
THE WRITER'S SPACE CHEAT SHEET



Gottabeewriting
Cheat Sheet



Choosing the Perfect Place to Write

Authors write everywhere: Airports, coffee shops, on the bus, and at home. This proves it's possible to carve out time and space to work on your craft, even if you're surrounded by crying babies, barking dogs, or the annoying customer service announcements at the airport.

And if you have three critical things in order,
you can write in almost any space.

Before we get into what these things are, let me describe my writing space. We're living in a rental while we wait for a home to be built and my office is the dining room of the house. The house has an open floor plan, so I can see the living room and kitchen from my desk. My desk, a standing desk, faces the window. This isn't very feng shui, but I love being able to look outside from time to time.

I also have bookshelves to hold both reference books and escapist tomes and a credenza with supplies. Behind me is the most wonderful foam-filled beanbag that doubles as a very large dog bed for my pups when I'm not sitting in it. And that's it.

No home office? Turn a closet into a writing space.
Designate an alcove on the stairs as your spot. Just add a comfy chair,
good lighting, a lap desk and a laptop and you're in business.

**Remember, any place, any surface, any space can become
a productive writing spot with just three ingredients.**

Critical Issue #1 Hardware



Every writer needs a place to sit and a somewhere to put their notebook, laptop, or computer. This can be as complex as a rented office space or as simple as a spot at your local coffee shop. For most writers, it's somewhere in between.

Let's take a look at the hardware you need to make any place a writing powerhouse.

Desk

If you have space for a desk, choose wisely. Writers spend a good amount of time at their desks, so having one that's ergonomically correct is important.

I work primarily on a standalone computer, so a desk is a must-have. I had a conventional, sit-down type but I swapped that for a standing desk last year to improve my posture and health. It takes getting used to, but now I can't think of any better way to work. And you don't have to spend thousands to get a great one. Mine cost \$350 and has two levels for better ergonomics. If standing isn't your thing, that's okay. Just make sure your desk surface is at the right level so you don't get computer elbow or suffer from back- or headaches.

Standing Desk

This is the one I've chosen for my writing studio. The two levels make it ergonomically superior to other standing desks I've tried. I've had mine for several years now, and it works like a dream! It's hand-operated, saving you money and removing another layer of technology to fiddle with. You can find it on Amazon at the Stand Up Desk Store.



Desktop Standing Version

If you already have a desk, a desktop version can give you the same benefits. I haven't tried any of these, but a writer friend of mine swears by this VariDesk brand.

Traditional Desk

Not ready for a standing desk yet? That's okay — if you're in the market for a new desk, choose one that fits in your space well. Ikea is a great resource for decent desks at low cost, but you can also find some good deals on overstock.com, wayfair.com and at garage sales, craigslist, eBay and Goodwill, too.

Lap Desk

I have no space for a desk—where can I write? No worries, a lap desk will help stabilize your laptop or notebook and provide a place to keep accessories like a pen and paper to jot notes or even a mug of tea. You can work on a couch, in bed, or anywhere there's a chair.

The UnDesk

Some writers choose not to write at home due to distractions. That's okay. All you need is a table and you're ready to go. The local internet cafe, coffee shop (don't forget to patronize them by buying a coffee or something to eat), or other wifi hotspot can do nicely.

Lighting

Good lighting keeps you from getting eyestrain and headaches. Natural daylight is the best, but position your computer where you won't get glare from sunlight on your screen. If you don't have good natural light or you work in the evening, invest in a good desk lighting, like a natural full spectrum desk lamp that mimics natural sunlight.

I prefer to work in the dark when I work at night, but I've got a FREE program called f.lux (for Mac and Windows) that reduces the blue tones on the screen to minimize eyestrain and to keep the light from interfering with sleep later.

Chair

Since I stand to write, a chair isn't necessary for me but I do have one in case I need to lower the desk and take a rest. I have the Stand Steady Wobble Stool, which I bought when it was on sale. It allows me to engage core muscles and, if I'm honest, to fidget while I'm sitting. Fidgeting is great for my concentration, so I like that this stool allows me to rock and wobble.

If you need a seat for your desk, investing in a quality ergonomic chair is one of the smartest things you can do. You'll be sitting a lot and you want to make sure that the strain on your neck, back and hips is kept to a minimum.

Printer/Fax/Scanner/Copier

While it isn't necessary to have this equipment, it sure is useful. If you have the space and the money, consider investing in one or more of these. Most printers these days are an amalgam of all four of these devices, so you'll get more bang for your buck. I've seen hybrid printer/scanner/fax/copiers for as low as \$70 on Amazon, and I'll bet you can get them even cheaper at big-box discount stores like Costco or Sam's Club.

Don't Forget To Personalize

For maximum productivity you should be comfortable and happy in your space. Even when I write in bed I have a lovely lap desk from Levenger in a smooth, luscious cherry finish that keeps my laptop steady and provides a place for my phone and other accessories I want at hand. The desk was a gift from my husband, and it makes me happy every time I use it. When I'm writing somewhere else in my house, the desk lends an instant feeling of ownership to my space.

