

Gathering Ideas for Brilliant Writing

By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

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I always seem to be asking as well as answering the question, "How do you get your ideas for writing?" Chances are everybody you will ask will have a different answer. Ideas are everywhere and there are many ways to collect them. Follow these tips to get the ideas flowing.

1. With the holidays just past us, use ideas from your holidays to write about. Stories about holiday fights can be turned into articles on people skills or coping with interpersonal relationships. Tell about the presents you got. Talk about how much you love outdoor sports. Or hate the snow. Or fear the snow. Write about the car accident you avoided on New Year's Eve.
2. Take a notebook and pencil wherever you go. Keep one on your desk, one in your purse or briefcase, and one in your jacket pocket. If you think a lot while driving, keep a mini tape recorder with you.
3. Write down every idea that floats through your mind, whether it's one word, a phrase, or a whole paragraph.

Continue to add to your notebook every now and then. When you need an idea, first scan through your notes to see if you have anything you can use. (If you prefer, do this on your computer and add new files as you get new ideas.)

4. Develop ideas from things you read. Keep that pencil and paper handy while you read the morning news or a favorite novel or history article. Whatever pops into your mind, write it down.

5. Eavesdrop. (Don't get caught!) You don't want to pry into others' lives of course, but whatever they're discussing may spark an idea in your mind for an article.

6. Ask yourself questions. "Why is the girl running in the rain?" "Why is that man slumped over his computer fast asleep?" Write down whatever comes to mind, then ask some questions about what you just wrote.

7. Keep working on your notebook or files. You might only jot down one word at a time, but eventually you will add to it. Write notes. Add to your thoughts. Print out a series of related ideas or paragraphs that you write, sit down with a cup of coffee, and begin to connect those ideas into something a little more structured.

8. Keep revising and rewriting until you have a solid idea. Then, you can plan your article and begin to write your first draft.

9. Keep an "always open" file on your computer. No matter what you name it -- "ideas" or "notes" or "scribbles" -- keep it open. Anytime you are distracted or have a minute to daydream, record some notes in this file.

With a little perseverance, keeping track of any thoughts or ideas you do get will be easy. Eventually you'll have enough material to scan through and find a solid idea to use in your writing.

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