

Writers Who Run

Other Resources to Explore

- <http://alexlockwood.co.uk/category/running-2/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/the-running-blog>
- <https://www.amazon.com/Runners-Literary-Companion-Stories-Running/dp/014025353X>
- <http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2016/04/why-does-running-help-clear-your-mind.html>
- <https://digest.bps.org.uk/2015/08/07/what-do-long-distance-runners-think-about/>

WRITING AND RUNNING (2013/penusa/marissa tinloy)

how they're different

It's funny to me that two of the ventures I love most—writing and running—are so different. One entails trotting around outside, in the fresh air, feeling my entire body. The other is characterized by hunching over a laptop, indoors, tapping out words, often unconscious of my physical self.

how they're similar

Of course, as others before me have pointed out, there are also many ways that these two activities are analogous. Each can be intensely solitary, though I also believe deep friendship and intimacy can grow from sharing miles and writing. And both require endurance—the long haul of writing and revision, and the long haul of time, miles, and hills.

running is...

- Running is a way to discipline the body and, therefore, the mind.
- Running is a way to free the mind entirely.
- Running is a way to create structure in the day.
- Running is a way to build endurance.
- Running is a way to move rhythmically.
- Running is a way to release frenetic energy.
- Running is a way to increase energy.
- Running is a way to find quiet.

Running to acquire a void...

a greater capacity for clarity. I am in my body and beyond it. I think and I don't. I see, hear, feel, and yet there's absolute silence, stillness—nothing and everything. When I return home, I know more and I know less, which I think is a good place from which to begin writing.

question to ponder: what is the relationship between running and writing?

I'M A RUNNER (2011/runner'sworld/susan orlean)

on thinking while running

I have had the weirdest phenomenon of what I think about while I'm running. I'm not particularly good at math, but while running I would get into these mental loops of calculating my pace and distance. That kind of thinking is more mantra-like, meaningless riffs as opposed to real creative work. But I think that those thoughts are valuable because it's giving your brain some quiet time. I don't think I would ever actively think, *Oh, I'm going to fix this sentence in this way or I'm going to start my lead in this way.* But, I think, overall, the more time you give yourself to have those palate-cleansing thoughts, the better. Those funny little petty thoughts keep your brain going, but don't take up a lot of brainpower, if that makes any sense. It's like meditating. What you

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think about while you're meditating isn't itself creative. It's the fact that your brain can cool off for a little bit.

I like the questions that Orlean is asked. I might want to answer some of them too.

- Why did you start running?
- Do you ever work through writing problems during a run?
- As an active Tweeter, you're used to commenting and making observations in 140-character dispatches. Can you sum up your relationship with running in tweet form?
- Describe your run route.
- How often do you run?
- What is your biggest pet peeve when it comes to other runners?
- I love running because...
- What I hate most about running is...
- Water or Gatorade?
- My most essential running equipment is...
- Are you a morning or afternoon runner?
- The difference between running and writing is...
- My favorite running song is...
- My running ambition is to...
- Which body parts hurt most after a run?
- When do you know you've had a great run?
- If you don't go for a run regularly, how do you feel?
- My perfect running weather is...
- Before I run, I eat...
- The best running advice I ever received was...

running and writing as complementary, but very different?

WHY WRITERS RUN (2015/theatlantic/Nick Ripatrazone)

running as natural extension of writing

running is a natural extension of writing. The steady accumulation of miles mirrors the accumulation of pages, and both forms of regimented exertion can yield a sense of completion and joy. Through running, writers deepen their ability to focus on a single, engrossing task and enter a new state of mind entirely—word after word, mile after mile.

on keeping a record

like Oates and DeLillo, his [Dubus] running was also deliberately timed. Dubus kept a log book that detailed his daily exercise output and writing word count.

a mutually beneficial relationship

Why do writers so often love to run? Running affords the freedom of distance, coupled with the literary appeal of solitude. There's a meditative cadence to the union of measured breaths and metered strides. Writers and runners both operate on linear planes, and the running writer soon realizes the relationship between art and sport is a mutually beneficial one.

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question to ponder: do writer-runners usually run alone? for most of them is running a solitary practice?

long distance running

The steady, repetitive movement of distance running triggers one's intellectual autopilot, freeing room for creative thought. Neuroscientists describe this experience as a feeling of timelessness, where attention drifts and imagination thrives.

each run is its own story

Writing exists in that odd mental space between imagination and intellect, between the organic and the planned. Runners must learn to accept the same paradoxes, to realize that each individual run has its own narrative, with twists and turns and strains.

question to ponder: what is the story of my run today? what are the twists, turns, strains?

TO INVIGORATE LITERARY MIND, START MOVING LITERARY FEET **(1999/nytimes/joyce carol oates)**

on non-running days

On days when I can't run, I don't feel "myself"; and whoever the "self" is I feel, I don't like nearly so much as the other

WHAT WE THINK ABOUT WHEN WE RUN (2015/newyorker/ **kathryn schulz)**

a cartesian collapse

When they are working at maximum intensity—racing up a hill, sprinting toward a finish line—runners cannot think at all; the brain is only the desperate charioteer of ten billion mutinous cells, famished for oxygen. Conversely, when everything is working to maximum perfection, runners can't really be said to think, either, so blissfully loosed from conscious control are their thoughts. ("I run in a void," Murakami writes, in the single passage in his memoir that I admired. "Or maybe I should put it the other way: I run in order to acquire a void.")

