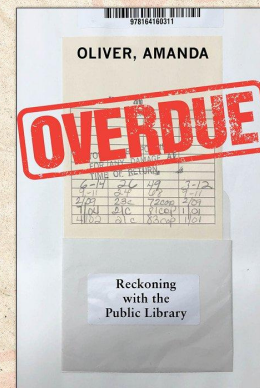


Get Back Into Writing



In this workshop, we will look at how to pick writing back up—and stick with it.

Welcome



**“Amanda Oliver
proves herself a
vibrant new
literary voice.”**

—Reza Aslan, author of
*Zealot: The Life and Times of
Jesus of Nazareth*



I’m Amanda Oliver! I’m the author of *Overdue: Reckoning with the Public Library* (2022), named a Best Book of 2022 by *Esquire*. I’ve been interviewed about my book for NPR, CBC Radio, *The Washington Post*, The Association Press, and elsewhere. I was the Nonfiction Editor of Joyland Magazine from 2018-2023. I hold an MFA from UC Riverside and an MLS from SUNY Buffalo.

Body Scan Meditation

Let's take a few moments to breathe, ground ourselves in our body, and become more present.

Why a Body Scan?

Enhances Focus and Awareness: By directing attention to each part of the body, a body scan meditation trains writers to focus deeply, making it easier to stay present.

Reduces Physical Tension: A body scan helps identify and release these physical tensions, promoting a more relaxed writing experience.

Boosts Creativity: Relaxing the body and calming the mind can open up space for creative ideas to flow, as meditation helps release mental clutter and create a clearer, more open mindset for inspiration.

Increases Emotional Awareness: A body scan encourages mindfulness of sensations, which can lead to greater emotional awareness. Writers can use this awareness to better understand and articulate complex emotions in their work.

Supports Mind-Body Connection: This meditation strengthens the connection between mind and body, which can improve intuition. Enhanced intuitions helps us make better creative decisions and trust our narrative instincts.

What gets in the way of writing?

The list is long, but these reasons are the most frequent I hear:

1. I'm worried I don't have anything important to say or it's not good enough.
2. I don't have time.
3. I have writer's block.
4. I don't know what to write about.
5. No one will want to read it.

Talking to the Writer Within

Why did you become a writer? Chances are you have an answer and perhaps even an age where you realized you were, or wanted to be, a writer. It can be incredibly powerful to be in conversation with that writer, who I call the Writer Within, and it doesn't require any work other than asking yourself questions.

Questions to ask:

When did I start wanting to write?

Why do I write?

Who do I write for?

What do I love about writing?

Talking to the Inner Critic

Oftentimes, there is another voice in there with the Writer Within that I call the Inner Critic. It's important to know what it's saying, too.

What is the thought that occurs when you are not writing or feel like you “can’t” or “shouldn’t” write? Try to distill it down to one line.

For me, it's **It's not going to be good enough.**

On a really bad day, it's **Nothing I write is good enough.**

Talking to the Writer Within

Now, you can start to have a conversation with that voice and its throughline.

My line: **It's not going to be good enough.**

Possible responses:

I like writing and that's a good enough reason to do it.

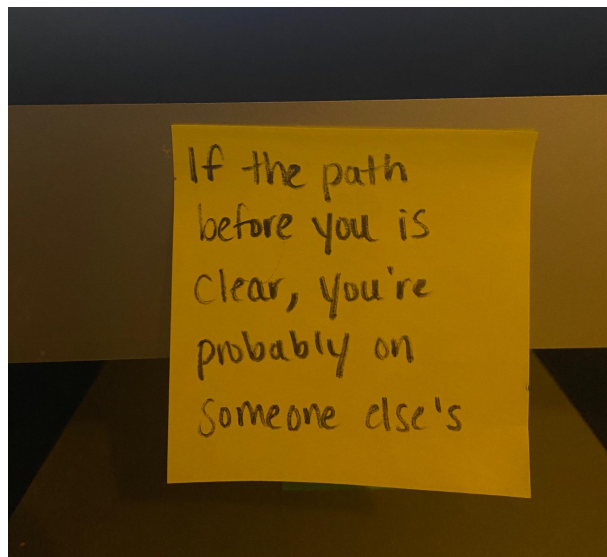
Not all of my writing has to be read by others.

My writing is for someone.

Write Out Your Response

Spend some time with what you want to say back to that voice. **What resonates most? What makes you feel more at ease? What feels kind to yourself?**

Write it down and stick it on a post-it. Keep it near your writing desk.



Write Every Day

I know, I bristle at it, too.

But consider this: Writers inherently write every day if we open up our definition of what we constitute as writing.

