

# Show Your Work

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## Be an Amateur

Amateurs are not afraid to make mistakes or look ridiculous in public. They're in love, so they don't hesitate to do work that others think of as silly or just plain stupid.

The best way to get started on the path to sharing your work is to think about what you want to learn, and make a commitment to learning it in front of others.

Find a scenius, pay attention to what others are sharing, and then start taking note of what they're not sharing. Be on the lookout for voids that you can fill with your own efforts, no matter how bad they are at first.

Share what you love, and the people who love the same things will find you.

## You can't find your voice if you don't use it

Talk about the things you love. Your voice will follow.

If you want people to know about what you do and the things you care about, you have to share.

## Become a documentarian of what you do

Become a documentarian of what you do. Start a work journal: Write your thoughts down in a notebook, or speak them into an audio recorder. Keep a scrapbook. Take a lot of photographs of your work at different stages in your process. Shoot video of you working. This isn't about making art, it's about simply keeping track of what's going on around you.

Whether you share it or not, documenting and recording your process as you go along has its own rewards: You'll start to see the work you're doing more clearly and feel like you're making progress. And when you're ready to share, you'll have a surplus of material to choose from.

## Share something small everyday

Once a day, after you've done your day's work, go back to your documentation and find one little piece of your process that you can share. Where you are in your process will determine what that piece is. If you're in the very early stages, share your influences and what's inspiring you. If you're in the middle of executing a project, write about your methods or share works in progress. If you've just completed a project, show the final product, share scraps from the cutting-room floor, or write about what you learned.

If you have lots of projects out into the world, you can report on how they're doing—you can tell stories about how people are interacting with your work.

Your daily dispatch can be anything you want—a blog post, an email, a tweet, a YouTube video, or some other little bit of media.

"What are you working on?" Stick to that question and you'll be good. Don't show your lunch or your latte; show your work.

Of course, don't let sharing your work take precedence over actually doing your work. If you're having a hard time balancing the two, just set a timer for 30 minutes. Once the timer goes off, kick yourself off the Internet and get back to work.

## "So What" Test

"Post as though everyone who can read it has the power to fire you."

Be open, share imperfect and unfinished work that you want feedback on, but don't share absolutely everything. There's a big, big difference between sharing and over-sharing.

Always be sure to run everything you share with others through The "So What?" Test.

"Is this helpful? Is it entertaining? Is it something I'd be comfortable with my boss or my mother seeing?"

## Turn Flow into Stock

"Flow is the feed. It's the posts and the tweets. It's the stream of daily and sub-daily updates that remind people you exist. Stock is the durable stuff. It's the content you produce that's as interesting in two months (or two years) as it is today. It's what people discover via search. It's

what spreads slowly but surely, building fans over time." Sloan says the magic formula is to maintain your flow while working on your stock in the background.

your stock is best made by collecting, organizing, and expanding upon your flow.

## **Don't be a hoarder**

Where do you get your inspiration? What sorts of things do you fill your head with? What do you read? Do you subscribe to anything? What sites do you visit on the Internet? What music do you listen to? What movies do you see? Do you look at art? What do you collect? What's inside your scrapbook? What do you pin to the corkboard above your desk? What do you stick on your refrigerator? Who's done work that you admire? Who do you steal ideas from? Do you have any heroes? Who do you follow online? Who are the practitioners you look up to in your field?

Your influences are all worth sharing because they clue people in to who you are and what you do—sometimes even more than your own work.

## **No Guilty Pleasures**

When you find things you genuinely enjoy, don't let anyone else make you feel bad about it. Don't feel guilty about the pleasure you take in the things you enjoy. Celebrate them. When you share your taste and your influences, have the guts to own all of it. Don't give in to the pressure to self-edit too much.

## **Credit is always due**

So, what makes for great attribution? Attribution is all about providing context for what you're sharing: what the work is, who made it, how they made it, when and where it was made, why you're sharing it, why people should care about it, and where people can see some more work like it. Attribution is about putting little museum labels next to the stuff you share.

## **Share your trade secrets**

The minute you learn something, turn around and teach it to others. Share your reading list. Point to helpful reference materials. Create some tutorials and post them online. Use pictures, words, and video. Take people step-by-step

through part of your process. As blogger Kathy Sierra says, "Make people better at something they want to be better at."

## **Shut up and Listen**

If you want fans, you have to be a fan first. If you want to be accepted by a community, you have to first be a good citizen of that community. If you're only pointing to your own stuff online, you're doing it wrong. You have to be a connector. The writer Blake Butler calls this being an open node. If you want to get, you have to give. If you want to be noticed, you have to notice. Shut up and listen once in a while.

## **You want hearts, not eyeballs**

Stop worrying about how many people follow you online and start worrying about the quality of people who follow you.

