



# Freshen up!

A spring cleaning guide for writers.

By Anica Mrose Rissi



SPRING IS A SEASON OF GROWTH, change, and possibility. What better time to refresh your creative process?

Use these tips to declutter your brain, reorganize your approach, and clear space for writing in the months ahead.



## Clean out your writerly closet

With winter gone and summer racing toward us, it's time to open every drawer, empty the closets, and sort through your goals, perceptions, and process. Take stock of where you are in your creative life at this moment. What's working well? What's cluttering your mental space? What tricks, crutches, and excuses do you reach for most often? What parts of your brain do you barely use, and what would help you access them more often?

Make a list of ideas or routines you've been holding onto that no longer serve you creatively. What "rules" are you

following that no longer apply? What insecurities have you been hoarding that you might be ready to part with, or at least tuck away for a season? Is there a project you wore (or that wore you) all winter that should be folded up and stored for a while? (Absence not only makes the heart grow fonder, it also makes one's vision – and revision – clearer.) Is your old security blanket the right weight for summer, or do you need to find new ways to cocoon and support your creative dreams?



Sketch a plan for what to keep close at hand for the season and identify at least one thing to toss or move to deep storage.



## Restock your toolbox

Spring is the perfect time to polish your craft, sharpen your skills, and add new tools to your coffer. Pick up a new (or new-to-you) craft book, such as *Meander, Spiral, Explode: Design and Pattern in Narrative* by Jane Alison, *Craft in the Real World: Rethinking Fiction Writing and Workshopping* by Matthew Salesses, *The Art of Slow Writing: Reflections on Time, Craft, and Creativity* by Louise DeSalvo, or *Light in the Dark: Writers on Creativity, Inspiration, and the Artistic Process* edited by Joe Fassler. Attend an in-person or virtual book event, such as those hosted by Anderson's Bookshop and Labyrinth Books. (Find their event schedules at [andersonsbookshop.com/event](http://andersonsbookshop.com/event))



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and labyrinthbooks.com/events.) Take a one-day or several-week writing class or workshop, such as those offered online by Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance ([mainewriters.org/all-events](http://mainewriters.org/all-events)) and the Writing Barn ([thewritingbarn.com/upcoming-classes](http://thewritingbarn.com/upcoming-classes)). Take notes on what you learn. Consider ways to apply it.



## Check your batteries

Spring is in the air, but is it in your step? If you're not feeling fully charged (creatively, physically, or emotionally), take a close look at what's draining your energy. What tasks, people, situations, or habits are depleting your reserves, and how can you contain, compartmentalize, or cut back on those interactions and obligations? Yes, the world is a lot right now, and unfortunately, much of that is out of your control. Every energy drain can't be eliminated or reduced, but taking even a few small steps toward recharging can help reignite your ability to be creative.

Set a timer to reduce the number of hours you spend doom scrolling. Say no to invitations that don't excite you. Re-assess, reassign, or swap overwhelming chores. Stop reading any book that's a slog. Forgive yourself for being human. Turn toward the sun and whatever else feeds you.

Pause. Stretch. Breathe.



## Open the curtains

If you've been feeling stuck, that's OK. Spring is a good time to refresh or refocus your thinking. Pull up the shades, throw open the windows, and let in new light and fresh air.

Make time for your writing away from the screen or page: schedule a

walk, bath, or visit to a swing set and let your mind wander, sometimes in your project's direction. Make a playlist for your novel. Look up (or invent) your characters' horoscopes. Draw a map of where a scene is set or a blueprint of a relevant building. List the scents that don't appear in your essay but would if the reader could smell it. Decide what each of your characters would have brought for show-and-tell in their first week of kindergarten. Approach your work from new directions and see what catches your eye.



## Try new containers

Unpack that enormous box of ambitions and sort your goals and tasks for the coming season into smaller, more specific (and satisfying!) containers. Instead of "publish a new essay," try "brainstorm five ideas," "research possible outlets," "write and send three pitches," and "expand one pitch into a draft by writing 200 words per day."

If getting that granular about writing isn't right for you at the moment, you can still benefit from a fresh parceling of intentions. Borrow author Nina LaCour's goal and aim for "some words on most days."



