








What's Holding You Back?

A Self-Assessment



The Starter Kit outlines five areas you need to master in order to be a successful, published writer. Arriving at your destination requires:

| | | |
|---|-------------------|---|
|  | Mindset | Your attitude and assumptions regarding writing and art |
|  | Process | How you go about writing |
|  | Craft | What you do in order to create the effects you desire |
|  | Publishing | Where your work ends up so people can see it |
|  | Community | Who helps you create |

Mindset/Mentality Self-Assessment



Take a look at each statement below and rate the extent to which it's true of you, with 1 being very true and 5 being 100% false.

| | True ----- False | | | | |
|--|------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I often don't believe I'm capable of writing the story/stories I want to tell. | | | | | |
| I expect(ed) writing to be easier than it is. | | | | | |
| I get down on myself when my writing isn't as good as I'd like it to be. | | | | | |
| I struggle to make time for writing. | | | | | |
| I procrastinate. | | | | | |
| I'm overwhelmed by how much there is to know about the craft. | | | | | |
| I get discouraged by rejection. | | | | | |
| I take critique too personally. | | | | | |
| I'm uncomfortable with failure. | | | | | |
| I'm not committed to my writing. | | | | | |
| I have no accountability for my writing habits. | | | | | |
| I lack writing community to commiserate with. | | | | | |
| I don't make goals or set deadlines for myself. | | | | | |
| I don't feel a need to write. | | | | | |

Process Self-Assessment



To what extent are you satisfied with the following? (1 being very unsatisfied, 5 being very satisfied)

| | Very ----- Very | | | | |
|---|-----------------|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Your understanding of your genre and your ideal reader | | | | | |
| Your process for generating ideas | | | | | |
| Your process for keeping track of ideas (for an ongoing story or a new one) | | | | | |
| Your output/productivity. | | | | | |
| Your creation and development of characters | | | | | |
| Your process for world building | | | | | |
| Your organization of your project | | | | | |
| The structuring your story (whether beforehand with an outline or afterwards with some assessment of structure) | | | | | |
| Your methods for getting meaningful feedback from readers | | | | | |
| Your revision process | | | | | |
| Your system for maintaining accountability for your writing practice | | | | | |

What can you do with this? The idea behind this self-assessment is that you pay attention to your areas of need so that you can then do a little research on that particular area(s) and start experimenting with some new processes. If the change is a big one, it will likely be uncomfortable. It can take anywhere from 18 days to 254 days to [develop a new habit](#), with the average coming somewhere around 66 days. Something to keep in mind if you're trying to, say, do "morning pages" every day before work.

Craft Self-Assessment



Your craft weaknesses have to do, broadly, with (check all that apply)

- Momentum (creating tension and making the reader want to read more)
- Resonance (building an emotional connection between reader and story; getting readers to feel the emotional impact of the story events and to identify with characters)
- Immersion (building a world the reader can visualize; providing authenticity)
- Structure (assembling the parts of the story in a way that makes sense and earns the ending)
- Mechanics (intelligible phrasing, wording, punctuating)

Name 1-3 things you hear frequently from readers, editors, critique partners, or workshop participants regarding your writing craft strengths.

Name 1-3 things you hear frequently from readers, editors, critique partners, or workshop participants regarding your writing craft weaknesses.

What effect are you going for within readers? And more specifically, what effect do you wonder if you're failing to elicit?

Which craft issue do you want to improve upon most?

Do you know where you might be able to find some good craft advice or instruction having to do with your weaknesses?

As with the process self-assessment, this one is meant to get you to reflect upon yourself and put some names to the areas of greatest need. Obviously, with a craft self-assessment, I could have created a huge list. But craft in a story is never a checklist.

Your area of need for craft = the effects you're trying to create minus the effects you're successfully achieving.

Publishing Self-Assessment



Which area of publishing are you most clueless about?

Rate your level of experience with the following on a 1-5 scale

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|------------------------|------|--------|------|------|-------|
| | None | Little | Some | Much | A Lot |
| Revision | | | | | |
| Query letters | | | | | |
| Synopses | | | | | |
| Pitching | | | | | |
| Submitting | | | | | |
| Self-publishing | | | | | |
| Traditional publishing | | | | | |
| Indie / small presses | | | | | |
| Publishing contracts | | | | | |
| Marketing your work | | | | | |

Where do you see your greatest needs in relation to publishing? (Check all that apply)

- Awareness of how a writer gets published.
- Practice with various stages of the submission process.
- Motivation to get in the game.
- A system for tracking your moves.
- Accountability for getting work out there.
- To figure out how to market.
- To decide on which type of publishing to pursue.

Community Self-Assessment



Rate your level of comfort with each of the following (1= very unsatisfied, 5= very satisfied)

| | Very ----- Very | | | | |
|---|-----------------|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| An emotional support community | | | | | |
| A group or partner to hold you accountable to produce writing | | | | | |
| Meaningful critical feedback from others | | | | | |
| A writing mentor or mentors | | | | | |

Do you know where you can search for new or alternative communities?

What communities would you like to be engaged in?

Typical kinds of communities you might find in the writing world:

- Local writing groups
- Classes and workshops
- Writing retreats and conferences
- Facebook groups
- Twitter connections
- Writing collectives and forums (like Scribophile, Critique Circle, Insecure Writer's Support Group)
- Online learning communities (LitReactor, DIY MFA, Savvy Authors, Manuscript Academy)

Self-Assessment Plan

Look back over the self-assessments I've given you. We're going to go for some modest improvements over the course of a month. Find the areas of greatest need. You don't need to pick one from each category (mentality, process, craft, publishing, and community). Maybe you're all set with your process or your community. Maybe your craft is great; you just need some help getting past the procrastination.

1. Identify three specific areas of need.
2. Next, take a day or two to research some resources that might help you meet those areas of need, whether they're communities, books, websites, schools, or professional editors/teachers/coaches.
3. Pursue those outlets once you find them. When you do, take notes. This is a good way to be a reflective practitioner. Monitor your own understanding of what you're learning.
4. And of course, then, do your best to put those new understandings into practice.
5. Speaking of practice, though, for those who don't already have a writing schedule, I want you to actually schedule (put it on your calendar) at least three writing sessions per week. They don't have to be long; 10-30 minutes is fine. Schedule them and then stick to that schedule.
6. Then, at the end of the month, get some feedback on what you've written.

