

**DIGGING**  
**DEEP**  
**INTO**  
**PROCESS**

The secret to crafting a sustainable –  
and sustaining – writing life.

By Anica Mrose Rissi



# Confession: I am a process junkie. As much as I enjoy talking and thinking about story and craft, my true love is analyzing process.

Process involves the physical act of writing and how and when you do it – your habits and routines. But it is also, perhaps mainly, about mindset... or mind games. It is the ways you psych yourself up and psych yourself out – steel yourself, reward yourself, pep talk your way through it, or get yourself stuck. Process is a combination of mindset and approach: the ways you create the conditions you need in order to *create*.

Figuring out your own best process is about noticing what you need, when you need it, and why it is what you need. It's about pulling back the curtain and analyzing the mechanics that allow the magic to happen.

WRITERS LOVE TO CREDIT THE MYSTICAL and magical parts of their processes. When that initial idea, long-sought solution, essential new scene, or perfect plot twist pops into your brain – *shazam!* – it absolutely feels like magic. But it doesn't come out of nowhere. It only shows up because you've opened the door and invited it in by heeding the conditions you need to be creative.

Just as you can study craft by noticing, examining, and breaking down the choices and techniques other writers

apply to their drafts, you can study the minutiae of your own process and discover how to approach the work more strategically and deliberately. In this way, you can learn to create your own optimal conditions for magic.

The first step is to notice your own patterns, tendencies, and emotional needs, so you can more reliably differentiate a bad day from bad writing and *your* needs from your draft's needs. When should the whole thing be deleted, when should a scene be reconsidered, and when do you simply need a snack and a nap?

Sometimes it's enough to open the door for creativity. Sometimes you need to lure it inside with bait.

WE EACH HAVE TO FIND AND FOLLOW what allows us to keep going as bumps and roadblocks hit, and that differs for every project and every writer. Just as there is no right or wrong way for a story or sentence to go – because it is all according to taste – so, too, your process is purely your own. It's all about what works – and what doesn't – for *you*.

Our muses all feed on different forms of sustenance. What should you feed yours?







**On any given writing day and across the life of a project, here are some questions to consider:**

What gets you started?

What keeps you going?

When is it time to stop?

At what points do you tend to need rest (breaks or distance), and what *kinds* of rest provide what you need?

What drives you forward, invites you back in, and keeps you invested over time?

Where do you tend to find joy?

What feels most like play?

What do you need for stamina?

What parts of the process usually go well? How does that feel in your brain and body?

Where and when do you tend to get discouraged? How does *that* feel in your brain and body?

What are you afraid of? (Naming your monsters helps you see, understand, and defang them.)

In what ways do your fears fuel you? In what circumstances do they hold you back?

What kinds of deadlines, feedback, goals, schedules, routines, or surprises have worked well for you? Why?

What kinds of deadlines, feedback, goals, schedules, routines, or surprises throw you off? Why?

Under what circumstances have you leveled up?

Under what circumstances do you thrive?

How do you define *good enough*, and how does that definition serve you?

How does it hold you back?

What are your strengths in terms of process? (Not your strengths on the page but those in your approach to the page, i.e., your mindset about your work.)

What are the associated drawbacks? (For example, perhaps one of your strengths is discipline. If you set a routine, you stick to it and can count on yourself to show up and start working. Perhaps, conversely, you're not always great at allowing yourself to rest. You struggle to adjust to ebbs and flows or life circumstances that make sticking to an iron-clad schedule or daily word count not always optimal – mentally, physically, or creatively.)

What is the story you need to hear? What's stopping you from telling it?

What kind of pep talk, reminder, or affirmation might help you proceed?



**One last note:**

Process is fluid. To build and maintain a sustainable writing life, you must forge a path for perseverance. But don't expect to clear a single path and carve the steps in stone.

From season to season and project to project, your needs will shift. The path might change. Paying frequent attention to process – to what you and your writing need and when – is an ongoing part of the work.

