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Staying on task during the holidays

December 15th, 2008 by Kathleen Bolton



I don't know about you, but I go a little nuts during the holiday season. I love the shopping, baking and general mayhem that comes with preparing for the big day. It used to be that I'd completely go off my writing schedule because of the busyness. I'd tell myself that I could catch up after the New Year, no biggie, everyone needs to take a break from the work.

Now I'm the first one to say everyone needs a break now and again. But I found that after a two (possibly three week) layoff from whatever story I was working on, getting back into the groove in January was excruciating. I'd dither around re-reading everything in the file from my infamous sheaf of post-its to discarded drafts. I'd agonize over the story in a way I wouldn't have if I was in the Zone pumping it

out. In short, I wasted about another month re-entering the draft.

A few years back I experimented with ways to stay with the story during holiday crazy-time. I wanted to share them with you:

1. Be selfish

This is a toughie, especially for caregivers. But I learned that the sky didn't fall in if I said no to being the cookie mother for my daughter's homeroom, and that I could bring a bag of chips and prepared dip to the office party instead of home-made goodies. I also found that if I stick to the time I carved for myself, even if it was drastically shortened, I could keep my head in the story I was working on, which is so crucial. Which brings me to . . .

2. Do a little each day

Maybe you have 25 people coming over to celebrate. Maybe your kid's choir is

Word of the Day:

ecclesiastical

from Dictionary.com

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having their holiday concert during the time you usually write. It's a no brainer: you'll go, you'll do. But it's also easy to find 15 minutes to review a draft, jot down a few lines of dialogue that whispered while you were sprinkling colored sugar on cake, or edit a page. I found that even these tiny connections to the work kept the momentum going, even if that momentum was a snail's crawl.

3. If you travel, take it with you

I've traveled away for the holiday more than I've had one at home. With my far-flung family, it's what we have to do to stay connected.

I can't gush about it enough: an [AlphaSmart](#) was a godsend.

This portable and durable keyboard gets through airport security with a minimum of fuss, I don't worry about it getting broken, and when I have some time to myself in the early mornings, I'm able to use it anywhere and everywhere. I don't need to locate outlets in someone else's house. Sure, I could bring my laptop, but then I get distracted surfing online, checking email when I should be taking advantage of my slice of writing time.

But before the days of the Alphie, there was my trusty steno pad notebook. It does the job just as well.

4. If it doesn't work out, don't beat yourself up

Like all intentions, sometimes your best doesn't work out. It's the holiday season, after all. Are you going to miss out on your billionth viewing of Frosty the Snowman with your niece to edit a manuscript page? Honestly?

I learned to let the guilt go. There's too much other stuff to feel guilty about, like scarfing the last mocha truffle or drinking way to much eggnog.

Are there any tips you can share to stay on task during the holiday season? Or is it easier to hang up the writing until January? What do you do?

Art by [Sugil](#).

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3 Responses to "Staying on task during the holidays"

Melissa Marsh

on 15 Dec 2008 at 12:21 pm

These are great tips. I know that when I took my vacation to England and didn't look at the manuscript for about a month, it took me FOREVER to get back into it. I hated it. So I try to do a bit each day during the holidays, even if I'm just thinking about it. I drive four and a half hours home for the holidays, so I like to use that time to think about my story, too.

Kristan

on 15 Dec 2008 at 2:16 pm

Great advice! This is the first holiday where I was planning to try to keep working, and this just adds to my resolve!



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Donna

on 15 Dec 2008 at 2:39 pm

I agree. It's hard to get started again.

Yes, the AlphaSmart is a dandy gadget. It's great when you're away from the computer. Plus, it's too hard to edit on it. So, all you get is new words.

In my car, instead of listening to the radio, I have a 'book' that I borrowed from the library to keep up with my reading.

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