Most runners run to achieve either or both of these conditions as often as possible—to provoke a kind of Cartesian collapse, mind and body suddenly in anguished or glorious collusion. And, most of the time, we fail. The body twinges and hitches and aches; the mind fusses and fidgets. What is it all for? What was it all about?

WHAT WE WRITE ABOUT WHEN WE WRITE ABOUT RUNNING (2016/ **guardian/brigid delaney)**

the exercise memoir bridges gap between slogan and self-help

the exercise memoir also acts as a bridge between running shoe slogans (Just do it!), self-help books (You can do it!) and literature (maybe it can be done, but there are obstacles and life is complicated and difficult and the road will not be simple – non sine pulvere palma)."

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RUNNING AND WRITING (2015/personal blog/elenor imprecht)

on discipline

Back then I had desire but little discipline, and I didn't yet understand the way that regular consistent work pays off. If I wasn't good at something immediately, what was the point? If I had not become a writer, I don't think that I would have the same focus that I do now.

In a haiku about grad school, I link joy/wonder with direction—before grad school, no direction, lots of joy in wondering, after grad school too much direction, not enough joy. How does my understanding differ from the author's ideas about desire and discipline. For her, discipline is regular, consistent work (habit). Is there another word for this besides discipline?

Here are ten things writing has taught me about distance running – in no particular order.

- I'm not in it to win it. I'm never going to be the fastest runner or the most erudite, celebrated writer. I'm not motivated by competing with other people, but I am motivated to see myself improve.
- Big goals are best approached in bite-sized chunks. When writing a novel I try to write 1000 words every weekday. When training to run 21 kilometres I run 5-10 minutes longer every week.
- It is a solitary exercise but it helps to have friends doing it as well. I have writer friends and runner friends, and with both I can commiserate when things are tough, and celebrate success. No one understands you like another person going through a similar struggle.
- Some days it is wonderful and easy, others it feels as though I am moving through a swamp. A croc infested, smelly, malarial swamp. I never know what kind of day it is going to be.
- I need goals in order to get anywhere. A short story by the end of the month, a novel by the end of the year. A 10K in June, a half-marathon in September. They need to be realistic though.
- I need endurance and every bit of stubbornness I can find in order to achieve those goals.
- Exercise improves my work – they feed into each other. My best ideas for writing come when I'm running.
- If it isn't hard, I am not improving. If it isn't hard, I won't have the same sense of achievement when I am finished. Good things come from being challenged.
- This is what I need to run: running shoes, some quick-drying, stretchy clothes. This is what I need to write: pen and paper or my laptop. The less complicated my requirements, the easier it is to not have excuses.
- The joy of an empty stretch of road is like the joy of an empty screen on my laptop. Both are silent, open, and full of possibility.

WHAT WRITING AND RUNNING HAVE IN COMMON (2014/chronicle of higher ed/rachel toor)

on discipline

When people ask me what running and writing have in common, I tend to look at the ground and say it might have something to do with discipline: You do both of those things when you don't feel like it, and make them part of your regular routine. You know some days will be harder than

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others, and on some you won't hit your mark and will want to quit. But you don't. You force yourself into a practice, the practice becomes habit and then simply part of your identity.

running and writing put you in a state of vulnerability

When I think harder about it, what I believe running and writing have most in common, at least for me, is the state of vulnerability they leave you in. Both require bravery, audacity, a belief in one's own abilities, and a willingness to live the clichés: to put it on the line, to dig deep, to go for it. You have to believe in the "it," and have to believe, too, that you are worthy.

7 PIECES OF WISDOM FROM A FAMOUS WRITER (2015/runnersworld/joanna novak)

"I don't think it's merely willpower that makes you able to do something. The world isn't that simple. To tell the truth, I don't even think there's that much correlation between my running every day and whether or not I have a strong will...I've been able to run for more than 20 years for a simple reason: It suits me."

not about willpower (as disciplined, inner strength), but about how running suits a person

MURAKAMI ON WRITING, RUNNING (2012/personalblog/alex lockwood)

the value of running is always open-ended

The value of running is always open-ended. Murakami experiences this when running a 62-mile ultra-marathon (well—wow). Beyond a certain point, he explains, "the end of the race is just a temporary marker without much significance. It's the same with our lives. Just because there's an end doesn't mean existence has meaning. An end point is simply set up as a temporary marker, or perhaps as an indirect metaphor for the fleeting nature of existence." As for running, as for the metaphors of writing.

so, the training/habits are not directed at one particular goal, they are not "disciplined" into one direction.

on focus and endurance

What makes a novelist? Murakami says he's asked this in every interview he ever does. "The answer's pretty obvious," he says: "talent" (p.76). But he also knows what else is needed: If I'm asked what the next most important quality is for a novelist, that's easy too: focus—the ability to concentrate all your limited talents on whatever's critical at the moment. Without that you can't accomplish anything of value... I generally concentrate on work for three or four hours every morning. I sit at my desk and focus totally on what I'm writing. And from there, the third requirement is, "hands down, endurance": If you concentrate on writing three or four hours a day and feel tired after a week of this, you're not going to be able to write a long work. What's needed for a writer of fiction... is the energy to focus every day for half a year, or a year, or two years.

Key idea: what are your goals for running? Is it too be more successful? To win a race? To drop your times? How do/don't those goals fit in with the typical narratives of what counts as success? How do they become instrumentalized?