feel encouraged, or even challenged. Other writers like to create their own affirmations: I know Joanna Penn from [The Creative Penn](#) has talked about using the affirmation "*I am creative. I am an author.*" Even if you think this isn't your thing, remember, you don't have to pick anything that sounds cheesy or banal to you. Maybe you'd like some funny or bittersweet words instead of something conventional.

I've included a set of 12 quotes that you might like to try in the printables for this kit. These come in two different sizes, so you can put them on your wall and/or in a planner or notebook, or even on your box of writing gear.

#2: Candles (Scented or Otherwise)

Some writers find the gentle, flickering light of a candle helps them to focus – and of course candles are often used in meditation. Others like to have a particular scent when they write, and find a scented candle works well for this.

This may not be a practical option for you, depending on where you write: I'm not sure my local library would take too well to me turning up with a candle

and matches! If you can't light a candle but you like particular scents when writing, you might try something like a fruit tea, a coffee that smells great to you, or essential oils.

#3: Inspiring Images

You might find that having an inspiring image to look at helps you to settle into the writing mood. That could be a poster or print on your wall, or even an image on your computer desktop. It might be something as simple as a postcard or photograph that you keep in your notebook.

Some writers like to use a vision board: a collection of images and words that relate to their goals. If you don't have space for a physical board, you could always create a virtual collage and use it as your phone's wallpaper.

#4: Good Lighting

I like bright, white light in my study because it helps me feel energised. If you're writing in a room with dim orangey light, you might find that you feel sleepy (and that you strain your eyes).

Of course, you may feel differently from me – and you may want to experiment with different types of lighting. Perhaps you find it easy to get into the mood for your horror-novel-in-progress when you're writing in the semi-dark, for instance, or maybe you find a warm, gentle light suits you well for writing poetry.

Getting Away From Home to Write

For years, I've been recommending to writers that they write away from home at least occasionally.

In 2020 and 2021, that's not been such practical advice. A year or two ago, it was easy to suggest going to a local library or coffee shop: as I'm editing this guide this now, we're back into lockdown in the UK and everything is closed.

But – depending on where you live, and depending on the state of the world when you read this – you might be able to get out and write. A morning in your local library, or an hour or two with a nice coffee, can be a great way to set aside the time and mental space you need for writing. Plus, if your home environment is busy or noisy, it can be incredibly helpful to get away.

If you want to take this a bit further, you could try a writing retreat. That might mean going on a day retreat, where you go and write in a hired room or even in someone's house. It could mean booking a hotel room just for you overnight, meaning you get to spend an afternoon, evening, and morning writing.

You might even want to book a writing retreat over a weekend or for a holiday – there are various companies that offer these.

Getting away from home to write may not be something you do very often, and it might be something you need to plan ahead for. Even if you can only get out to a coffee shop one morning every couple of months, or for an overnight hotel stay once or twice a year, it's still worth doing.

#5: Creating Mental Writing Space and Clarity

Although this kit focuses on creating a physical writing space that works for you, I wanted to also look at how you create the mental space to write.

For me, the whole point of having a good physical space in which to write is because it helps me feel mentally ready.

When I go into my study at the start of my workday, I'm not thinking about the laundry or the washing up or all the many other things that need to be done around the house – I'm in a physical space that's dedicated to writing, and it's easy to get on with the task at hand.

I feel this effect most strongly when I get away from home to write. By setting aside the time, and paying for a coffee or even a hotel room, it's easier to have the *mental* space to write too. I don't have to think about the dishes that needs doing at home, or the meal that needs preparing – because I'm not there to do it. I don't have to stop and take off my headphones because I hear the kids yelling at one another – they're not here.

Simple Ways to Clear Your Mind to Write

As well as setting up your physical space to write, you may want to try some ways to create more mental space and clarity.

You don't have to do all of these, or even any of them. You certainly don't need to do all of them every single time you write. But if you find your mind wandering a lot, or if you feel so distracted that it's hard to even *start* writing, then give at least some of them a try.

Turn off your internet connection – and your phone notifications. I think I recommend this in pretty much every kit in the Supercharge Your Writing series! Disconnecting from the internet is one of the simplest, and most powerful, things you can do to make the mental space for your writing. Plus, the simple act of switching off your wifi or silencing your phone is like a message to yourself: *I'm taking my writing time seriously.*

Avoid watching or reading the news immediately before your writing session. With upheaval from both coronavirus and political events in 2020 – 2021, it's easy to be distracted and dismayed by the rolling cycle of news. This definitely isn't going to help get you into the right state of mind to focus on your writing.

Have a clear goal for your writing session – and write it down. It's fine if you don't have a specific project: perhaps you want to use your writing session to explore some ideas and see where they take you. But be clear with yourself that this is what you're going to do. If you're working on several different projects, pick *one* for your writing session – otherwise, it's going to be really tough to focus.

Tip: For more help with this, check out [Supercharge Your Writing Session](#), the first kit in the Supercharge Your Writing series.

Keep some scrap paper to hand. This is a great place to jot down anything that suddenly pops into your mind (“must put the laundry on!”) so that you don't have to either (a) worry about forgetting it or (b) stop your writing session to do it immediately. You can also use this to jot down worries or distracting thoughts (“there's no point writing, I'll never get published”) – putting these down in words can help you move on from them, instead of having them as a nagging, unvoiced fear in the back of your mind.

