

THREE RULES FOR WRITING A REGULAR BLOG

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Fig.1 After Henry Robert Morland,
Writing by Candlelight (mid-C18)

Firstly and inevitably: have something to say.¹ No point in writing just to fill the blank page. And, more particularly, decide on the topic at least two or three days in advance. That system gives a good chance to mull over ideas, phrases, and half sentences, in quiet moments well before writing. (Such cogitations are good subjects to think about while on a long, non-taxing walk, or while swimming up and down in a quiet pool). Lateral thinking and inventiveness is a great prelude to the sequential progression of writing. And the more that ideas

have been mulled over beforehand, the easier the writing becomes. It flows as if from inner dictation. A good style should then be conversational, not didactic.

Secondly: dedicate a quiet place and a good slab of unbroken time for the actual writing process. Ban emails, regular mail, phone-calls, texts, real-life visits, and all other distractions for the duration. Press right on to the end. In the event of any necessary stoppage to check sources or for any other reason, keep the break as short as possible – and don't use it as an excuse to divert into another task, no matter how urgent. Remember the story of Coleridge in 1797, when he had written 54 lines of his enigmatic poem *Kubla Khan*. He was disrupted by 'a person on business from Porlock'. When the visitor departed an hour later, Coleridge found, to his mortification, that the muse had left him.² The poem remained *A Vision in a Dream: A Fragment*. Whether it would or would not have been an even greater work if twice the length, and/or whether the 'person' was a real visitor or a proxy in Coleridge's mind for his inability to complete, does not matter. 'Porlock' is the codeword for an untimely break in literary concentration. So take care to avoid being Porlocked, while in creative flow. (Writing longer works, which cannot be completed in one session, requires a different strategy. Yet the same principle applies: learn to concentrate. It's a great ability to acquire, in this era of multiple electronic distractions.)

Thirdly: embed the writing in its context, with footnotes or short references in brackets, if appropriate. The point is not to make a show of learning; or, even less, to bore impatient readers. Nonetheless, it's helpful for them to know when authors are relying on their own invention and when they are using sources or citing information which can be corroborated. (It's especially important, when fake news and information are proliferating, to know that authors have not simply made up the evidence that they are quoting in support of their case). In other words, citations supply intellectual scaffolding for original thoughts. New

insights build upon the existing stocks of knowledge. Retrospectively, indeed literary detectives can unpick the background building blocks of even the most off-the-wall creative works: John Livingston Lowes did just that in inspired style when sleuthing the origins of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*.³ Writers of BLOGs are considerably more earthbound than was Coleridge. But all are using words to communicate. All with a mixture of originality and authenticated information. Then end with a 'snappy dictum', such as the following (ten words): *Regular BLOGS need uninterrupted time to fuse inspiration and information.*

ENDNOTES:

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- ¹ Please note that there are plenty of web-BLOGPOSTS on this very theme.
 - ² As recounted by Coleridge in Preface to 1816 edition of his poems: see E.H. Coleridge (ed.), *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1912; in 1964 reprint), p. 296.
 - ³ J.L. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of Imagination* (1927; and many later edns).