

So You Want to Write— Techniques and Tips from Miss Prolific



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This booklet is dedicated to Rod Chase, my astrological mentor, who encouraged, coaxed, and cheered me through my first hesitant steps as an astrological author. Without his enthusiasm, I might never have begun writing seriously. Now almost 80, Rod continues to be the joyous, exuberant, inspiring individual he was back in the 1970s when this journey of exploration began.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Donna Cunningham, an internationally respected astrologer with over 35 years' experience, is the author of 19 books on metaphysical topics. Listed in several Who's Who volumes, she has given seminars on astrology around the world and won the prestigious Regulus Award at the 1998 United Astrology Congress. She also has a Master's Degree in Social Work from Columbia University. She uses this combined approach in her "Dear Abby" type column in Dell Horoscope and her ongoing series of articles in The Mountain Astrologer.

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 Flower Remedies—How Plants' Energies Can Heal Us. 2007 Edition

Hard Copy Books from Red Wheel/Weiser:

How to Read Your Astrological Chart: Aspects of the Cosmic Puzzle;
 Red Wheel/Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1999
 Healing Pluto Problems; Red Wheel/Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1986

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After 17 books, a metaphysical author shares her writing tips in.....

So You Want to Write—
Techniques and Ebook Advice from Miss Prolific¹
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I began writing some 40 years ago with excruciatingly bad poetry that I read aloud in the poets' circles in New York City. To the relief of everyone who knew me, I shifted over to astrology articles when several experts looked at my birth chart and assured me that I could and **MUST** write. Since then I have written 17 books, well over a thousand articles and 12 years of a Dear Abby type advice column for Dell Horoscope Magazine. Colleagues who want to write but can't get going often ask me how I can be so **PROLIFIC**. The way they say it, the word sounds more like an accusation than a compliment, but I try to offer helpful

advice all the same.

This booklet details a method that sustains me through the arduous yet rewarding task of creating an article or book. Though I often use writing for astrology markets as an example in both parts, the principles are the same for a variety of other nonfiction genres. The latter part of the booklet is intended for writers who are also involved with astrology, describing features of the birth chart that are related to being a writer and giving clues for timing of writing and publishing efforts. I hope that you will find the information given here useful in getting your own ideas and wisdom out to the world.

Writing—What are the Payoffs?

When I was about to start my third book, an old friend came to town--a highly successful man with more Taurus planets than I've totaled in my last five incarnations. "Tell me," he asked over the expensive lunch he treated me to, "Writing books--is it cost effective?"

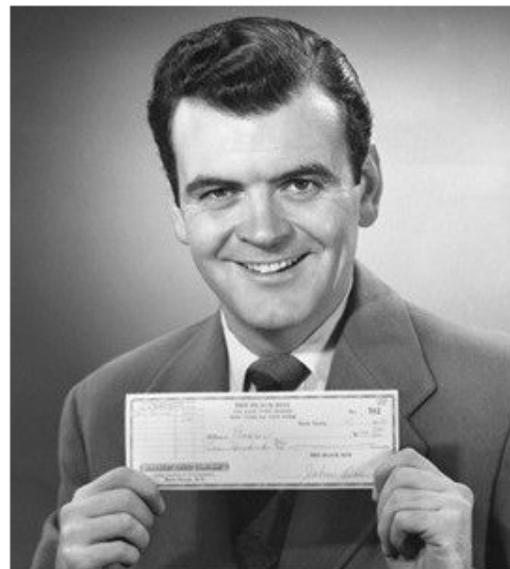
Of course, I laughed (somewhat hysterically), and so did the carefully selected friends I repeated it to. However, the question has stuck with me over the years, and it's one you'll want to ponder if you're thinking of doing a book. The unambiguous answer

¹ Parts of the material in this booklet appeared in The Mountain Astrologer as, "So You Want to Write about Astrology, 7/1994, and "Do You Dream of Becoming a Writer?" 4-5/2003, pp. 19-29. They are reprinted with permission.

I've come up with, after years of observing the creative process and its results, is, "yes and no."

If you're talking about direct financial payback, no, it's NOT cost effective. The author generally earns less than a dollar royalty per hard copy sold, except for the ones you sell yourself, and there you get about 40% of the cover cost but no royalty. If it's a hard copy book from a publisher, the first payment doesn't arrive until a year or longer after you complete the hard work of writing the book, unless you get an advance on royalties.² With an ebook, you get 100% of the royalties if you are marketing it yourself from your own website, or generally 50% if it is marketed elsewhere.

You'd probably earn a higher hourly wage at Burger King—and they'd pay you at the end of the week! Sorry if I'm shattering any fantasies. People love to dream that writers buy swimming pools and fancy cars with their royalties. That's not true of 85% of all writers, and there was probably only one astrological author who bought a swimming pool with her earnings. It wasn't me; it was the best-selling popularizer of our craft in the early 1970s, Linda Goodman.



Writing IS extremely cost-effective in other ways, however. There are the indirect rewards of creative self-fulfillment, the pride of seeing your work in print, the sense of contributing to the field, and the satisfaction of knowing that your ideas are reaching and helping people you'll never meet. If it's a good book, you enjoy increased prestige and respect from your colleagues and readers.

Not bottom line enough? I have also had many more tangible but indirect rewards, although there's no guarantee that everyone who publishes a book will do as well. Because of my publications, I've been invited to speak at conferences and to lead seminars around the world. There have been five all-expense-paid, one-month trips to Europe, three to Brazil, and a month in Australia. Without the books, none of these groups would have heard of me. A well-received work can be an entree into speaking at conferences. It's not the only way—some of our finest and most popular speakers have yet to write a word and are still invited to speak abroad.

And, no, as my Taurean friend would point out, the trips weren't cost-effective either, because of the income lost during those months away. However, the chance to travel and to meet astrology lovers all over the world is a priceless reward. Another indirect benefit has been the clients who came after reading my books—satisfying, astrologically sophisticated, insightful folks who were attracted to my way of thinking. Since *Healing Pluto Problems* was published in 1986, in particular, many astrology and healing clients came because of reading it. Many of them were Plutonians who had

² Advances are increasingly rarer in the metaphysical fields, now usually no more than \$1500 (that's fifteen hundred), paid half in front and half on submitting the completed manuscript. Advances are not free and clear, but must be repaid through earned royalties on book sales before there is any additional payment.

suffered the kinds of abuse or trauma it discussed.

If it isn't cost effective, why do it? I do it because it's what I must do, because writing is as much a part of me as astrology. I write because I learn so much in the process—ideas come together in new ways, and unexpected insights and understandings spring onto the computer screen and amaze me. Often I write because I am impelled to do so, because there is some message I need to get across to people in my field. If you decide to write books or articles, you might also find that writing challenges you to develop your mind further and to express your experience, wisdom, and beliefs with a new clarity that can't help but spill over into your teaching and client work. First and foremost, writing is communication. Writing can be wonderfully stimulating and self-affirming, a voyage of discovery about yourself and your topic.

Since book advances were never enough to meet living expenses for the many months devoted to writing the books, I developed pay-as-you-go strategies, so that the work earned money in other ways. The trick is to waste no effort—I make sure each lecture, class, or seminar I develop will fit into a book I am working on. Apart from my advice column in *Dell*, my rule is to write nothing that does not serve at least two purposes—usually as an article or online offering as well as a chapter in a forthcoming book.³ This system also provides immediate rewards in terms of both feedback and income, the applause sustaining you through the solitary and often lonely work of writing.

How to Get the Writing Done—an Overview

Many of my colleagues who are making excellent contributions to the field have had books stalled in process for years—a loss to all of us. It is one thing to have reams of great material—by no means a small accomplishment in itself—but still another thing to get those ideas written down in a book. Here are some practical strategies that sustained me over the years.

DECIDING ON A FOCUS AND STRUCTURE: Clarifying what you want to write before starting helps you focus and avoid wasted work. What is it that you need to communicate? Is it a cohesive whole or just a scattering of topics where you've developed some expertise? If your book is cohesive, it has a better chance of being completed and, ultimately, of being published.

It helps to create a summary statement of what you want to write about, and from that perspective, outline the various chapters of a book or sections of an article. By that I don't mean a rigid, classical outline (I. A., B. C.), but at least decide on flow of the chapter and the subheads. A complete outline is neither possible nor desirable at this stage, because you will accumulate more information as you research your topic and write about it. This process clarifies what pieces you need to assemble in order to complete the project. It streamlines your research and on the all-important level of

³ This booklet, for instance, will become a chapter in a book about how to establish an astrological or metaphysical practice.

