

Will's Thoughts on Getting Unstuck

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An Unreasonable Schemer Production

Book 04 of Will's ShovelWare Book Pack

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To deadlines, as much as I dislike them.

About Will's ShovelWare Book Pack

In an experiment to see if I can train myself to finish writing a book on my own—instead of just poking at it for a few weeks before abandoning it and starting another—I have publicly committed to writing and releasing seventeen (17) books in one year, releasing one book every three weeks. I made the original announcement on Will Radio Part XXVIII¹ on September 15, 2025, with the experiment to end on September 6, 2026, when the 17th book is due.

Good or bad, short or long, my goal is to finish and release a book every 21 days, like clockwork.

The idea for this experiment came from my kiloTube Video challenge from a couple years ago. I had been wanting to make more videos, but was suffering from perfectionism—I would record 70 or 80 takes of a video before deleting it in disgust. So I publicly announced that I was going to make 1,024 (or 2^{10}) videos in a single year (one kiloTube worth), in an attempt to force myself to just make video after video, with the idea that I'd eventually learn the mechanics, and learn my own style for making videos. Although I didn't come close to making 1,024 videos that year (partly because making videos involved making noise, which caused some social issues), the practice of making an average of 3 videos a day for weeks quickly got me over my perfectionism block. I now have no trouble sitting down and making a video in one take, editing it, and uploading it in a single sitting.

My hope is that after finishing and releasing a dozen or so books, I'll start to relax out a little, and will be over the fear of releasing something less than perfect. There's a go adage, "Lose your first hundred games as quickly as possible." I'm trying to write and release my first dozen (or so) terrible books as quickly as possible. With 17 books to write, I might write a few decent ones, as well.

I am allowing myself to update books I've already released, so long as I continue releasing a new book every 3 weeks.

This is the fourth of the 17 books, due on Sunday, December 7, 2025, Anywhere on Earth (or whenever I go to sleep!). (Originally I was going to release the books on Monday nights, but Sundays work better.) The next book, book 05, will be due Sunday, December 28, 2025.

¹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6_cB-jtxYI

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Preface

This book contains a few of my thoughts, observations, and techniques for getting unstuck—that is, for recognizing that I’m no longer making progress towards some goal I desire (perhaps one that has been imposed upon me externally!), for identifying why I’m no longer making progress, for figuring out a plan to allow me to continue making progress, for adhering to this plan, and for occasionally reassessing my progress.

I’ve spent vast amounts of time stuck on various things, and have at this point many techniques for trying to get unstuck. Sometimes these techniques work for me, in at least some circumstances. Othertimes I remain stuck, or quickly get stuck again on another issue, and I have to start the process over again, or at least temporarily abandon my exertions in that area (which is one of my techniques, of course!).

In addition to sharing techniques I’ve found useful, this book is also an attempt for me to get unstuck on things I care about. If you have techniques that you find helpful and would like to share, please let me know!

Disclaimer

I hope this book is of use to you. As always, don’t blame me if one of these techniques doesn’t work for you! Context is everything, I don’t know your exact situation, use your best judgement, and all that.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to acknowledge both the power of deadlines and the power of my mother to try to get me to adhere to said deadlines. I love you, Mom!

Will Byrd
Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina
December, 2025

Chapter 1

Strategies for Getting Unstuck

Often we're stuck because we set our sights too high. For example, I was stuck for years on writing a book on my own, because I wanted to write this one perfect book. I had this book in my mind (and I still have it in my mind) called *An Imperishable Wonderland of Infinite Fun*. I spent hours thinking about the cover of the book, the title and subtitle, the type and dimensions of the paper, and all those sorts of things. However, I spent almost no time actually *writing* the book. I wrote the dedication to the book over and over again, and played with the preface countless times, but there was no book. I spent all my time thinking about how nice it would be to have this book instead of concentrating on actually writing and finishing the book. My dreams of the perfect book, I think, got in my way of actually doing the less exciting work of sitting down and just writing. A technique you can use in this sort of case (and which I am certainly using in the case of *this* book!) is to lower your expectations, to set your sights lower and just focus on doing the actual work, instead of daydreaming about the prize you'll win or the contract you'll get with the publisher or any of those things. If any of those things ever do happen, they are largely out of your control. Just write the book, write it for yourself, and *finish* it.

