

## Write type

Respecting personality traits can put you on the right path to accomplishment.

**M**ost people imagine the life of a full-time writer as very solitary. Chuck Wendig, author of *Blackbirds* and *Mockingbird*, calls it the Hobbit style of writing. You go into hiding, he says, and then you “emerge from the cave in four weeks.” That practice is true for many writers. But there is a range of personality types – and processes – in the writing world. Many writers are introverts who prefer the cave, but many others are extroverts who need to be out in the world.

What determines whether you are an introvert or an extrovert? It may not be what you think. Laurie Helgoe, author of *Introvert Power*, says your personality type is determined not by how shy or outgoing you are, but by how you process the world around you.

An extrovert’s brain seeks external stimulation and becomes energized in the company of others. The introverted brain is less comfortable with external stimulation and takes extra time to process it. That processing time is best

spent alone. Knowing your type can help shape your comfort zone, career choices and best fit for projects.

No matter where you fall on the personality scale, you have to find your own best practices. Helgoe says the most important step is to “respect the writing.” But that means respecting the writer, too. **W**

Jennifer Roland is a freelance writer in Oregon. She focuses on education, technology, lifestyle and writing. She is an introvert.



## WHAT'S YOUR TYPE?

Here's a quick quiz to determine if you are an introverted or extroverted writer.

### You write best when you have:

- A. six or seven active projects.
- B. one or two active projects.

### You look forward to writing conferences because:

- A. you get to network with many writers to energize your writing.
- B. you get to absorb lots of new information to improve your writing.

### The hardest part of writing is:

- A. isolation.
- B. interviewing people.

### The movie quote that best describes you is:

- A. “The more, the merrier” (*Clueless*, 1995).
- B. “I need to be where other people are not” (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*, 1994).

### When you attend a networking event, you are more likely to be found:

- A. in the middle of the room, chatting up your fellow attendees.
- B. seated in a quiet corner, taking in your surroundings.

### An in-person team writing contest is:

- A. an amazing way to test your boundaries, bust through your blocks and make new writer friends.
- B. great for getting you out of a rut, but totally exhausting.

**Mostly A's:** You fall solidly on the extroverted side of the scale. The tips for extroverted writers should work for you.

**Mostly B's:** You are an introvert. Look at those strategies to use your personality type to your advantage.

**Some A's and some B's:** You're an “ambivert.” Pick and choose among the tips to create your best process.



## STRATEGIES FOR INTROVERTED WRITERS

### ► **Get Away**

From the keyboard, that is. Treat the time you aren't writing with respect, says Helgoe, who is also assistant professor of psychology at Davis & Elkins College in West Virginia. In fact, Helgoe wrote a good chunk of *Introvert Power* while raking leaves. She didn't attach a tablet to her rake or dictate thoughts into a recorder. Instead, she thought about her topic, building links between ideas. All that time spent processing meant the writing came easily when she sat down at her desk.

### ► **Push Yourself**

Sage Cohen, author of *The Productive Writer: Tips & Tools to Help You Write More, Stress Less & Create Success*, began writing poetry mainly for her own enjoyment. "It took me a very long time to see the purpose of having a public life as a writer," she says. But she needed to open her writing up to move to the next level. Good writing connects with people, and she says, "You connect with people when you're scared and you're raw." The key? Go to conferences, readings, group activities with other writers.

### ► **Be Non-linear**

Many writers want to start with sentence one and let the words flow out in order until they reach the conclusion. There may be drafts that come that easily, but if the words aren't coming when you start at the beginning, attack whichever part of your work inspires you. "Write in a disorganized fashion," says Helgoe, then find the structure later.

### ► **Allow for Inspiration**

Cohen works a day job as a marketing writer, but her muse doesn't always respect her nine-to-five schedule. She captures ideas on index cards to use later. This, she says, ensures that "the forces of inspiration, the muse or whatever you call it, know that I will be accountable. I will write it down" and act on it later.



## STRATEGIES FOR EXTROVERTED WRITERS

### ► **Hibernate**

Wendig is known for his outspoken social media presence and says he loves to interact with his audience. But, he says, "I don't want to be near people when I'm writing. I can't even listen to music." When he's done, he emerges from his cave after what seems like weeks. A writing cave can be a boon to extroverts who are easily distracted. Helgoe's research supports this idea. She finds inspiration at a coffee shop, where extroverts want to talk to everyone around them rather than getting into their writing task.

### ► **Blog**

"Blogging is writing for extroverts," says freelance parenting writer Lisa C. Baker. "You have this whole dialogue" with your readers. Baker's blog *How to Be Supermom* attracts a regular group of commenters, and Baker makes sure to interact with them on each post. These readers, her "virtual friends," satisfy some of Baker's need to interact with people.

### ► **Journalism**

Helgoe points out that the extrovert's natural desire to interact with other people makes them very good at interviewing. "They can be very good at asking questions," she says, and they enjoy the mental stimulation they get from the interactions. Baker agrees. She loves that part of her work, often chatting with subjects after the interview is over.

### ► **Networking**

Local writing groups can be a great way for extroverted writers to get the social interaction they crave. Helgoe points out that the isolation extroverts may need to get their writing done can deplete their energy – Baker says she never uses her office at home because "it is so darn quiet" – but they can reward themselves with social interaction with fellow writers.