Intention, magnetizes clients, information, and other experiences that fit the outline. Once you clarify the theme and the separate chapters, look for ways to trick yourself into the necessary preparation and research.

ORGANIZE YOUR WORK AROUND THE BOOK: It is very fruitful to organize your work life around the topics in the outline. Give a class or lecture, or target a relevant group in your practice in order to have more examples at your disposal. This enables you to organize your thoughts, gain feedback as you learn to articulate what you know, and clarify where more research might be needed. It also ensures the income to meet such practical needs as daily expenses. The immediate feedback—not to mention the ready financial rewards—will keep you motivated and, over time, increase your confidence that you have something valuable to say. You are also building an audience for your work and a reputation in the field.

I generally develop a set of lecture topics, based on the various chapters, which I



send out to program committees of groups, conferences and seminars, or which I offer as a class. I don't have the lectures prepared, mind you, but am confident that I can deliver them. When a group chooses a topic on the list, I have a reason to do research and development on the subject. The notes taken in preparation for the lecture become a file on the computer. Usually, a topic that has merit and relevance will be requested several times. (If it isn't requested at all, that's also valuable information about the subject's usefulness and appeal—or lack thereof.)

Each time I give that talk, I add notes on the audience feedback and new insights that inevitably arise as I speak. Often a listener asks a productive question which I will research or find cases to illustrate before

giving the lecture again. There's nothing like a Uranian audience of one's peers to deflate a half-baked theory before it appears in print. By the time I actually sit down to write about that topic, the file is full of audience-tested material.

START THE WRITING PROCESS WITH SHORTER PIECES: Next, find outlets for smaller parts of a long project. For instance, write articles or columns that allow you to explore different segments of the book and to begin organizing and polishing the material you have collected. My series of columns for intermediate students in *The Mountain Astrologer*, for instance, became a book of short essays, *Astrological Interpretation—Select Topics in Chart Interpretation*⁴. When you submit articles, make sure to obtain written agreement that you retain the rights to reprint them in a future book, since a publisher and the copyright office will need it. Most, but not all, magazines grant reprint rights, so long as you include a credit line stating where it first

⁴ *Astrological Interpretation* is available through Moon Maven Publications at <http://www.moonmavenpublications.com>.

appeared.

There are many benefits of polishing your material into articles first. A short piece is less intimidating to contemplate than a whole book or even a chapter, so it is easier to settle down and write. Books are verrrry long-term projects, but with articles, you get the immediate satisfaction of publication and applause—as well as the corrective feedback of an editor and readers. Often a magazine editor's questions will suggest unforeseen areas of exploration that enhance the book as a whole. Published articles may also attract clients who relate to what you have written, especially if your bio at the end of the article includes your contact information. If you are placing an ad in the magazine, negotiate to have it printed alongside your article.

Given the exposure of articles in print, your name becomes familiar to your target audience, so they are more likely to buy your book when it does come out—and ask you to speak in the meantime. Publishers also take you more seriously when you have a writing track record and recognition factor. Except in our more esoteric or high-minded publications, there are also financial benefits, such as free subscriptions, free advertising for your services, and even the occasional check. (Even if there are generally no tangible benefits, some of these publications are hungry enough for contributors that you can negotiate something, like a free ad or listing in their services directory.)



Not every part of a chapter can become an article, but when you polish several pieces into articles, it becomes easier to integrate the remaining notes into completed chapters. As you continue pursuing this method, you will have several chapters ready before you know it. Publishers usually want to see four sample chapters before they offer a contract.

Tips and Strategies for Writing Consistently and Effectively

GIVE YOUR BEST TIME OF THE DAY TO WRITING. We all have different biorhythms, but most of us can identify a part of the day when we are functioning most effectively—at our peak mentally, communicating fluently, and full of energy. Perhaps in the past, you used that time for clients or other important activities. To finish a book, you need to assign new priorities, so that you give your prime time to writing. A monthly biorhythm chart can help, too, in knowing which dates are your mental peaks and scheduling writing activities on those dates.



One prominent speaker wanted to know how he could write a book, so I asked what he did with the best hours of his day, which he said were

the morning hours. He reserved it for client consultations, as his mind was fresher then—he had always done so throughout his long career. I suggested that perhaps he had gotten into that habit in the early years of his practice because he was still learning the complexities of integrating all the pieces of an astrology chart. By now, he was a master at it, so perhaps he could schedule his appointments a bit later and give his first hour or two in the office to the book.

HOLD THAT TIME SACRED. Regularly set aside time to write and don't allow anything to interfere. Put the phone on the machine, hang a **Don't Disturb** sign on the office door, and make the people you live with understand that nothing but fire alarms or cuts needing stitches is allowed to intrude. Don't succumb to the temptation to open your emails until you've finished your stint at the book for the day. When we want to avoid writing, a myriad of temptations can arise.

Significant others may manipulate to make us feel guilty. Unless you are the primary caretaker of a bed-ridden invalid or a child under two, a relationship that can't wait for an hour or two for you to pay attention to it might just be an overly codependent one that needs work. If you feel guilty taking time away from your loved ones, try the Bach flower Remedies Pine (for guilt) or Red Chestnut (for excessive worry or concern about others).⁵

CREATE AN INFORMATION-STORING STRUCTURE: For each chapter or section, make both a manila file folder and a word-processing file. As you come across newspaper or magazine articles, websites on the internet, and case or chart examples, add them to those files. Carry a notebook or blank book at all times, and jot down inspirations or make notes about experiences pertaining to that section, and tuck them into the files as well. If you engage in email, chat room, or news list exchanges related to the topic, create a folder in your email program to store them, or save them directly to the book's folder on your hard drive. By the time you are ready to write a particular piece, you have plenty of information at your fingertips without having to hunt for it.

PUT SERENDIPITY TO WORK FOR YOU: Because your outline clarifies the areas you will cover, by a mysterious principle, you will magnetize clients, experiences, and information that pertain to what you are working on. That principle is the well-known Power of Intention⁶. You may be sitting in a waiting room and idly pick up a magazine, only to find an article that has important details on the subject and that tells you where to do further research. You may be procrastinating on writing and flip on the television to a talk show where an expert on the subject is today's guest. Many times, I've been doing research at the library and gone for a stroll to stretch, only to pass a cartload of

⁵ For information about flower remedies, visit the free online essence quarterly journal, *Vibration*, at <http://www.floweressencemagazine.com/nov05/>. and FAQ at <http://www.essences.com/wwes/faq.html>. We'll discuss them in more detail later in this booklet.

⁶ Dr. Wayne W. Dyer has written and spoken extensively on this topic. I would especially recommend his book, *The Power of Intention*, if you need support in firming your intention to write, publish, or promote your book. (Hay House, Carlsbad CA, 2004)

books that held a book I needed but didn't know existed. Serendipity is the law of my life—and of my writing—and you can train yourself to use it effectively in your own research. Be receptive to the flow of information, for the Universe may very well be feeding you valuable clues.

WRITE WHAT'S EASY TODAY: Let go of the idea that you must start with paragraph one and go on sequentially to the end of the article or chapter, because with the tools that word processing provides, that is no longer necessary. Consulting the outline, see what pieces make up the whole. Some will spark your interest immediately and stimulate you to write and do research. Those parts tend to flow like magic. Other topics on the outline will seem too hard or too boring, and you are more likely to become bogged down if you force yourself to work on them. Some parts are too hard because you haven't yet done the research or perhaps Serendipity hasn't yet brought you the clients or experiences that will clarify that piece of the puzzle. *Trust me on this—if you focus on what is both easy and interesting to write today, each piece will fall into place in time.* What if nothing seems easy? Then you might better spend time on research or organizing the materials in your folders—or read a good book and veg out! No good comes of pushing yourself to write if it isn't flowing. The writing done under those conditions reeks!

A sub-rule of this is, *don't waste your good energy on the tedious parts.* If you wake up excited about writing, write what's easy and fun that day; don't write something just because it's next in the book or because you think you have to. Jump on that excitement and ride it!

What if nothing seems easy? Then you might better spend time on research or organizing the materials in your folders—or read a good book and veg out! No good comes of pushing yourself to write if it isn't flowing. The writing done under those conditions usually reeks!

