

Yoga for Writers

When I became a full-time freelancer, the overall health benefits were immediately obvious. Before, I had suffered chronic sinusitis. After, I became sick a lot less often. I attributed this to the fact that my stress levels had dropped drastically. That and I was no longer in contact with other human beings.

On the other hand, I was no longer in contact with other human beings. This was... sort of depressing. Not only that, but I gained a lot of weight pretty quickly. Instead of waking up at a normal time, commuting into NYC, and power walking from the Port Authority to my office every day, I rolled out of bed at 8:30 a.m., commuted to my bathroom, and then power walked to my desk in the other room.

This took its toll. Then, a year ago I started doing yoga. I had previously taken classes at the New York Sports Club on the other side of town. After that, I purchased DVDs, moved aside my banged-up coffee table and rolled out the old \$20 yoga mat I purchased years ago at a display stand in the middle of Barnes & Noble. But a year ago I got serious about my health. I joined a yoga studio five minutes from my condo. I was soon taking six classes a week, and I'm now convinced that yoga was *made* for freelance writers. Why?

It starts your day off right. Before becoming a devoted yogini, I typically shuffled my way over to my desk and did whatever mindless tasks my brain could handle while I was still partially unconscious. Now, I attend morning yoga classes several times a week. They simultaneously pump me up for productivity and make me more relaxed so that I don't have a class-A freak-out about the five deadlines and three interviews on my to-do list that day.

But you don't need a studio membership to enjoy the benefits of yoga. In fact, I sometimes use Tara Stiles's *Yoga Cures* on the days I don't have class. It has several morning routines, and even prescribes specific poses for awakening your system, like Cat/Cow, Down Dog, and Side Plank. A quick seated meditation can also help to awaken your mind. Download an app like the Insight Timer, or visit Calm.com.

It stretches out your muscles. My upper back muscles and shoulders always ache after hours at the computer. And my wrists get sore, too. Is it any wonder I'm addicted to yoga? From the first Cat/Cow to the final spinal twist, my body feels happier with the regular stretches my yoga classes provide.

Of course, the stretches mentioned above (plus a score of others) can be done at home and, if you're too busy to even walk away from your desk, chair yoga is *totally* a thing. Seriously. It has its own Wikipedia page and everything. Check out *Chair Yoga for You: A Practical Guide*. Do a Google Image Search to find suggested poses (my favorite is when you cross an ankle over the opposite thigh and do a forward bend). Head on over to getfitwhereyousit.com. Developing a strong yoga practice

doesn't have to intrude on your work day if you don't want it to.

It protects you from the dangers of a mostly sedentary lifestyle. In addition to stretching out your muscles, depending upon what style you choose, yoga can also act as a cardio and strength training workout. The Ashtanga style (also called Vinyasa or Power Yoga) is typically best for this. It combines a continuous fast-paced flow with poses that are held longer, challenging you to use certain muscles in order to support your own body weight. Before joining my local studio, I was a huge fan of Rodney Yee's *Power Yoga* DVD. He also has several books out that allow you to develop your own yoga sequences. For beginners, consider Seane Corn's *Vinyasa Flow Yoga* and Shiva Rea's *Lunar Flow*, and there's yogaglo.com, a subscription-based site that streams class videos for all levels.

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It helps you turn off your brain. I have trouble sleeping. Or rather, I have trouble *falling asleep*. (If you happen to wake me up after I've finally achieved unconsciousness, your life may be in danger.) It's because I can't turn my brain off. I'm always masterminding new career paths and worrying over deadlines and wondering whether I should add this or that to my to-do list. But when I go to the occasional evening yoga class, focusing on the poses and meditating in *savasana* (corpse pose) help me shut all of that out. And once a month, my studio has a Yoga Nidra class — a quick vinyasa flow followed by an extended, guided meditation. One hour of Yoga Nidra (yogic sleep) is said to be equivalent to four hours of actual sleep.

It boosts your mood. I have to say, it's been a long time since I've felt this good without the help of mood-stabilizing medication. This is partly because focusing on your breath can help ease anxiety. Certain poses can also be comforting. And then there's the community. The freelance life can be a reclusive one. But getting myself to the studio several times a week has made me a part of something again.

Freelancing and yoga go together like Nutella and pound cake. So try it. At a studio or gym. In your living room. At your desk. It's second only to a strong pot of coffee. ♦



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