## Dust off old ideas or ambitions

Did you once dream of writing a screenplay? Formerly consider yourself a budding poet? Imagine, once upon a time, you might finish your memoir – which, alas, you stopped drafting long ago? Peek in on those hibernating projects and wishes and choose one to shake awake. How would it look if you cleared off the cobwebs? Why not invite it to come out and play?



## Don't sweep fear under the rug

Brace yourself: This is the messy part. You're going to plunge your hands into the muck and scoop out your creative fears.

Fear of mediocrity. Fear of failure. Fear of rejection. Fear of success. Fear of running out of time, talent, or ideas. Fear of doing the thing you've always dreamed of and finding life remains the same. Fear of how people might judge if you show them your soft underbelly.

Count your fears. Name them. Assess the shape they're in.

If you discover any have holes or no longer truly fit, kick them to the curb. It might be tempting to ignore or hide the ones you can't get rid of, but they need to be stored properly. Don't leave them in your workspace or scattered around where you might, at any moment, trip on them.

Put those lingering fears in a leak-proof, well-labeled container – it's important to know exactly what's inside. Place them on a shelf in your mental garage, preferably far from anything flammable. Consider that you might want to take your fears out at points where





your next steps require a gut check. But while you're working and dreaming, keep them in their place.



### Plant seeds

Even if you don't have time to write these days, you have time for this: Choose a notebook and pen to keep near your bed. Before you turn out the lights at night – or first thing every morning – write down one thought. That's it: a single sentence about anything. It can be something you've been thinking about, or whatever just popped into your head. Don't put any pressure on it. Write it down and let it live in the notebook, where, the next day, another thought

will join it. The sentences you write in the notebook don't need to be related. You're just collecting them, making it a habit, and seeing what comes. You're making space for the things you notice and wonder. You're giving your thoughts a safe place to grow.



### Find what sparks joy

Applying the KonMari Method™ to your process won't free your first drafts of all clutter or allow you to discard or skip the parts of writing you don't love. (What is writing without frustration? Asking for a friend.) But as you write your way through spring and summer, search for sparks. Feel and follow the joy.

If you love to revise, indulge in re-writing even as you draft. If concocting dialogue delights you, allow the banter to flow. If cutting, condensing, and clarifying give you a feeling of clean satisfaction, write a poem, flash essay, or flash fiction, and polish it down to the bone.

Make space for pleasure in your process. Clear the way for a summer of fun. 📖

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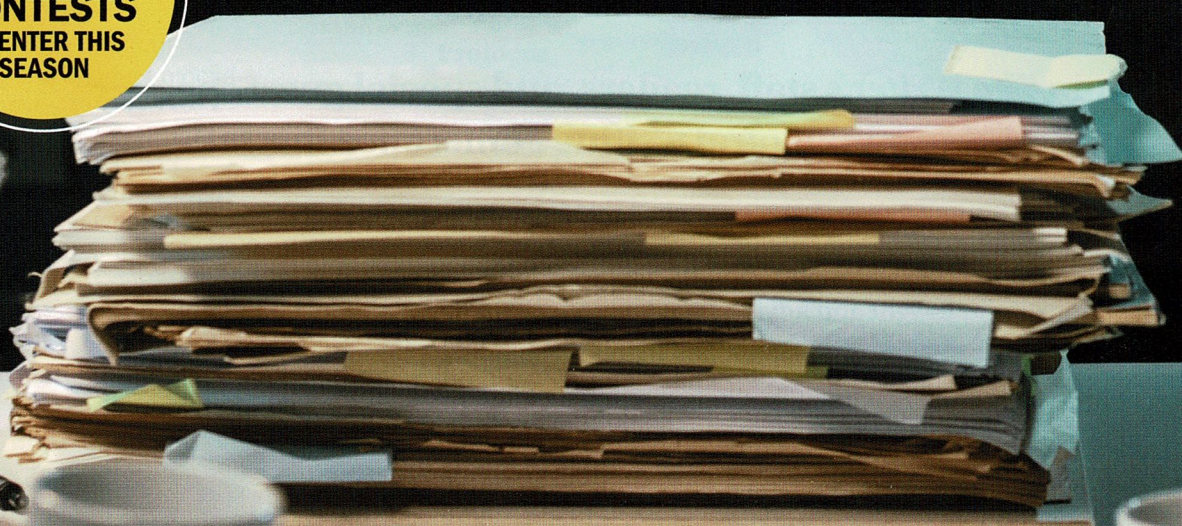
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