You can do it. This magic is in you. 🍊

*Anica Mrose Rissi is the award-winning author of more than a dozen books for kids and teens, including Hide and Don't Seek: And Other Very Scary Stories and Love, Sophia on the Moon. Her next book, the middle grade novel Wishing Season, comes out in June. Find her online at anicarissi.com and follow @anicarissi on Instagram and Twitter.*



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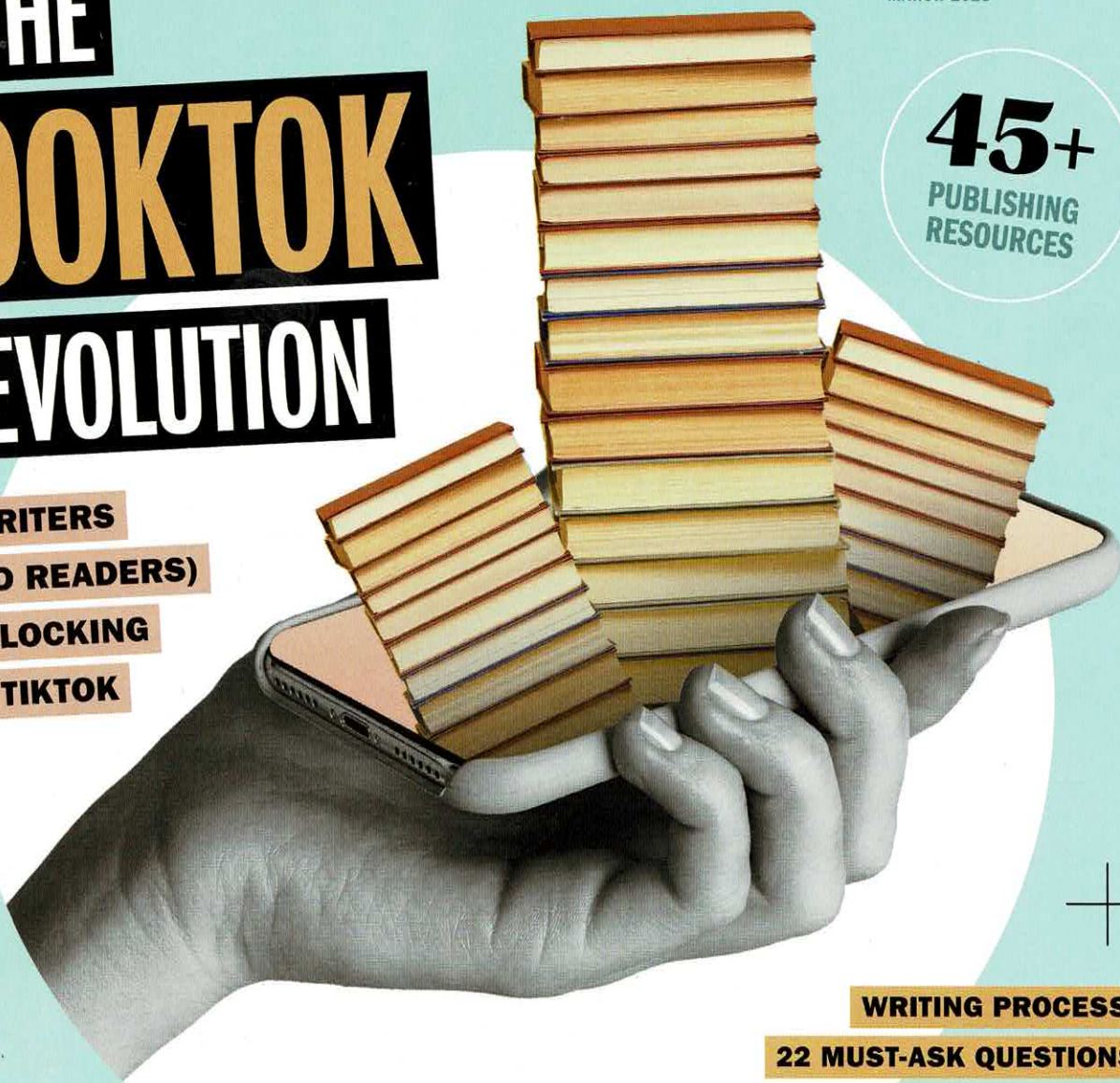
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