DAM UP YOUR MERCURY ENERGY. Regardless of how prominent Mercury is in your birth chart, we all only have so much Mercury energy. You can't fritter it away on the phone,

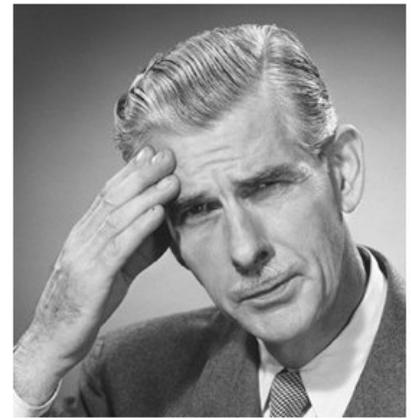
in long bull sessions, or in endless email exchanges if you want to write. It isn't wise to squander too much of it talking your ideas through with friends **before** sitting down to compose. For many would-be authors, air signs in particular, talking about an idea can use up the motivation to work with it—there's no more mystery, nothing left to learn, so it loses its interest. Sit at the computer, get the words down, and THEN share it later.

If your daily work is heavily communication-oriented, you might try scheduling an early morning writing session before you've used up your day's supply of Mercury energy. For some, the necessity of damming up their Mercury energy may mean spending less time teaching or lecturing. I tend to alternate between my 9th house lecture tours and my 12th house regrouping and writing phases. Many of the colleagues mentioned earlier who are frustrated at not writing spend weeks at a time on the lecture circuit, using a great deal of Mercury energy there, and they need to spend their free time in pursuit of other planets' concerns, like Venus or Neptune or Sun.

FIND A TRUSTED CIRCLE OF FIRST READERS: After your work is written, share it with trusted friends or colleagues whom you've carefully selected for their ability to give candid and constructive feedback. Their input can be a valuable part of the revision process. Ask them about parts they didn't understand or would have wanted more clarity on, as well as the parts that worked.

If they didn't understand, then what you've written might mystify the readers of the published work as well. Sharing your writing as you go along helps to offset the isolation that writing entails. It fills a need for immediate validation of your efforts, since you will be waiting for months for public recognition for writing an article or several years for a book.

WRITER'S BLOCK—OR JUST A LOT OF LIVING? Even the most successful and consistent writers go through periods when writing seems to fade into the background and they feel they will never write another word. These periods are a problem only if you define them as such. (Label them **WRITER'S BLOCK** and you set yourself up for a long, dry spell!) In my years of writing, I have learned not to force myself to write at those times or to beat up on myself for not being productive, but to accept them serenely. From my astrology chart, I can often anticipate when they will be over.



In retrospect, those phases when the ground lies fallow are actually times when useful inner work is going on that ultimately deepens the writing. Often these are the intervals when the Universe is shaping my next book chapter or article by providing me with life experiences and challenges that are eventually revealed as part of what I write. Insights and wisdom gained from just living and getting on with other work are the seeds of new writing projects. Being a writer with wisdom and something of consequence to say requires many such experiences.

A NOTE ON USING CONFIDENTIAL MATERIAL IN WRITING: There has been considerable debate among professional astrologers on using clients' charts and personal material in public venues, and I wanted to add one more consideration. Though a client might readily give permission to use these materials, I am not certain it is entirely possible for a client to give **informed** consent. In my book, *Healing Pluto Problems*, I used several clients' charts in the chapter on incest—with their permission. After it was published, however, I found that two of them were shattered by seeing their stories and their charts in print. Though I believe I wrote sensitively and with great discretion (no one could have identified them from what was printed), they were still shaken by reading about themselves as a "case."

One of them insisted I had never asked her permission, but it would be unthinkable for me to have used any chart, much less in such a difficult situation, without discussing it with the client. I was naive in those days and had not asked for permission in writing. Her significant other at that time was a lawyer, and I came within a hair's breadth of being sued. I apologized from the depths of my being for the harm it

had done, since I was also quite devastated that she had been hurt by it, and when the next printing of the book was being prepared, had the material removed.

Granted, incest and other such traumas are far more painful topics than, say, using the chart of a client with a vocational question. However, since this regrettable instance, I have decided not to use clients' charts in lectures or printed materials. Editors have pressured me to do so, but I have refused in the recognition that it is one thing for a client to agree to having the chart used but quite another to see their story in print. (Believe me, eventually they will see it, as many who begin as clients wind up as serious astrology students.) Instead, I use mini-vignettes and only a small, relevant portion of a chart without identifying material or data. Alternatively, I use famous people's charts, which shouldn't present an ethical issue because they are not clients.

Flower Remedies as Aids to Creativity

I haven't gone into detail up to now about the flower remedies, also known as essences because it would have taken us rather far afield. However, I do definitely include the remedies among the tools that have made me a productive and successful author—right up there with the astrological timing tips we'll discuss soon. A number of remedies that can help you move through writing barriers have already been mentioned, but there are also some with well-deserved reputations as enhancers of creativity⁷.

In particular, Iris is recommended by the various makers who provide it, such as FES. For the 25 years I have worked with flower essences, Iris has been my signature flower, for I consider myself a writer as much as an astrologer and healer. A stained glass iris hangs in my office window, and I meditate on it when I need inspiration or my own creativity lags. I have taken Iris essence often and also give it to artists, writers, and musicians who are blocked.



Some years ago, I hadn't taken this remedy in a while, though I was going through a tough phase of my writing career. I'd published 13 books and had standing columns in two prominent astrology magazines. However, I no longer took any joy in the creative process and felt burdened by the deadlines. I never wanted to write another word in my life--it was just a job, and a job I heartily wanted to quit. Just at that juncture, a fresh bottle of Iris flower essence from a different maker arrived in the mail. Never one to resist an Iris, I took a dose straight from the bottle. It felt good, so I kept whacking away at the stock for several days. TWO

⁷ This section is borrowed from my ebook, *Flower Remedies: How Plant's Energies can Heal Us*, available from <http://www.moonmavenpublications.com>. The Bach remedies are sold at many health food stores, and the FES remedies mentioned here can be ordered from FES at 1-800-548-0075 or from <http://www.fesflowers.com/fes-store>. Flower essences are NOT the same as the essential oils used in aromatherapy.

writing deadlines loomed, and so I was too busy to bother with making a diluted mixture as is generally recommended. (Taking a single essence instead of a combination often turns out to be a strong catalyst.)

Immediately, I was infused with fresh inspiration, and began writing with the painstaking precision that characterized my work before I became so tired. I felt good about the article I was working on, and enthusiasm for the process began to build. More wonderfully, my muses were suddenly there again, feeding me insights of the sort that have always taken my breath away, for they truly don't come from me and yet have a ring of truth and wisdom.

These insights are typically there when I awake, so I spring from bed to get them down before they elude me. It had been a long time since I woke up with such whisperings to record, a year or more of leaden mornings. It was great to be back on track as a writer, and though the power of iris as a symbol for me personally may have made this remedy more potent than is typical, you might try working with it if your work is stalled.

Here are some other remedies that can support your writing, all from FES. Indian Paintbrush gives a fresh outlook when creative work has gone stale. Peppermint and Hornbush relieve mental fatigue, as does the homeopathic cell salt Kali Phos. Madia and Blackberry lend focus, concentration, and follow-through. Shasta Daisy helps in synthesizing information from various sources, and Sunflower strengthens self-confidence, especially when you are looking for a publisher or promoting a published work. Walnut and Goldenrod can ease the sometimes-disorienting transition between writing and non-writing phases, and Goldenrod also helps you adhere to your own truth when it goes counter to the mainstream.

If the flower remedies intrigue you, an excellent free resource about these healing tools is Vibration Magazine, an online educational quarterly that I have co-edited since 1989. We have over 350 articles in our archives—including a collection of articles about astrology and essences. There is also a very useful onsite search engine that in just seconds lists all the articles in our collection dealing with any term you specify. The current issue can be accessed at <http://www.essences.com/vibration/>. If you like it, sign up for a free subscription and pass it on to others who might be interested.

For other kinds of resources for writers, see the list on the next page.

RESOURCES FOR WRITERS

Author and Writing coach Ann McIndo has a series of free downloadable writing tools that can help you formulate your book plan and keep moving through the process. See them at <http://www.soyouwanttowrite.com/freetools.html>.

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Even when you are published by large mainstream publishing houses, you will need to do plenty of promotion if you want your book to be a success. Here are a few tools that can be useful to you in the process:

FRANCINE SILVERMAN'S BOOK PROMOTION NEWSLETTER: Published twice monthly, the newsletter shares a wealth of authors' promotional ideas and success stories and serves as a networking tool. It costs a mere \$7.50 a year. Read about it and subscribe at <http://www.bookpromotionnewsletter.com>.