Things that also count as writing:

- Reading something that sparks an idea
- Chatting with a friend about an idea
- Overhearing a sentence that connects something we want or are writing about
- Jotting down a line we hear or read that we love
- Philosophizing
- Making overarching life connections
- Giving advice to a friend
- Living our lives!

Write Every Day

For slightly tighter parameters, and to help develop more of a daily practice, you can implement your **Must, May, Wish Do's**. Keep track of their success in a notebook.

Must Do's: Extremely achievable. **Write one sentence. Open the word document.**

May Do's: What you'd like to accomplish. **Write one paragraph. Edit two pages.**

Wish Do's: Your dream writing day. **Write three pages.**

Track it: Keep a notebook for personal/journal thoughts and a notebook for your writing, where everything related to writing, including Must, May, Wish do's, goes.

Track your success and what worked! Where did you write? When? For how long?

Power Writing

Steps to power writing:

1. **Begin with an overarching question.** It could look like "What are the concrete details I observe in the moment ?" (something a fiction writer might ask while working on a specific scene) or "What happened when my mom died?" (something a memoirist might ask).
2. **What goes on in your head goes on to the page.**
3. **Time it.** And hold yourself to it.
4. **Don't worry about being good.** You are training yourself to write fluently and with focus. You are also practicing thinking on your feet.
5. **Write without stopping and do not go backwards.** No pauses, no pencil biting, no gazing out the window, no editing or correcting anything.
- 6.. **Write in one long run-on sentence with "and" between all sentences.** A punctuation mark indicates the end of a thought; you want a continuous prompting for the next thought. No punctuation. If you can't handle that, make your "and's" dashes.
7. **Don't worry about being fast.** It is physically impossible to write or type as fast as your thoughts operate. As long as you aren't stopping, you're doing it right.

Example Power Writing

What happened when I left the restaurant?

The restaurant was in downtown Joshua Tree and it was one of my favorites and I had been sitting there for hours by myself after returning from the hike and it had felt so good sitting in the window before there were many other people there and it was my third time and I started to really think I could live here and that felt beautiful but also insane because I was living in DC and moving to the desert of California felt so wildly impossible and I can't imagine couldn't imagine it being something I could achieve anyway I was in the restaurant and I had been looking out the window and what book did I have with me ok I think I had suicide by edouard leve and that was int he corner and maybe I tried the pancakes for the first time and the waitress who was the nicest waitress in the world was there and I keep losing track here of the question what happened when I left the restaurant I left the restaurant and I felt hopeful for the first time in ten years no not ten maybe five years because I could feel myself hoping for something else and thinking about it

After Power Writing

When you're done, **look for the gold**. Maybe it's one sentence. Maybe it's an idea for a piece. Maybe it's a new understanding about yourself or the piece. Maybe it's that you want to keep writing beyond the timer you set.

Facing Writer's Block

What happens when you “can’t” write anything?

1. **Emulate a writer you love.** Open up a favorite book and read the first few paragraphs. Identify a sentence you love and write it down. Continue the sentence, either emulating the voice of the writer you are borrowing it from, or using your own voice.
2. **Power write about why you “can’t” write.** This is another iteration of talking to the write within. What’s getting in your way?
3. **Watch/read/listen to art that inspires you.** Sometimes we just need to remember what it can mean to make good art by listening to art that means something to us.
4. **Try a writing prompt.**

Use Writing Prompts

1. Write “I remember...” and finish it with 10 items. Choose one to write about.
2. Write “I picked it up to have a better look and...” and keep going
3. Write “I was in the other room when I smelled...” and keep going
4. Write “It could never have happened and yet...” and keep going
5. A person you don’t know recognizes you at a coffee shop, write about your interaction.
6. Describe a recent dream in as much detail as possible.
7. Imagine a conversation between your future and past self. Write it out.
8. Write a story that begins with, “I never expected to find...”
9. Describe a place you’ve never been but always wanted to visit.
10. Create a character who has a secret hobby.
11. Imagine a world where one fundamental rule of reality has changed.

Review

3 Writing Techniques:

Body Scan Meditations

Talk to the Writer (and Inner Critic) within

Write every day

3 Writing Tools:

Power Writing

Must Do, May Do, Wish Do

Writing Prompts

Emulate a writer you love

Through a small hole

Still, I am not ashamed to take what joy I can in writing, it is neither a little joy nor a small solace, it is enormous. Whether one celebrates or laments, it is a joy to engage in, and then pass on, such an ancient tradition. My advice to you is to sit down, look out the window, and go to work. Through a small hole in a high fence you are offering a gift to a stranger.

—Mary Ruefle