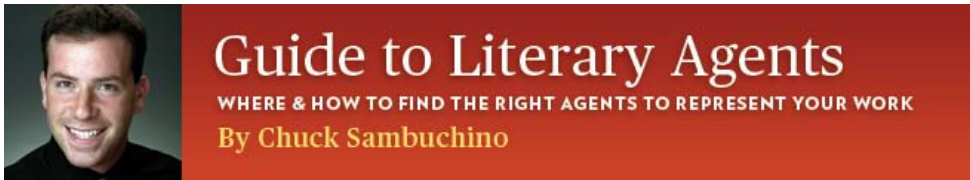




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8 RULES FOR WRITING IN BED

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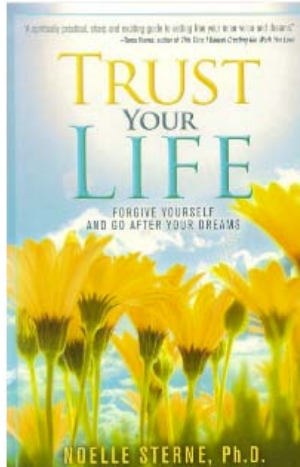
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At nine minutes to go, I always fall asleep at night on the latest action-adventure-intrigue TV show or movie. I never know how the ends got tied up, the hero(ine) got untied, or why the tie-dyed shirt gave the killer away. Then I stagger off to bed, murmuring excuses to my husband about having worked too hard.

But the moment I stretch into the expanse of the bed, groaning with pleasure at its snug comfort, something inexplicable happens. I'm wide awake—and worse, or better—my mind starts churning with ideas for the current writing project, revisions for two others, brand new ideas, and floating brilliant phrases for some still-unnamed piece. I'm as alert as a kid waiting for dawn and Disneyland. And sure I'll remember everything tomorrow.

But I don't. Slivers of ideas and mostly sad forgettings have taught me a few things. If you've had similar grog-to-awake experiences, sure it will all be fresh the next day, and then regret your hubris, here are eight rules I've learned to follow that may help you retain your brilliance.

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Author, editor, ghostwriter, writing coach, and spiritual counselor, [Noelle Sterne](#) publishes fiction and nonfiction in print and online venues. Her current column in Coffeehouse for Writers is titled “Bloom Where You’re Writing.” With a Ph.D. from Columbia University, Noelle for over 28 years has assisted doctoral candidates to complete their dissertations. She is completing a practical -psychological-spiritual handbook to support doctoral candidates: *Grad U: Complete Your Dissertation—Finally—and Ease the Trip for Yourself and Everyone Who Has to Live With You*. Her book [Trust Your Life: Forgive Yourself and Go After Your Dreams](#) (Unity Books) uses examples from her practice, writing, and other aspects of life to help readers let go of regrets, relabel their past, and reach their lifelong yearnings. With *Trust Your Life*, Noelle is participating in the Unity Books “Summer of Self-Discovery,” a reading series with two other authors of positive messages. You are invited to book discussions on Goodreads and free author webinars. See unitybooks.org/summer (May 1, 2013). Visit Noelle at www.trustyourlifenow.com

1. Don't trust your mind to remember. As clear, sharp, and wonderful as your ideas are at night, and as convinced you are of your excellent memory, you'll remember .01 to none tomorrow.
2. So, keep a scratch pad/notebook/cards/tape recorder/lpad/phone voice memo app next to your bed within easy reach. I graduated recently from a pocket-size notebook to a full-size clipboard.
3. Keep pens/stylus in the same place.
4. Turn on the light to get down your thoughts. I've often grabbed my clipboard and pen in the dark, cavalier and overconfident, brimming with creative bounty, and started writing like mad. In the morning, I look and the words, completely unintelligible, are splattered over the page like a drunken sonnet.
5. Sit up to write. An effort, I know. Sometimes, fatigue creeping back, I've compromised by reclining. I scribble like a demon and, sated, slide down again. Next day's result: see #4.

