Twitter Thread by Laura Lippman



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Good morning, Baltimore. A thread on walking and writing. It will be boring but possibly helpful if you wish to walk or write more.

In my pre-pandemic life, there was lots of incidental walking. I averaged 2.4 miles a day, or 5,662 steps.

Pandemic life ended most incidental walking -- not daily walk to school, then coffee shop, fewer errands. In June, after finishing a book, I decided to shoot for 6-7k "deliberate" steps a day.

On December 1, I decided to up my daily mileage to 5 miles. That required more planning -- I couldn't get that done in the pre-dawn hours while my daughter sleeps. I would need to add a second walk, maybe a third.

Then I noticed that I was close to averaging 8k steps a day by year's end. Kind people here on Twitter, using this strange magic called algebra, calculated that I would need to average 10.5k miles a day to up my year average to 8k.

So these are the stats, as it were, I consult 6-ish every day.

So, yes, things are looking good, in part because when I can walk more, I do. But also because I look ahead to things that could throw me off my quota -- rain is more worrisome than cold, but it's also going to be hard to get my steps in on a holiday weekend with a 10-year-old.

So how does this correlate to writing? Depending on where I am in a project, I have a quota (1k words a day while writing, a certain number of chapters while revising, 30 pages daily while in copy edits, proofs.)

I carve out time, M-F. I anticipate obstacles. On Monday and Tuesday, for example, I need to be an active presence in my daughter's virtual learning, 8:45-9:45, so I start writing at 9:45.

I also honor rituals, however meaningless. Taking photos with my camera on my walks is a challenge to see something new in familiar vistas, to experiment with POV.

If you want to write a novel, there is a formula not for writing or plotting, but doing. Identify the time of day you can write and establish a concrete goal. (Word count, pages.) Commit to it, anticipate obstacles, plan around the obstacles.

1k words a day, 5X's a week, for 20 weeks = 100,000 words. That's a rough draft in less than five months.

And the occasional 1.5k day or even 2k day or that great white whale (for me) of the 3k day creates a cushion for the day when you can barely eke out 500. It's about averages.

BTW, my most recent novel took 20 months, but in my defense, I had to put it aside for a few months to write the new material for My Life as a Villainess and I am slowing down because, I regret to inform you --

Writing novels actually gets harder. I just started my 25th one.

Five days in. No idea what I'm doing or where I'm going. And there will be bad "weather" and crises and sick kids, but it's the only job for me.

Oh and I notice this thread is ablaze with typos. That's good. Perfectionism is absolutely the enemy when writing a first draft. I've got a character whose name is changing from paragraph to paragraph right now. The only way forward is forward.

Oh, what about inspiration, you might ask. FUCK INSPIRATION.

Years ago, a famous-ish writer who had just snubbed me gave this airy-fairy talk on inspiration and it was the most impractical thing I had ever heard, it made writing seem mystical and out of reach to mere mortals.

As a kind of counter-argument, I took out a legal pad while she spoke, intent on using old-fashioned brainstorming to come up with the idea for my next novel, determined to have the idea before the writer finished speaking.

Within 10-15 minutes, I had an idea that became I'D KNOW YOU ANYWHERE, one of my most successful books, critically and commercially.

Inspiration is great. I'm happy to see when it shows up. But if I waited for it, nothing would ever happen.

You also can create time quotas, by the way. "Butt in chair for X hours a day" is a perfectly reasonable goal.

FWIW, I did a 1,200-word chapter today. I have no idea what's going on in my book, I'm just letting different characters take the reins and tell me their stories.