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■ OFF CAMPUS ■

TECHNOLOGY

for when writing feels tough

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For the purposes of this article, when I say technology, what I'm really referring to are free websites and apps that help me start writing when I'm not in the best headspace to do so. This is also because this writer, like many writers, struggles with technology. The following are, therefore, a bunch of free places on the internet that allow me to complete assignments or personal projects when the going gets rough.

Mailtrack

In a landscape where writers across the globe are suffering from the consequences of shrinking jobs and both indie and mainstream magazines seem to be shutting, a response about submissions can provide huge relief. Often, no response is given if a piece is not selected. What can give a modicum of comfort though is knowing if, at the very least, the email you sent was opened. This is what Mailtrack does, and it is available as a free extension on Google Chrome.

The Most Dangerous Writing App

The premise of the app commits to the name given to it, since it deletes what you've written if you stop writing within the time period you have set. The text slowly gets blurry when you stop writing, and if you've paused long enough, the writing disappears with no chance of you getting the text back.

This happens as long as you continuously write within the time limit you set, which can start at five minutes at the lowest. Once you really get into it, however, you may not even notice that the set time has passed and your writing is no longer in danger of going away forever.

Where this app truly shines is when you find yourself in a mental place where after plenty of research,

thought, and drafting, you hesitate to write or find yourself unable to proceed because your brain is too cluttered with that information. With this app, you can rush through writing the text and in turn, the thoughts in your mind flow out as you rush to get the information out. As any person who has written for a long period of time may tell you, you often *can* write what you intend to write about. It's just that sometimes you have to first get it out somehow.

This app is therefore highly crucial for freewriting, a practice where you write non-stop without any interruptions from yourself. As you focus on ensuring the writing doesn't disappear while you're writing within the time period you have set, a lot of your inhibitions will go away. You might be surprised by the outcome. Moreover, there is also a random prompt generator delivering prompts, which range from mundane to highly interesting.

Notion

Notion is famous for many things, but for those with the habit of keeping 20 tabs open and suddenly finding themselves immersed in a topic wholly unrelated to the work at hand, Notion may be immensely helpful.

While the free version has limitations on the size of the file you can place in a page, an infinite number of pages within pages can be made with paragraphs copied from relevant sources all in one place. The app further allows a wide range of colours for texts and highlights that enables easy categorisation of the information into quotes from different people, summaries from other articles on the same topic, historical background, and sociopolitical context.

The Marginalian

Formerly known as Brainpickings, this website has been

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run for 17 years by Maria Popova, an essayist, book author, poet, and writer. The website offers a range of information through quotes, anecdotes, and personal thoughts, all without ads and paywalls. It focuses not just on novelists or poets, but also on philosophers and astronomers. Accompanied by beautiful illustrations, the pieces are personal and touching, offering glimpses into the thoughts of people we both know and don't know. You can read about advice on writing from celebrated authors, both modern and old, thoughts on creativity, writing routines, and even somewhat eccentric ideas such as "creative sleep".

One of the most fascinating pieces includes this illustration showing the different times in which famous writers typically wake/woke up to write, ordered according to who woke up earliest to latest. This post is just one of many examples of what makes The Marginalian such a brilliant website for writers. It provides an insight not normally available to many, closing the much needed gap between memorised knowledge and wisdom that can only be attained through personal or informal communication not always readily available in traditional settings such as classrooms.