Take time to make your space yours. Hang art that inspires or makes you feel happy. Put personal objects within sight to motivate you to linger longer. Keep snacks and drinks at the ready so there's no reason to go looking for them in the middle of a writing streak.

Remember, though, one size does NOT fit all. If you work better with minimal clutter, then perhaps a sleek computer screen on a tidy glass desktop is more motivating than a surface crowded with tchotchkes and memorabilia.

Only you know how your space should feel. The important thing is to get that space created and get writing!

Critical Issue #2 Software



If you write on a computer, then you'll need some software. Even though I own several types of writing software, I always come back to plain old word processing programs like Microsoft Word and Adobe Pages in the end. That doesn't mean something else won't work better for you, but it does mean you can get some serious writing done with inexpensive programs that come pre-installed on most computers.

THE BIG BOYS

- Microsoft Word (Windows)
- Adobe Pages (Mac)
- Scrivener (Windows/Mac)
- Storyist (Windows/Mac)

OTHER CHOICES

- iA Writer
- StoryMill
- StoryBlue
- PowerWriter
- Writer's Blocks
- NewNovelist
- Dramatic Story Expert
- Trelby (screenwriting)
- FinalDraft (screenwriting)

Scrivener and Storyist are two of the most popular dedicated writing software, but there are plenty of others in the market like iA Writer, StoryMill, StoryBlue, PowerWriter, Writer's Blocks, NewNovelist, Dramatic Story Expert, and then Trelby and FinalDraft (for screenwriters). I own both Scrivener and Storyist. Storyist is much easier to learn, while Scrivener is a real bear. Most writers who master it can't live without it, but I'm not there yet.

There's more to writing than just typing your story. I use Evernote to catalog my ideas as they pop into my head, although you can just as easily use the free Notes feature on your phone or go old school and jot it all down on paper.

I also use Grammarly, a grammar checking program, for some of my non-fiction freelance work, and Hemingway Editor helps me self-edit my fiction pieces. There's also WhiteSmoke and AutoCrit. I like AutoCrit because it's made with story writers in mind, but I don't love monthly memberships, so I haven't signed up for this one yet.

THE HELPERS

- Grammarly
- Hemingway Editor
- Evernote
- WhiteSmoke
- AutoCrit

Don't feel like you must have these; you can have your work edited professionally or even have a writer friend proofread for you. I like to cover all my bases, and these tools help me do this with the least cost possible.

For Fun

I have several apps installed that help give me a better writing experience. These are just extras, but to me, they're worth it! The first is NoisyTyper – an app that turns my Mac keyboard into an old-fashioned sounding typewriter. My family hates the sound, but it inspires me.

My second must-have app is WordCounter. This little gem keeps track of my word count each day and even allows me to see my history over time, so I can track my progress. Very motivating, an important factor when working at home!

THE FUN ADDITIONS

- NoisyTyper
- HanxWriter
- WordCounter

Critical Issue #3 The Business of Writing



This is the most critical issue of the bunch, and the one aspect of a home office that many writers overlook:

Every writer is also a business owner.

Even if you're not ready to branch out beyond the "hobby" stage, you should keep track of your expenses and earnings. The IRS allows you to deduct hobby expenses up to the amount you earn, so it's worth it to keep track of revenue in and money out. In addition, you may be able to deduct the square footage of your home that you use for an office on your income taxes, even if it's just a converted closet. That's money in the bank!

Here's what to do:

Ledger

At the basic level, all you'll need is an accounting ledger, an accordion file, or files set up on your computer.

QuickBooks

Once you've moved into writing business mode, it's worth it to invest in some basic accounting software to help you manage your revenue.

Bank Accounts

Many people forget this when just starting out, but you'll need a separate bank account for your business. Mixing personal and business money makes things difficult to sort, especially if you get audited. If you still feel like you're a hobbyist, that's okay. Get a separate personal account and keep only money you make on your writing in it. That way, when you hit the big time you'll have a clear business paper trail for an easy transition.

Putting It All Together

With these three components covered, you're ready to start a daily writing habit that will get your writing career off the ground in no time. Once you get your home base space set up, you can work on having "satellite" spaces for working on the go.

I keep a bag packed with all the essentials for taking my writing on the road: A briefcase for my laptop and my iPad with remote wireless keyboard; a device that holds all the peripheral wires and cords and keeps them organized; a USB drive; pens, pencils, and highlighters; a stash of Stevia packets (in case I'm working at a cafe that doesn't offer them), and a sweater. Yes, a sweater. Because sometimes working in an internet cafe, hotel lobby, or cafe can be a chilling experience!

You're so lucky to be living the writer's life—it's the perfect business that can go anywhere with you. Remember, your writing space can be as small as a chair in the local Starbucks. Don't let perceived lack of space keep you from pursuing your writing dream. Get a desk; a computer, or pen and paper; and organize like a businessperson. Then, you're ready to put ink to paper (or finger to keyboard) and make a name for yourself in this exciting industry!

See you on the next page!