TELECONFERENCING EVENTS: You can promote your book by giving talks and events for groups via conference calls. FreeConference.com hosts some services without charge and more elaborate ones for a reasonable sum. Callers who attend events pay standard long distance charges. (<http://www.freeconference.com>)

WANT MORE RESOURCES? Check out the large collection of articles, links, promotional tools, books, and products for writers and especially for e-book writers at <http://www.organizedwriter.com/resources.htm>.

The Astrological Advantage—Astrology as a Writing Tool

As both a writer and an astrologer, I have learned to use astrology to maximize my writing output. If you are knowledgeable about astrology or can ask someone who is to help you, following the current positions of the planets can significantly boost your productivity. An *ephemeris*—that is, a table of the planets' daily positions—is a writing tool with even more muscle than a thesaurus!

FOLLOW THE DAILY MOON SIGNS: In general, writing should go well while the Moon is in Gemini each month or during the month or so each year that the Sun, Venus, and Mercury are in that sign (usually late May and most of June). You can follow these periods on a calendar that includes astrological information or by subscribing to an astrology magazine. The Moon or inner planets in Virgo are good windows for editing your work. If you write consistently and follow the planets as you do, you will doubtlessly discover which Moon signs and transits are most productive for you—the periods when you work most effortlessly and effectively—based on your own personal chart. Watch for those intervals, block off the time, and use it to the hilt.

Mercury Retrograde Periods 2006-2010

<u>Dates:</u>	<u>Zodiac Degrees:</u>
<u>2006:</u> Jul 4-29	1 Leo-21 Cancer
Oct 28-Nov 18	25 Scorpio-9 Scorpio
<u>2007:</u> Feb 14-Mar 8	10 Pisces-25 Aquarius
Jun 15-Jul 10	11 Cancer-2 Cancer
Oct 12-Nov 1	9 Scorpio-23 Libra
<u>2008:</u> Jan 28-Feb 19	23 Aquarius-8 Aquarius
May 26-Jun 19	21 Gemini-12 Gemini
Sep 24-Oct 15	22 Libra-7 Libra
<u>2009:</u> Jan 11- Feb 1	7 Aquarius-21 Capricorn
May 17-31	1 Gemini-22 Taurus
Sep 7-29	6 Libra-21 Virgo
Dec 26-Jan 15/07	21 Capricorn-5 Capricorn
<u>2010:</u> (Jan 1-15)	(direct at 5 Capricorn)
Apr 18-May 11	12 Taurus-2 Taurus
Aug 20-Sep 12	19 Virgo-5 Virgo

CAPITALIZE ON MERCURY RETROGRADE PERIODS: Mercury represents all communication media, and Mercury retrograde has a bad press in popular astrology venues. To avoid the snafus popularly associated with Mercury retrograde, be certain to make copies of everything you write and regularly back up the disk. However, in my years as a writer, I have learned to make productive use of the three spans of time each

year that Mercury is retrograde for about 20-25 days each. A table of Mercury retrograde periods through 2010 appears above. For the novice, no planet actually moves retrograde (backwards) around the sun, but from the point of view of the earth, all but the Moon appear to do so yearly for periods of varying lengths.

Capitalizing on the natural backward and forward rhythm of Mercury's movements can be useful to a writer. A long-term writing endeavor has its own rhythm, and Mercury retrograde periods are not the best time to move forward into new sections of the book, but instead are ideal for revisions. In the course of writing a book over a year or more, use these intervals to go over and refine what you've already written, rather than waiting until the end, when you are mentally exhausted, fed up with the subject and yearning to be finished.

Mercury retrograde periods are also excellent for completing writing projects started but put aside, and for tedious but necessary tasks like fact checking, footnotes, bibliographies, creating tables, and indexing. As a book author, I'd be lost without those intervals, so I typically block them off on my calendar for what I call my Mercury Retrograde Projects.

NOTE: If you are an astrological novice or beginning student and also an aspiring author, the following sections may be too technical, but a chart interpretation can be a good investment.

Finding Your Write Niche—Astrological Clues to Authorship

The astrology clients I most enjoy working with are professional wordsmiths who want to maximize their potential. Among the many functions chart readings can serve for writers—or potential writers—is to identify their personal niche among the endless topics covered by books, articles, and other media. The chart can also provide clues to their style and the conditions most conducive to getting the writing done. For instance, a Pluto or Scorpio writing signature would show a person who needs solitude and long uninterrupted stretches to devote to their work, while someone with a strong Libra or 7th house writing signature might blossom with a collaborator.

What does a writing signature consist of? Naturally, we would think of Mercury first, and yet a strong Mercury does not automatically make you a writer—what it makes you is a communicator. Many bright, interesting, verbal people with Mercury conjunct the Sun, Moon, or Ascendant or with a strong Gemini emphasis (Sun, Moon, Ascendant, or a stellium) are brimming with ideas and yet never sit still long enough to get them down on paper. They may use up their Mercury energy in communications-oriented careers, enjoy a reputation as a gifted raconteur, or simply graft a cell phone onto their ear and irritate the rest of us by carrying on long, animated, one-sided calls while we try to relax over a gourmet meal. Natively or by transit, a strong, well-aspected Saturn or Pluto as an element in the signature helps such individuals apply the derriere to the chair long enough to write something of substance.

In working with pros over the years, I have observed some keys to a writing signature, given here in the order of importance. Look at all aspects to Mercury,

especially watching for conjunctions and other hard aspects to lend the energy and motivation to write. The urge to work through inner conflicts, as described by such aspects, are often part of what spurs an author to wrestle words and ideas to the mat. Look, also, at planets in the 3rd house and aspects to them; consider Mercury's sign and house; and bring in the sign on the cusp of the 3rd. Analyze all of the above and blend them together for a complete picture. To assess the potential for more creative types of writing like fiction, poetry, film, or music, look for Neptune in the picture. For creativity—and the conditions needed to inspire it—analyze the 5th house. I won't go through all the possible sign/house combinations in cookbook fashion, but here are a few examples so you can get a picture of how this principle works.



For the person with Mercury in Aries, Mercury/Mars aspects, Mars in the 3rd, or Aries on the 3rd, the best genres include action and adventure tales, sports reporting, war stories, how-to pieces, and romance with plenty of passion. You like to call yourself a groundbreaker and enjoy nothing better than being the first to explore and write about a particular topic. Keep your subjects—and your slant on them—fresh, for when the pack catches up with you, you tend to pack up and move on.

A series of short pieces—perhaps an ongoing column—on a particular area of interest can provide the immediate rewards that a Mars-Mercury type tends to need, while ultimately collecting enough material for a longer publication. Another way to maximize your output is to take an action-oriented approach in which you learn by doing—get out and interview people, go see the site where your story occurred, and participate in the actual activities you describe. Tape your notes on the fly, in the car coming and going. Lead groups who are doing the things you want to write about. A scrappy writing group with lots of male members can also provide the motivation and stimulation to keep you going—as well as the element of competition that some of you like. In fact, creating something for a writing contest can also motivate you.

Health or self-improvement writing might be a fruitful field when Mercury or the 3rd house features the sign Virgo. Virgo health care practitioners tend toward the more physical forms of healing such as body work, herbalism, or nutrition, and when Mercury is in Virgo as well, they may want to share what they know in practical and yet detailed articles or books. For technical writing of many kinds, including instructional manuals, some connection between Virgo and Mercury or the 3rd house is an asset. To satisfy that relentless inner critic, Virgo authors like to over-prepare, double-check all facts, and research, research, research. This is also the sign of editing. My best book and article editors have been Virgo Sun, Moon, or Ascendant, and, yes, they CAN be picky. The thing is, they are usually right, and putting your manuscript under their microscope before the public sees it can make you look great!

An element of romance in the writing would be indicated by a strong 5th or 7th house Mercury or else Venus or Libra planets in the 3rd, especially when Neptune is also involved. If this is you, you'd probably do your most impassioned work when you are falling in love, falling out of love, or hopelessly enamored with someone inaccessible. Scorpio or Pluto as a top note in a writing signature could also be quite passionate, but not always about sex, whatever Plutonians' reputations might lead you to expect. They might be just as passionate about exposing and reforming corruption or about transformation and healing from traumatic experiences. In fiction writing, they might excel at mysteries, suspense, or gothic novels.