If you want followers, be someone worth following.

If you want to be interesting, you have to be interested.

It is actually true that life is all about "who you know." But who you know is largely dependent on who you are and what you do, and the people you know can't do anything for you if you're not doing good work.

Make stuff you love and talk about stuff you love and you'll attract people who love that kind of stuff. It's that simple.

## **Identify your fellow Knuckleballers**

As you put yourself and your work out there, you will run into your fellow knuckleballers. These are your real peers—the people who share your obsessions, the people who share a similar mission to your own, the people with whom you share a mutual respect. There will only be a handful or so of them, but they're so, so important. Do what you can to nurture your relationships with these people. Sing their praises to the universe. Invite them to collaborate. Show them work before you show anybody else. Call them on the phone and share your secrets. Keep them as close as you can.

## **Let 'em take their best shot**

When you put your work out into the world, you have to be ready for the good, the bad, and the ugly. The more people come across your work, the

more criticism you'll face. Here's how to take punches:

Relax and breathe. Bad criticism is not the end of the world. As far as I know, no one has ever died from a bad review.

Strengthen your neck. The way to be able to take a punch is to practice getting hit a lot.

Roll with the punches. Keep moving. Every piece of criticism is an opportunity for new work. You can't control what sort of criticism you receive, but you can control how you react to it.

Protect your vulnerable areas. If you have work that is too sensitive or too close to you to be exposed to criticism, keep it hidden. But, If you spend your life avoiding vulnerability, you and your work will never truly connect with other people.

Keep your balance. You have to remember that your work is something you do, not who you are. This is especially hard for artists to accept, as so much of what they do is personal. Keep close to your family, friends, and the people who love you for you, not just the work.

## **Keep a mailing list**

Keep your own list, or get an account with an email newsletter company like MailChimp and put a little sign-up widget on every page of your website.

Write a little bit of copy to encourage people to sign up. Be clear about what they can expect, whether you'll be sending daily, monthly, or infrequent updates. Never ever add someone's email address to your mailing list without her permission.

## **Make more work for yourself**

Be ambitious. Keep yourself busy. Think bigger. Expand your audience.

Don't hobble yourself in the name of "keeping it real," or "not selling out." Try new things. If an opportunity comes along that will allow you to do more of the kind of work you want to do, say Yes. If an opportunity comes along that would mean more money, but less of the kind of work you want to do, say No.

## **Pay it Forward**

When you have success, it's important to use any dough, clout, or platform you've acquired to help along the work of the people who've helped you get to where you are. Extol your teachers, your mentors, your heroes, your influences, your peers, and your fans. Give them a chance to share their own work. Throw opportunities their way.

You just have to be as generous as you can, but selfish enough to get your work done.

## **Don't Quit your show**

The people who get what they're after are very often the ones who just stick around long enough. It's very important not to quit prematurely.

You can't plan on anything; you can only go about your work, as Isak Dinesen wrote, "every day, without hope or despair." You can't count on success; you can only leave open the possibility for it, and be ready to jump on and take the ride when it comes for you.

## **Chainsmoke**

Here's how you

do it: Instead of taking a break in between projects, waiting for feedback, and worrying about what's next, use the end of one project to light up the next one. Just do the work that's in front of you, and when it's finished, ask yourself what you missed, what you could've done better, or what you couldn't get to, and jump right into the next project.

## **Go away so you can come back**

Chain-smoking is a great way to keep going, but at some point, you might burn out and need to go looking for a match. The best time to find one is while taking a sabbatical.

Writer Gina Trapani has pointed out three prime spots to turn off our brains and take a break from our connected lives:

Commute. A moving train or subway car is the perfect time to write, doodle, read, or just stare out the window.

Exercise. Using our body relaxes our mind, and when our mind gets relaxed, it opens up to having new thoughts.

Nature. Go to a park. Take a hike. Dig in your garden. Get outside in the fresh air. Disconnect from anything and everything electronic.

## **~~Start Over~~ Begin Again**

When you feel like you've learned whatever there is to learn from what you're doing, it's time to change course and find something new to learn so that you can move forward. You can't be content with mastery; you have to push yourself to become a student again. "Anyone who isn't embarrassed of who they were last year probably isn't learning enough," writes author Alain de Botton.

You have to have the courage to get rid of work and rethink things completely. "I need to sort of tear down everything I've done and rebuild from scratch," said director Steven Soderbergh about his upcoming retirement from making films. "Not because I've figured everything out, I've just figured out what I can't figure out and I need to tear it down and start over again."

Look for something new to learn, and when you find it, dedicate yourself to learning it out in the open. Document your progress and share as you go so that others can learn along with you. Show your work, and when the right people show up, pay close attention to them, because they'll have a lot to show you.