Set a timer. This is another one that I recommend a lot. Again, I love it because it's so quick to do ... but it really works. If you're finding that your focus is wandering, try setting a timer for 15 minutes. Tell yourself that you'll write until the timer goes off. Replying to texts or checking emails can wait that long.

#6: When Your Writing Space Isn't Working Well

Maybe you've tried to create a good writing environment, but it just doesn't seem to be working. Perhaps you're struggling to keep control of your space, or maybe despite your best intentions, it's ending up constantly cluttered.

In this last section of the guide, we're going to tackle some issues that might come up, and look at some solutions to them.

Problem #1: Other People Are In My Writing Space

Let's say you have some time in the evenings to write at the kitchen table from 8pm - 9pm ... but your partner and kids are playing a card game then.

Or maybe you write during the daytime on the sofa, but other members of your household are at home due to lockdown or because their work or school schedule has changed.

Not being able to access your writing space when you need to is frustrating. If this is happening more than very occasionally, you need to tackle it.

There are three possible solutions here:

- **Get the other people to vacate your space.** This could mean simply asking them. It might mean reminding them ahead of time (e.g. "I'm going to be writing from 8pm, so could you guys clear off upstairs before then?") In some cases, it might require negotiating for use of the space and setting up some kind of schedule.
- **Find a new writing space.** Perhaps writing on the sofa was working for you a few months ago, but it's just not such a good option now. Is there another space that could work instead?
- **Split your time between two writing spaces.** If you keep your writing gear in a bag, you can easily shift between (say) the kitchen table and the sofa, or the desk in your living room and the desk in your bedroom, as needed.

Problem #2: My Writing Environment is Really Messy

While a messy space isn't necessarily a problem in and of itself, you might find that it makes it hard for you to focus. Plus, if things aren't at least somewhat organized, you may find that you're frequently having to spend a lot of your writing time hunting around for something you've lost.

If you're struggling to keep things tidy, a few things to try are:

- **Have a 2-minute "put away" at the end of each writing session.** Put back your notebooks/pens/anything else you've got out, and clear up things like cups, plates, and food wrappers.
- **Move so that the clutter isn't in your line of sight.** If you write on the sofa and there are piles of laundry and heaps of toys all around you, can you move a bit so you're not actually looking at them?
- **Start each writing session with a 2 – 5 minute tidy.** Check out the bonus checklists for help with this.
- **Keep critical writing gear in one place.** Make sure your essentials, such as your notebook, working pens, and your laptop, are in a bag or box that you can just grab when you're ready to work. Again, there's a checklist for this.

Problem #3: I Have the Space ... But It Isn't Comfortable

Perhaps you've managed to create a writing space in your home, but you're struggling to write there comfortably. Maybe it's too hot, too cold, your chair isn't comfortable, or something else is wrong.

The solution here depends on what problem you're trying to solve. In almost all cases, there will be *some* kind of solution. For instance:

If your writing space is too cold, could you use an electric heater? Or wrap up warm? (If it's just your hands that get cold, I find that woollen fingerless gloves work really well.)

If your writing space is too warm, could you open a window or use a fan? If you don't have the space for a large fan, how about a small desk one?

If you don't have a comfortable seat, could you switch to a different chair, or save up for a new one? Or you might find a different option, like sitting on a Swiss ball or using a standing desk, works well for you.

Don't put up with an uncomfortable writing space. Even if you're limited by what's practical or affordable, there's likely to be *something* you can do to improve things.

If you're stuck and can't figure out what would work for your situation, try asking around on Facebook or Twitter: chances are, you know someone who's faced something similar and who has a bright idea.

Where Next?

Different writing spaces work for different writers. Don't worry about making your writing space into someone else's ideal: instead, figure out what works for you, and what's possible for you.

The rest of the materials in the Supercharge Your Writing Environment pack are printables designed to help you create an inspiring and productive space in which to write. Each one has a nicely coloured version, and a stripped-down black and white version in case you don't want to use much printer ink.

[Writing Quotes \(.pdf\)](#)

I've chosen some of my favourite quotes about writing to share with you: I hope you find them inspiring too. You can print these and cut them out, or use them as a single sheet.

[Writing Gear Checklist \(.pdf\)](#)

This checklist is designed to help you quickly and easily gather your crucial writing supplies. That way, you don't have to break off a writing session to hunt round the house for your notebook or a working pen.

[Preparing Your Writing Space Checklist \(.pdf\)](#)

If your writing space is cluttered, it's easy to put off writing. This checklist is designed to help you quickly sort out your space. Pick the 2, 5, or 10 minute version, depending on how much time you want to spend.

Happy writing,

Ali

P.S. I'd love to hear how your writing goes – and which tips or resources from *Supercharge Your Writing Environment* helped you most. Drop me an email any time at ali@aliventures.com to let me know.

More Resources to Help You

If you want to go further with your writing, check out these resources on my website:

Supercharge Your Writing series (\$8 each)

Find the rest of the Supercharge series at aliventures.com/supercharge

Get Writing (\$20)

Get Writing is designed to let you dip into (or dig deep into) four key areas of writing: short stories, novels, blogging, and freelancing. It comes with a bunch of extra goodies, too, including checklists, prompts, and much more.

Check it out here: aliventures.com/get-writing

Self-Study Packs (\$20 each, or 6 for \$50)

The self-study packs are sets of seminars that cover specific topics, such as managing your time, self-publishing, freelancing, and more. You can choose any packs for \$20, or get the full set for just \$50.

Check them out here: aliventures.com/self-study-packs