These are enough examples to give you an idea how a writing signature works. Consider the things that matter to Mercury's sign—like finding the answer to life's larger questions when there is a strong Jupiter or Sagittarian emphasis, or exploring unusual perspectives on modern life when Uranus or Aquarius is spotlighted. Think about the areas of life indicated by the house in question—such as foreign countries, education, or the justice system when the 9th is involved. To find the best writing conditions, imagine what milieu or conditions natives of Mercury's sign might like—snugly tucked away at home for Cancerians, challenged by an eccentric group of gadflies for Aquarius, or in lively chat room discussions for Gemini.

More Astrological Aids to Being a Productive and Successful Author

FOLLOW YOUR CHART FOR GOOD WINDOWS: If you are advanced in astrological studies, watch the Moon as it travels through your own chart and note which signs and houses seem to correspond with your own most inspired and lucid times. You may find that they correspond with the Moon's travels through your 3rd or 5th house or over your own Sun and Mercury. Block those times off on your calendar for writing. Similarly, observe the passage of the faster moving planets, especially Mercury, through the various houses and signs to see which are most productive and then use them more consciously. For instance, schedule your annual vacation or long weekends during peak times, and get away to a quiet place if need be. Other times that may be productive for you are the annual movements of the Sun and Mercury, and the every-other year transit of Mars through the sign Gemini. The peak writing periods of a lifetime can occur when the slower-moving planets travel through your 3rd or 5th houses or set off aspects to natal Mercury. Do not waste them, for they slip by all too quickly!



MARKETING AND PUBLISHING YOUR WORK:

Jupiter is the planet of expansion, growth, and good luck, as well as publishing. Jupiter's successive sweep through the 8th, 9th, and 10th houses represent a boom time for a writer. Slower-moving transits through the same three houses of the chart may coincide with a more prolonged phase of a writing career, with a series of books and more

sustained public interest in the individual's work. Transits through the 8th can coincide with book advances or payments for articles—or just extra support from a partner or family member that makes it possible for you to take time off to write. Transits to the 9th go along with the publication process, including the editing and revisions—and can also signal periods when you are teaching, lecturing, and giving workshops on the subject as a way to promote your work. Transits across the Midheaven (the cusp of the 10th) and traveling through the 10th itself can show the release of a book and a book-signing tour for marketing it.

Another concern that working authors often consult me about is the matter of finding an agent, virtually a must for mainstream book publishing these days. Transits that would pertain to this search are usually aspects to the Descendant or to planets in the 7th house, for this is a committed relationship and a partnership that can make all the difference in a writer's success. I would not be happy to see a Neptune transit involved, for the agent may be anywhere from ineffectual to downright deceitful. A trine from Pluto could indicate an agent—often of the shark-like ilk—who could maximize the writer's earnings because of being comfortable in the intense bidding wars that characterize high-level publishing these days. Tougher Pluto aspects tend to promote power struggles with the agent, whereas the trine indicates that you could get along in the interests of a good financial result. Saturn, at least in good aspect, could show a well-established if somewhat conservative agent who would be responsible, capable, and committed. Some writers ask for a chart comparison with a potential agent, using at least the date of birth, before signing a contract.

ASTROLOGICAL CLUES TO WHY YOU DON'T WRITE— AND HOW YOU CAN

Because of my own books and articles, I often draw clients who are “working writers”—journalists and other authors who consistently earn major parts of their income that way, even if their names never appear on Best Seller lists. I also draw many would-be authors who can't seem to get moving. In working with both groups over the years, certain astrological and psychological patterns have emerged. Creative and even brilliant folks who seldom put their inspirations down on paper tend to share blockages related to Mercury and the 3rd house.⁸

Oh, Brother! Family Barriers for Writers to Overcome

Family dynamics frequently create challenges to a writing career. Many successful authors come from troubled families—celebrity biographer Kitty Kelley is one of them whose chart we will look at later. Potent novelists, poets, and self-help writers often courageously mine a problematic childhood or painful adult experiences as material for their books. In the process of getting what happened down on paper and

⁸ This section appeared as, “Do You Dream of Becoming a Writer?” *The Mountain Astrologer*, 4-5/2003, pp.19-29, and is reprinted with permission.

reliving the emotions those events evoked, many of them also find healing and freedom. What often seems to distinguish them from others of similar backgrounds who only fantasize about writing is the courage to face down those ghosts of the past through the stark reality of the written word.

Talking about a difficult past is one thing and not easy. To put such personal information in writing for others to read requires a higher level of courage and commitment—even, perhaps, of exhibitionism. Fear of self-revelation can be a barrier even if you THINK those early experiences have nothing to do with your subject matter.

If you're writing about quincunxes or asteroids or myths or what's doing with Virgos this year, you might wonder how what happened when you were ten could get in the way. All writing is to a certain degree autobiographical, in that we filter everything through our experience. When early experience and family taboos taught us that it was dangerous to communicate our deeper truths, this background impacts writing along with all other forms of communication. To break this sort of barrier, it is usually necessary to create safe spaces for breaking the taboo against talking about what happened. Do write about it—if you prefer not to air the family laundry in public, you need not publish what you've written, or you could do so under a pen name.



When it comes to writing blocks, a particularly meaty family of origin dynamic to explore is sibling relationships. The 3rd house and Mercury describe our sisters and brothers and also provide clues to our communication styles. In interviewing writers and would-be writers over the years, I came to understand that siblings are just as important as parents or teachers in shaping our communication patterns. They are on a peer level, maybe enough older to know the ropes around the house and schoolyard. Given the intimacy and primacy of the family circle, our brothers and sisters can have more powerful influence on us than schoolmates.

Sometimes with love, but all too often with teasing, intimidation, or even outright pummeling, siblings teach us what it is acceptable to talk about and what will get us into trouble if we tell. (“Don’t show Mom your report card now,” they counsel, “she’s got that mean look on her face.”) Clients who have trouble writing often find it fruitful to explore what their Mercury and 3rd house show about their siblings. The patterns that most often created blockages for them are described below, along with the modes of writing that suited them best.

Mercury and 3rd House Challenges for Writers

Birth information from AstroDataBank for the writers we’ll be considering appears in the footnotes. In most cases, no information is available about their siblings, but we will look at their writing style. You will note that each author has several aspects to Mercury, but I have chosen to focus on just one aspect for discussion purposes so that

this section doesn't become a book in itself! Though the choices are somewhat arbitrary, I selected what seems to be the planet forming the dominant aspect to Mercury. Because of the strength of that planet in the chart as a whole, its qualities become a signature for the writer's work—a sort of top note in the planetary blend.

For instance, Frances Sakoian is listed under Mercury-Pluto aspects because her Mercury not only trines Pluto, but is also in Scorpio. In practice, however, your analysis would integrate all of the Mercury aspects, as well as its sign and house positions plus any planets in the 3rd house and any planets in the sign Gemini for a fuller picture of writing potentials and challenges.

I have focused here on hard aspects, since the sextile and trine are generally freer of blockages and more able to manifest the better qualities of a given Mercury aspect. Additionally, in sessions with clients, it became apparent that when a challenging planet is placed in the 3rd house, the dynamics are akin to that same planet aspecting Mercury. For instance, Pluto in the 3rd is much like a Mercury-Pluto aspect. Mercury's sign tends not to be so much descriptive of siblings as of communication style and of fruitful subject matter for the author—the types of information in the section on finding your niche.

MERCURY-MARS HARD ASPECTS, MARS IN THE 3rd: Depending on Mars' sign and aspects, a sibling, often male, may have been highly competitive, aggressive, or even abusive. Sibling rivalry was bound to be intense, with battles for dominance a longstanding feature of growing up in that household. (Even in adulthood, this dynamic can make family get-togethers anything but peaceful.) Outright abuse is more likely when Mercury and Mars form additional hard aspects to Uranus, Pluto, or Saturn. In such cases, fear of the sibling's rage could have induced the native to keep a low profile in order to avoid being a target.

Consciously or unconsciously, Mars in the 3rd individuals may fear reprisals if they outshine their siblings—or the sibling's adult counterparts, the person's colleagues in the field of interest. Even in adulthood, therefore, this deeply ingrained but not always conscious fear can get in the way of writing for publication—or, for that matter, of entering the often-competitive arena of conference speaking. Those whose siblings were abusive might need formal therapy or healing, with bodywork as an important component, to release the fear of putting their words out there. If a sibling was physically combative, bodywork may be needed to release “red alert” triggers that arise in competitive situations.