One technique I use to get unstuck is what I call *the biology approach*. Biology is an interesting topic in that everything is so connected that it doesn't make sense to spend all of your effort learning about just one part of a biological system. For example, spend-

ing all of your time only learning about the heart of an organism without learning about the pulmonary system and the vasculature and everything else that goes together with the heart; the heart is serving a purpose in this overall system. If you zoom into the molecular biology aspects of the heart, you could concentrate on just one protein, but proteins interact with each other, and interact with small molecules. Proteins are found in compartments inside of a cell. The cells interact. All those sorts of things. You can end up losing the big picture by focusing too much on one thing. It doesn't even make sense to only focus on one molecule in isolation, because the molecules interact with each other. In biology you have to get a sense of the bigger picture and *then* zoom in on one part. But even within that part, there are going to be many subparts, so you want to try to get a sense of what is going on more broadly at that level before zooming in more. Because everything is connected, you can't learn just one part in isolation.

This biology approach, I find, can be helpful for learning topics where there are many many concepts that interact, which is probably the case in most areas. For example, I'm getting back into electronics. I could focus entirely on one small aspect of one use of one component, such as op amps configred in transimpedence mode. However, there are lots of bigger ideas that I'm wobbly on. So it's better that I go back and try to get a bigger picture of things, and really try to understand how inductors and capacitors work, at a much deeper level than I currently do, and really understand general design rules and exceptions for transistors and op amps and filters and oscillators, before studying one specific use case in great depth. I am trying to learn more generally the high-level concepts circuit designers care about, such as reactance and impedance, instead of just focusing on, say, trying to learn everything about a 555 timer chip. Learning about a 555 is great of course, and worth doing; however, 555 chips occur within larger circuits, which contain other parts that I need to understand at some level.

Another technique I use to get unstuck is to just take a break. Maybe I'm getting frustrated with a project or topic. A little frustration isn't necessarily a bad thing, because it might give you the indication that what you're trying isn't working (or isn't working yet). Sometimes that just means you haven't put in enough time and effort, that you just need to spend some more time. But some-

times it's so frustrating that I just don't want to do it anymore. I'll take a break if that happens. I'll usually come back after a few days, weeks, months, or years. For complicated topics, I might come back to that topic many times. For computer programming, for example, I came back to it over and over again, over a period of 20 years. Each time I would come back, I would learn some more. It was probably my fourth or fifth time learning about programming before I started understanding what a pointer was, for example.

It's often necessary to learn how to learn a topic. For example, there are lots of ways to learn Japanese, which is considered a difficult language for native English speakers to learn, certainly to read. So a big part of learning Japanese, especially on your own, is *learning how to learn Japanese*: which resources are available, which techniques and approaches people have used to learn Japanese fluently is very useful, even if you only use a subset of those techniques. In general, learning how to learn can be very powerful, especially in conjunction with taking a step back and taking a break. Maybe you try to learn the topic, and what you really learn the first attempt or two is a sense of *how* people learn this topic well. The next time you come back to the topic, you'll be ready to go further because you'll be more prepared.

One technique I've been using recently is to give more time and attention to fewer things. I'm someone who likes to do lots of different things—it's in my nature to want to do 20 different things at once, have a whole bunch of different hobbies, a bunch of different projects, and to be reading, watching movies, drawing, learning Japanese, writing a book, making videos, learning music theory, and many other things, all at the same time. At some point, I find I reach diminishing returns, and end up just going through the motions for many of these activities, because I've stretched myself too thin. So instead of having 20 activities, more recently I'll focus on two activities, or one activity, or three activities for a short period of time (outside of work and family). Just concentrating on a small number of activities is a good way to get myself unstuck. This probably seems like a totally obvious technique, and probably most people figure this out early in life. It's probably just my stubbornness and generalist nature, I'm sure, that keeps leading me back to wanting to do everything at once.

To conclude, these are a few techniques that I found useful in

getting unstuck. Some of those techniques may be contradictory; like I said before, it's all contextual. If you would like to suggest other techniques for a potential future revision of this book, please let me know what works for you.