

Let's talk about the writing process. I've now written 11 of these A Dog's Lunch columns so certainly I'm qualified to pontificate on the art of writing. I am now a man of letters.

When I speak of the writing process you must realize that I can't speak for all us. By us, of course, I'm speaking among others of Tom Clancy, Camille Paglia, Leon Uris, and myself. My literary cohorts. I used the word myself instead of me or I because it's much more impactful. Athletes often do this as in, "we have a great defensive backfield with players such as Gene Jelks and myself." Athletes also like to throw in, "things of that nature." To prepare for games we lift weights, study film and learn our game plan. You know, "things of that nature."

First of all I procrastinate. It is now 7:09 p.m. and I've been procrastinating for a little more than four hours now. I'm currently in the transition phase from procrastination to activation. For the last twenty minutes or so, my fingers have actually been typing. Before that, for half an hour, I was in the secondary procrastination phase. That grueling stage included looking over some notes for this column, logging on to the internet to add the link to what will be this column, and scanning my bookshelf to find names of other writers to mention in this column. You know, "things of that nature." As you would expect, the secondary procrastination phase is preceded by the primary procrastination phase. That began at about 3:00 with a swim at the Y to get the blood flowing and a trip into Manhattan to check what I knew would be an empty P.O. Box.

Procrastination is not wasting time. I don't know if you can convince your boss or husband of this, but I believe it to be true. I have been well aware since last night, and much more so since this afternoon when the procrastination countdown began, that I would have to sit down and write tonight. I believe that subconsciously I've been whipping my imagination into a froth. Only now, by removing my finger from the dyke to allow the ideas to flow down my arms, through my computer keyboard, and onto the Internet am I ready.

The environment is also very important to a writer. I like a very bright room when I work. I don't listen to music when I write but I do keep a movie, with the mute on, playing in the background. I like to keep hard core action movies playing because it gives me something to glance at every once in awhile but not something that ever requires concentration. Tonight, I'm screening Scarface here in my study. My whole apartment is just one room, but when I write, I like to refer to it as, "my study." Just another part of the tenuous mental camouflage that must be in place before great art may be created. What's going on in the background has nothing to do with what I write.

A few years ago I had an acting coach compliment me on the tenderness of a scene of unrequited love that I'd written for a screenplay I'm working on. I wrote that lovely scene at Billy's Topless in Manhattan. In response to the new anti-nudity law in Manhattan strip joints, and to avoid having to buy a new sign, Billy's Topless is now called Billy Stopless. We're talking about writing so I have to mention that sublime little bit of syntax.

Now, as I write this, I'm trying to be aware of many things. I'm looking to be clever and funny and down to earth. I'm also trying to be a little lighter than I was in my last ADL on Martin Luther King. Most importantly, I'm trying to make sure that all the paragraphs have at least three sentences. My friend Mike Murphy went to catholic school and he says this is very important. I

may not agree with the Vatican on the beatification of Pope Pius, but on writing style, I think they may have a good point.

Okay, so now I've gotten the background lighting and entertainment in my study just right. I've gotten my blood pumping and my notes organized. I've called my mom to alert her that she'll have another ADL to proof read tonight. Now, if only I had something to say.