However, where Mars is well aspected, and where there was no crushing abuse, these individuals may draw on early sibling rivalry to evolve into a tenacious fighter for their own wants and goals as well as an advocate for change in their field of interest. A surprising number of successful writers in AstroDataBank numbered Mars contacts as part of their Mercury or 3rd house picture. Sometimes healthy competition with siblings

stimulates the person to achieve, just as champion athletes spur each other on to ever-greater performances. Here, belonging to an ongoing group of writers who are scrappy rather than a sappy—definitely including some men—can provide the spur to keep producing week after week and to keep improving your work based on their input.

For more tips on how to use this aspect well, review the section on finding your personal writing specialties, but many you excel at filling the “How To” niche. An example of this in our own field is Joan McEvers, who with Marion March wrote the enduringly popular *The Only Way to Lean Astrology* series⁹. See her chart on the next page. Her Mercury is at 0° Aquarius, squaring Mars in practical Taurus in the 2nd house and in a t-square with her Moon in Leo in the 6th. (Mercury generally makes a number of aspects in the charts of any productive writer, and Joan’s Mercury is further highlighted by being conjunct her Aquarius Ascendant, sextile her Sagittarius Midheaven, and conjunct Venus in Capricorn.)

MERCURY-SATURN HARD ASPECTS OR SATURN IN THE 3rd HOUSE: I discussed Mercury-Saturn aspects in depth in my book, *How to Read Your Astrological Chart: Aspects of the Cosmic Puzzle*. (Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1999.) It included an analysis of the life and chart of author Maya Angelou,¹⁰ who has a close square between Mercury in Pisces in the 8th house and Saturn in Sagittarius in the 4th. Because of a shattering event at the Saturnian age of seven, she became mute and did not speak again until she was thirteen. At that time, she fell in love with poetry, and a beloved teacher persuaded her that she could not completely appreciate it unless she read it aloud.¹¹

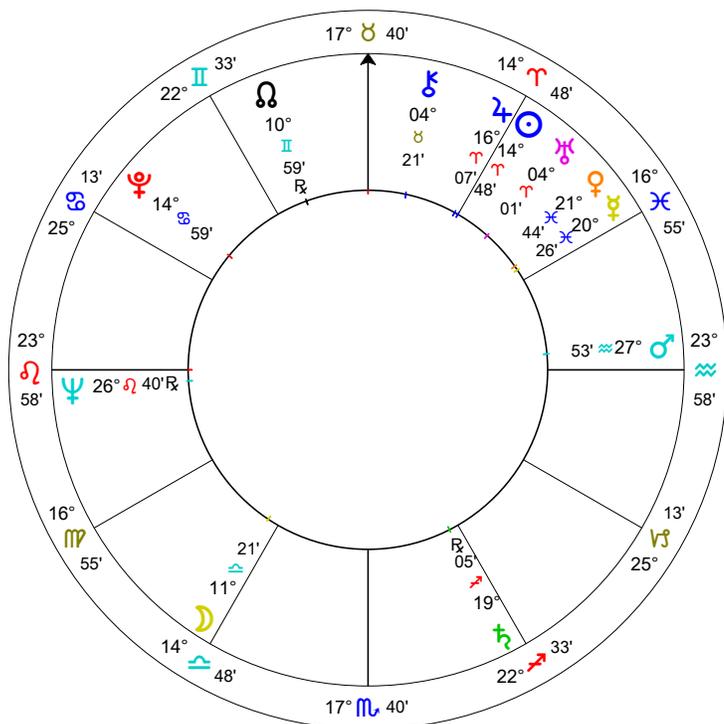
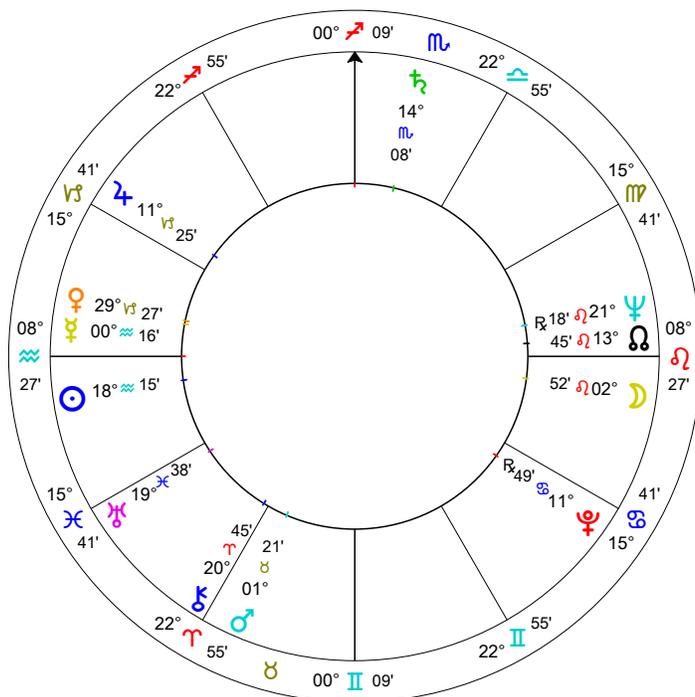
Angelou’s chart appears on the next page. Mercury is closely conjunct Venus, and her brother was one of her main supports throughout her life, but siblings are not always so loving when charts feature Mercury-Saturn aspects. One pattern I often see is that of growing up in the shadow of a talented or accomplished sibling—generally an older one—and winding up with an inferiority complex, especially where intellectual or scholastic abilities are concerned. Comparison with the gifted sibling is especially daunting when Mercury-Saturn individuals try to write something of substance—and with this aspect, they would usually be drawn to write something of substance and a high degree of difficulty, rather than lighthearted fiction. Talking or journaling about this part of their history in detail and validating their own adult abilities and achievements in their field of interest is useful. It puts the childhood chimera of The Omnipotent Elder Sibling into perspective. (As Saturn represents authority figures, the overpowering model is occasionally a gifted, accomplished parent rather than a sibling.)

⁹ Joan McEvers was born February 7, 1925, at 6:34 AM CST, Chicago, IL, 87W39; 41N51. AstroDataBank rates of this information AA, from the birth certificate.

¹⁰ Maya Angelou was born April 4, 1928, 2:10 PM CST, St. Louis, MO, 90W11; 38N37. AstroDataBank rates this information AA, from the birth certificate.

¹¹ She describes these events in one of her autobiographical works, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, published by Bantam in 1994.

JOAN McEVERS:
Feb 7, 1925 at 6:34 AM CST
Chicago, IL 41N51; 87W39
Rated AA, from the Birth Certificate



MAYA ANGELOU:
April 4, 1928 at 2:10 PM CST
St. Louis, MO 38N37; 90W11
AA, from Birth Certificate





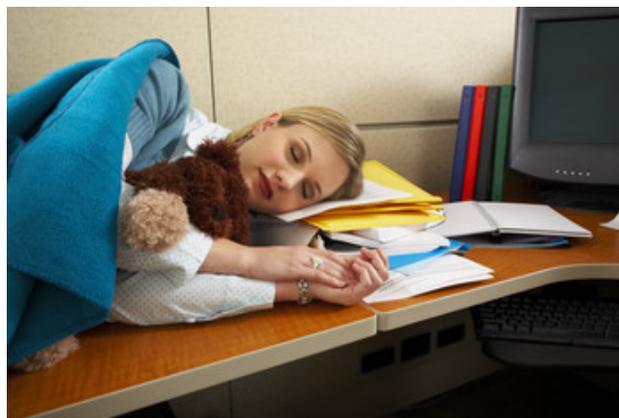
My experience—confirmed by the research of the late Lois Rodden—is that these can be the true scholars of the zodiac, though they seldom consider themselves brilliant. The signs involved tell whether their subjects are classically academic or alternative. Late bloomers with high standards, they tend not to write until they are satisfied that they have enough experience and expertise to offer something important. Realists, before investing time in writing, they also tend to assess whether doing so is cost-effective and will further their career or life goals.

Perfectionism can get in their way, and with their strong sense of order and rightness, they may stop when they reach an obstacle, waiting until they are certain they are correct in what they are writing. (Bach Flower remedies that help with perfectionism are Beech and Rock Water. Bach's Larch, for those who are afraid they will fail so they fail to try, is another that can alleviate these Saturnian fears.)

Many with this aspect work best by creating a firm structure for research and writing, a practical and realistic one that suits their personality and situation. Such a structure might include time blocked out on their daily planner, a detailed outline, file folders for each topic, goals for how many words to write, and perhaps periodic meetings with a writing coach or an expert in their field. I do advise them, however, not to be a slave to the outline and not necessarily to tackle the various sections in order, but rather to keep writing the parts they feel qualified to complete while researching the parts that are less well formed.