(Enjoying this article? Check out Noelle's previous guest posts for GLA: ["What Selling Lemonade Can Teach Us About Writing"](#) and ["7 Things I've Learned So Far."](#))

6. Open your eyes to write. If you're like me, your mind is a vast field, largely unexplored. With ideas rising up, your best move is to pay attention with your eyes closed to minimize distractions. But when I keep my eyes shut trying to catch the ideas on paper, even though I race like a pen on wheels, I get the same rueful result: see #4.

7. If you use a pen, make sure it has ink. Sometimes, after writing in the dark, in the harsh daylight I discover that the pen ran dry and only light grooves are visible on the paper. I could stab myself with the empty pen. Keep an auxiliary pencil at the ready.

8. When your male significant other bursts in with the crucial news that the Yankees/Red Sox/Titusville Sluggers just whacked the championship-winning homer, or your female S.O. screeches that the baby just spit up on her good shoes, signal firmly that you don't want to hear it. You can deal with the fallout in the morning. A few days of silence or gas-filling boycott are small prices for all the precious ideas you've captured.

If your nodding and alert patterns are anything like mine, you'll need these eight rules. When you follow them, you won't have to keep trying to remember your marvelous thoughts. And the effort won't keep you up and you won't hate yourself in the morning with a blank mind. In the new day, you'll actually be able to retrieve, read, and use what you obediently recorded writing in bed.

([Learn why "Keep Moving Forward" may be the best advice for writers everywhere.](#))



[How to Blog a Book](#) by Nina Amir discusses how to slowly release a novel online to generate interest in your writing and work.

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9 Responses to 8 Rules For Writing in Bed



Clae says:

[November 24, 2013 at 2:28 am](#)

So, so true

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Raynala says:

[November 2, 2013 at 2:04 pm](#)

Laughing at #7, I'll admit I've had my share of writing with faulty pens...

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Noelle Sterne says:

[November 7, 2013 at 11:11 am](#)

Thanks, Raynala-

And I've had my share of writing with faulty paper—over notes that I'd written before. Of course, nothing at all is decipherable..

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[dymphna st james](#) says:

[October 31, 2013 at 5:08 pm](#)

I keep a legal pad and assorted pens at the foot of my bed. When I have an idea or want to outline I just grab the pad and pen and start writing. I have a lamp at my bedside table that I can turn to on to see what I am writing. I must admit I do most of my idea brainstorming and writing before bedtime.

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[Noelle Sterne](#) says:

[November 1, 2013 at 2:09 pm](#)

dymphna st james—

Thank you for your contribution. Before bed is a great time to brainstorm, after the day's activities, physical and mental. I see your secret is having your writing materials at the foot of your bed. That means that if you don't have to get out of bed you at least have to sit up.

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[Noelle Sterne](#) says:

[October 29, 2013 at 12:06 pm](#)

Cassandra—

Very much appreciate your comment. I laughed out loud too—until I tried to decipher my scratchings.

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[writercassandra](#) says:

[October 28, 2013 at 4:29 pm](#)

Laughing out loud at #4 and #6! Must admit, I'm guilty of scribbling in the dark, too. Great tips! Thank you for sharing this unique piece. Cassandra Black

[Log in to Reply](#)



[Noelle Sterne](#) says:

[October 28, 2013 at 4:07 pm](#)

Thanks so much, jplumey, for that great tech solution. I'll check it out, as I'm sure other writers will too. In the dark or light, as long as we keep writing

[Log in to Reply](#)



[jplumey](#) says:

[October 28, 2013 at 2:55 pm](#)

Just a little tech tip for those times when you wake up at three in the morning with an idea you can't forget and don't want to burn your retinas with a harsh light. I use an app on my iPhone called Drafts. It has a white-on-black color scheme that works well in the dark. And, it saves automatically (and even synchs to the cloud) so you don't have to remember to hit the save button. I have saved so many ideas using this app. Great article, thanks for the tips!

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