

Waste Not, Want Not. You'll Never Run Out of Writing Ideas if you Reuse Them.

By Mandy Marksteiner

My next-door neighbor got chickens over the summer and I occasionally feed them.

Feeding chickens has completely changed the way I clear the table. I'm amazed at all the things they will eat. I've noticed they pick cantaloupe rinds clean, fight over wrinkly grapes, and eat the seedy cores of peppers.

The food we toss into the coop makes the chickens grow and lay eggs.

Making better use of my leftover food reminded me of the value of leftover writing ideas. Here are a few ways to stretch your writing further.

Start with the raw ingredients in your mind

You can't feed chickens if you don't cook with fresh ingredients. And you can't reuse your writing if you don't write regularly.

Natalie Goldberg, author of *Thunder and Lightning; Cracking Open the Writer's Craft*, recommends you get in the habit of completely filling one spiral notebook per month, and writing for a set period of time. She wrote, "At the beginning, I wrote for rounds of 10 minutes, eventually increasing them to 20 and 30. I told myself that if the atom bomb went off eight minutes after I began, I'd go on writing."

Carry a notebook with you to jot down your thoughts, ideas, and conversations you hear. Months from now, this material might turn into the perfect lead, or spark an idea for an article or book.

Go through your notebooks

As you start keeping notebooks or journals, you'll notice they begin to accumulate — physical proof that you have ideas! Periodically go through them and organize your favorite notes.

Start by cleaning out your notebooks, page by page. Rip out interview notes and put them in the appropriate client files. In your notebooks, you will find material you forgot about completely; things like unfinished articles, article ideas, and scenes. When

you find these things, create a physical "article idea" folder, and put those papers in there. Then type up the notes and you'll instantly have a rough draft.

Type up your journals

While cleaning out my storage closet, I unearthed over 20 years' worth of journals. My habit has always been to write in my journal and hide it. But now that I've lined them up in my office and started to type them out, I'm thrilled to see the pages add up to a full-length memoir.

But as I type, I realize that not everything in the journal belongs in the memoir. For example, I came across a section that could be turned into an article about creativity, another idea that made sense as a story, and plenty of material that can be fodder for a YA (Young Adult) novel.

If you have journals you haven't looked at in a while, I challenge you to dust them off and type them up. You'll get in touch with yourself, find your most emotional writing, and (if you're like me and have been journaling since junior high) you might have already written a book.

If you find sections that can be used for something else, copy and paste them into a separate document.

Collect interesting quotes and facts when you read

The information you collect when you read will flesh out your articles, give your ideas more credibility, and can even make your writing more persuasive. Develop a system for saving, retrieving, and using fascinating tidbits you come across.

In AWAI's [*Accelerated Program for Six-Figure Copywriting*](#), Don Mahoney writes, "You plant these little nuggets into your copy and they act like invisible hooks that grab onto your reader — hidden magnets that keep him turning the page."

Some writers have a drawer or folder full of article clippings and quotes they tap into it when they're looking for ideas. Others organize their clippings by topic. I've repurposed a small accordion file for coupons and labeled each section with a topic that interests me. When I find a quote, I can copy it on a slip of paper, photocopy it, or rip it out and stick it into my file, which fits in my purse.

Save your darlings!

William Faulkner said that in writing, you must kill your darlings, but it doesn't have to be the end. When you feel a pang of regret after cutting a sentence or section from your latest promotion, article, or story, ask yourself if it can be reworked or combined with other material to make a new article, blog post, book chapter, or Facebook post.

Find fresh ideas in your reject pile

Just because an editor decided not to use your story doesn't mean you can't use it.

Last week, I opened my "rejected articles" folder on my computer and found a story with an anecdote that made perfect sense for an email I was trying to write. I used the anecdote, and tossed the rest.

Start your book today!

I mentioned that I found memoir and other book ideas within my journals. In fact, writing a book is one of the best things you can do to cement your credibility as a copywriter. Pam Foster recently wrote a book that she said became the best business card she ever had!

Once you start writing more efficiently, writing a book will seem less daunting. If you've written a lot about a certain topic, you can start by gathering all of the articles, blog posts, and reports you've written into one folder.

That's what Master Copywriter Bob Bly, author of over 80 books, recommends ... In *Become a Recognized Authority in Your Field in 60 Days or Less*, Bob offers an organization tip that simplifies the process of writing a book. "The instant I get an idea for a book I might write, I create a file labeled with the title. I then clip and place into that file every item related to that topic I come across in my reading and web surfing. This way, when I'm ready to write the book, a good chunk of the research is already done."

Getting more mileage out of your writing is one way to get more assignments and make more money. When you organize your office, computer files, and life with the intention of reusing your words, you will uncover a cornucopia of ideas.

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1 Response to "Waste Not, Want Not"

What a terrific article, Mandy!

I'm applying your tips and advice to my online notepads. I can't tell you how many of these are just sitting idly on my desktop. Now, you've inspired me to go through them and organize all those dormant ideas. With a little work, I can bring them back to life and turn them into future paid assignments. So your "chicken coop" is my treasure chest!

Thanks again, Mandy. Keep up the great work!

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