Being over-prepared on a given topic is reassuring to their Inner Critic, and can only enhance the result. While they may write more slowly than those with other types of Mercury aspects, what they write is likely to be sound and thorough. Once actually engaged in a writing project, they have a strong self-discipline, an exceptional work ethic and a concern for quality that makes for a worthwhile contribution. It could only be wished that more writers applied such high standards to their work!

MERCURY-NEPTUNE HARD ASPECTS OR NEPTUNE IN THE 3rd: Some of the most creative and imaginative individuals I know have Mercury-Neptune aspects, but writing tends to be a trial for them. They endlessly agonize, postpone, and even resort to their drug of choice—perhaps nothing more than ice cream or soap operas—as their deadline recedes further and further into the past. One reason for the difficulty is that many of their inspirations come from the astral plane or the collective unconscious, an arena that is hard to capture in words because of its grander-than-life visions of how things might be in an ideal world. Often whimsical, poetic, romantic,



and fey, they are at home in the realm of fantasy and, alas, can as easily be fulfilled by fantasizing about writing as by putting things down on paper.

Some support can come from using the Bach flower remedy Clematis for the space cadet, while the Flower Essence Society's Blackberry and Madia help with focus. However, I don't honestly know how to help them be more productive writers—if I did, the fields of astrology and metaphysics would be enriched by the writings of some exceptional beings! Much of their inspiration seems to come while asleep, listening to music, or in the shower. If you have this aspect, don't hesitate to rush to the computer, even in the wee hours, and dash the ideas down as quickly as possible with no concern for sentence structure or order.

One friend with the conjunction whose tales I cherish carries a journal at all times, so she can capture her inspirations and record her vivid dreams immediately before they fade away. Unfortunately, her handwriting is abysmal, or I'd transcribe them for her! If Neptune is in Libra natally, it helps to write with a more earthbound partner. Squares and oppositions tend to be the more effective aspects of this type, for these natives can alternate between immersing themselves in a dream-like state of creativity and coming out of it long enough to get it on paper.

What light does family history shed on these gifted individuals and their creative tribulations? Some come from dysfunctional families whose reality was so troubled that immersion in a dream world was appealing. Many were voracious readers or spaced out by other means to avoid absorbing the pain that surrounded them, a mental habit that does not change just because they no longer live at home. As for sibling relationships, some have handicapped siblings or siblings who grow up troubled by addiction or other emotional problems. If they are more successful than these troubled siblings are, they can have a case of survivor's guilt that holds them back.



Still, the difficult background and the love they have for their siblings teach them compassion and empathy that is reflected in their writing, which may focus on spiritual answers to the woes of the world. Whenever their topics are too painful, however, the pattern of postponing or avoiding writing can come into play—and they are extraordinarily creative at finding reasons not to write!

Celebrity biographer Kitty Kelley, whose chart is shown on the next page,¹² is an example of a Mercury-Neptune type who grew up in a well-to-do alcoholic household, the oldest of seven. According to her biography in AstroDataBank, her parents were physically abusive to Kelley and her siblings until she was as old as

¹² Kitty Kelley was born April 4, 1942, 5:00 PM PWT, Spokane, WA 117W25; 47N39. AstroDataBank rates this information AA, from memory.

twenty. Her compulsion to root out and expose scandal may derive from growing up in a wealthy family with secrets like these. She has a double Mercury-Neptune connection in that her Mercury is at 29° Pisces and little more than a half-degree from an exact opposition to Neptune, both planets being in the Gauquelin sectors. Mercury forms an out of sign Grand Trine with Pluto in Leo and the Moon in Sagittarius in the 3rd. Though not in aspect to Mercury, her Mars and Jupiter in Mercury-ruled Gemini are closely conjunct the Midheaven.

While Pluto opposed this conjunction during 2003-4, she took on one of the most powerful clans of our time with her biography, *The Family: the Real Story of the Bush Dynasty*¹³, released in September, 2004. As quoted on the book cover, the New York Times reviewer said, “This is a story of power, sex, and betrayal, but mostly of power.” She was definitely having a Pluto transit!!

MERCURY-PLUTO HARD ASPECTS OR PLUTO IN THE 3rd: Mercury-Pluto types are keenly conscious of the power of words—written or spoken—whether to heal or to wound, and therein lies a good deal of their difficulty in writing. Many of them grew up in families where it was taboo or even outright dangerous to talk about what was really happening. While the secrets of Neptunian families are maintained by denial, addiction, and spacing out, the secrets of Plutonian families are more often maintained by guilt-tripping or intimidation.

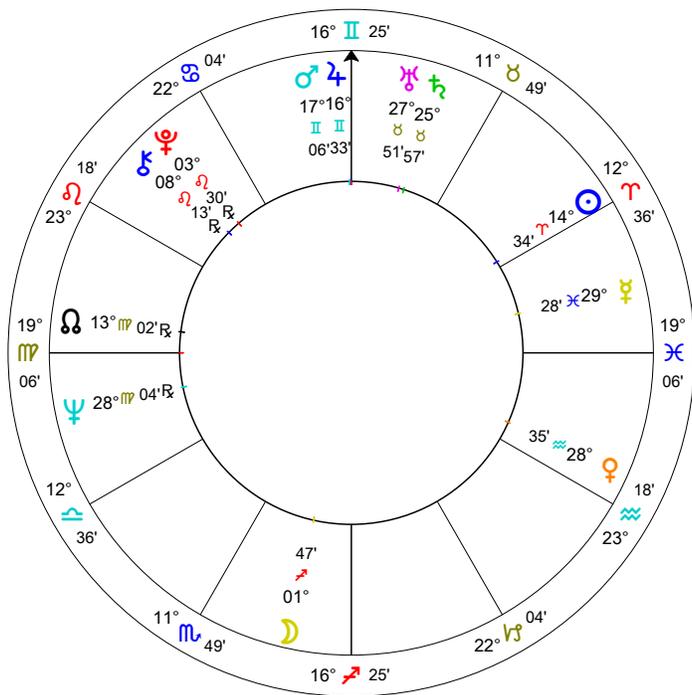
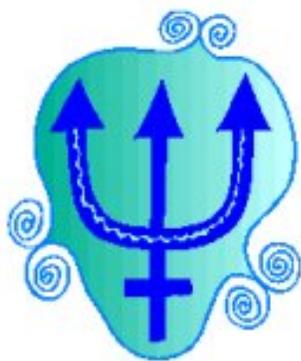
Since Pluto and Neptune were traveling in tandem 60° apart for the last several decades of the Twentieth Century, however, most such dysfunctional families are a crazy-making combination of both planets. Some family members are sunk in denial, while others perceive the truth but are punished or shunned for speaking out about it! The Plutonians are the family members who see deeply but learn to keep their own counsel. When Mercury aspects Pluto or Pluto is in the 3rd, the secret may be about a sibling who is either abused or abusive or both, and who threatens the native with some dire consequence **If They Tell**.



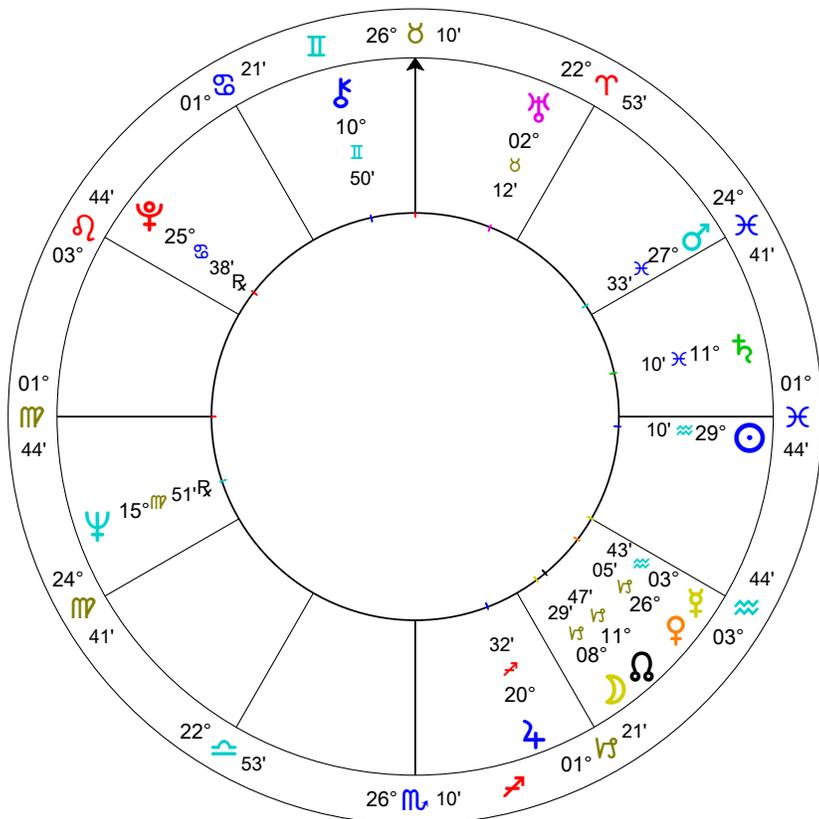
Additionally, the sibling may engage in heavy-handed power trips or less apparent but no less effective manipulation in order to maintain dominance. I have also noted with Pluto in the 3rd that it is common for one or both parents to promote an intense and often scarring sibling rivalry in which siblings vie with one another for sparsely-available love and attention at all costs. Being invisible—and thus less of a target—becomes a survival skill in such families, and yet in order to be published, the person has to overcome the fear of being high profile. Insight and healing work may be required to break through this barrier. Writing under a pseudonym is another possibility.

¹³ *The Family: the Real Story of the Bush Dynasty* was published in paperback by Doubleday, NY: 2004.

KITTY KELLEY:
 April 4, 1942 at 5:00 PM PWT
 Spokane, WA 47N40; 117W26
 Rated A, from memory



FRANCIS SAKOIAN:
 October 8, 1912 at 5:07 AM
 Berea, OH 41N22; 81W52
 Rated A, from memory



Mercury-Pluto or Pluto in the 3rd types can be caught in a bind, for despite the desire for invisibility, they also have a pressing need to communicate the truths that lie beneath the surface. Some resolve it by keeping secret journals or password-encrypted files on the computer that no one else ever sees, or they write deep, detailed, perceptive pieces that languish in a drawer because they are afraid to send them out for publication. Their rationalization for this is often a paranoia that someone will steal their work—someone in their writing group or at the literary agency or publishing house. This fear can arise from a family economy of scarcity in which a sibling seemingly stole parental love or affection or otherwise stole the person's place in the spotlight.

Therapy groups or writing seminars monitored by a skilled and self-aware leader can provide safe spaces for Mercury-Pluto types to share their keen perceptions, giving validation for their piercing insights and providing all-important permission to speak out more publicly. Flower remedies like Star of Bethlehem by Bach or Golden Eardrops, Oregon Grape, and Evening Primrose by the Flower Essence Society can be an adjunct to healing childhood wounds, but are not a magic bullet.¹⁴ Where the abuse has been physical, bodywork may be required in order to release the “red alert” triggers that can be activated by attempting to share writing about taboo or secret subjects. When Mercury-Pluto or Pluto in the 3rd individuals are free to tackle these subterranean themes, however, the writing can be extremely potent and healing for the reader as well as the writer.

An example of someone who successfully used the capacity of a Mercury-Pluto aspect to focus, delve deeply and analyze was Francis Sakoian,¹⁵ whose chart is shown on the previous page. She was one of the astrologers whose writings brought astrology out of the realm of the occult and into the mainstream in the late Sixties to early Seventies. The books that she and Louis Acker wrote taught many of us that there was more to astrology than Sun signs. She was the author of 19 down-to-earth and readable astrology texts, which many of us dog-eared and virtually memorized in our student days. Perhaps best remembered were *The Astrologer's Handbook* and *The Astrology of Human Relations*, still available today online at chains like Barnes and Noble. She has a dual Mercury-Pluto influence since her Mercury-Mars conjunction in Scorpio in the 1st trines Pluto in the 9th, the house of teaching and publishing. Including Chiron in the picture, it forms a Grand Water Trine. Like many successful authors, her Mercury is in high focus, in that it also squares the Moon and Uranus and quincunxes Saturn in Gemini.

Not every Mercury aspect is covered here, as not all of them seem to correspond with the patterns I've been discussing. For instance, I have seldom had Mercury-Uranus natives raise this sort of issue. It is unclear whether they do not suffer from such

¹⁴ Star of Bethlehem is for healing old shocks and traumas; Golden Eardrops helps to release unhappy childhood memories; Oregon Grape helps relieve suspiciousness and the fear of being a target, and Evening Primrose helps with the feeling of being unwanted in their family of origin. These remedies can be ordered from FES at 1-800-548-0075

¹⁵ Frances Sakoian was born October 18, 1912, 5:07 AM CST, Berea, OH, 81W51; 42N21. AstroDataBank rates this information A, from her memory.

blockages, whether they are not much interested in written communication, or whether they are too independent or too scientific to seek the help of an astrologer.

I also note that Mercury-Ascendant aspects do not seem inclined to writing. Particularly with the conjunction, that Mercury combination seems to express itself more often in speaking than in writing. Many are superb communicators who use their speaking ability in their careers to good effect. Others are compulsive talkers, unable to sustain the silence and solitude needed for writing anything of length, unless there are supportive aspects from Saturn or Pluto.

Writer's Block—or Waiting for the Right Astrological Window?

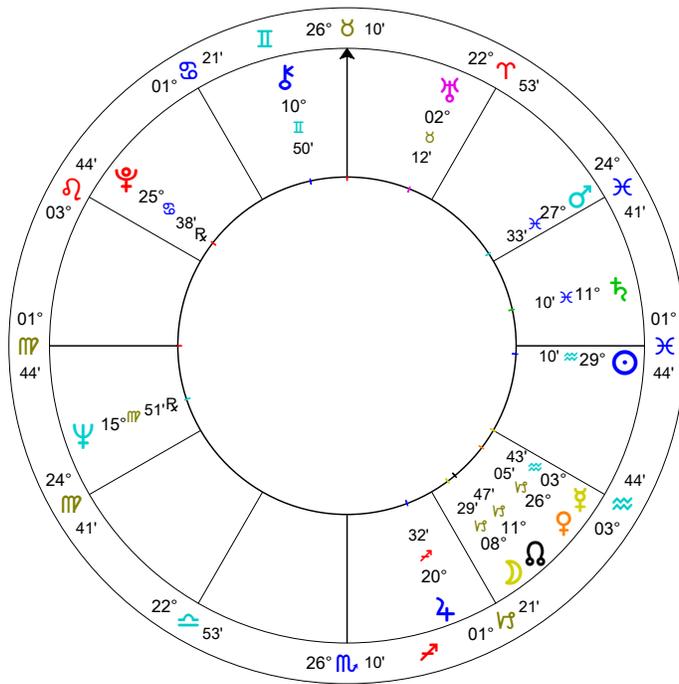
As we've noted earlier, even the most successful and consistent writers go through periods when writing seems to fade into the background. Can we understand the peak and fallow periods of a writer's life through the astrology chart? An example of a novelist with a long career hiatus was Jean Auel. Her first book, *Clan of the Cave Bear*, was not written until she was 40, as her progressed Mercury applied to a conjunction with natal Mars. Her chart and a solar chart for noon on the date *Shelters of Stone* hit the top of the New York Times book list are shown here.¹⁶

After four huge best-sellers, a twelve-year interval ensued before the publication of *The Shelters of Stone* on April 30, 2002. (It was finished in early June, 2001, and sold immediately, with a record advance.) A variety of sensational rumors swirled among her worldwide network of fans as they waited for book five—she was reputed to be gravely ill, dead, or feuding with her publishers, all untrue. In the eleven years it took to research and write the book, was the novelist stewing over her “writer's block?” No, she says simply, “Life gets in the way,” pointing to her enjoyment of her 15 grandchildren.¹⁷ The long-awaited 753-page tome, priced at a hefty \$38.98, debuted on the New York Times Best-Seller list at #1 on May 19, 2002, and was simultaneously released in 28 languages. Natally Uranus in the 9th forms the closest aspect to her Mercury, which is in Uranus-ruled Aquarius in the 5th. Interestingly enough, she says that her real first book was a computer manual. Her Uranus is in Taurus in the 9th, and her series is called *Earth's Children*. (Mercury also forms out-of-sign aspects to Venus and Pluto.) Not surprisingly, her sensational rise to fame corresponded with important Uranus transits. In 1980-1, Uranus in Scorpio opposed her Midheaven and squared her 6th house Aquarius Sun—the very same positions activated in 2002 by Uranus in Aquarius, again with sensational results. In the chart for the release of *The Shelters of Stone*, there is a stellium in Gemini including Mercury, and Mercury is conjunct Saturn, opposite Pluto, and trine Neptune.

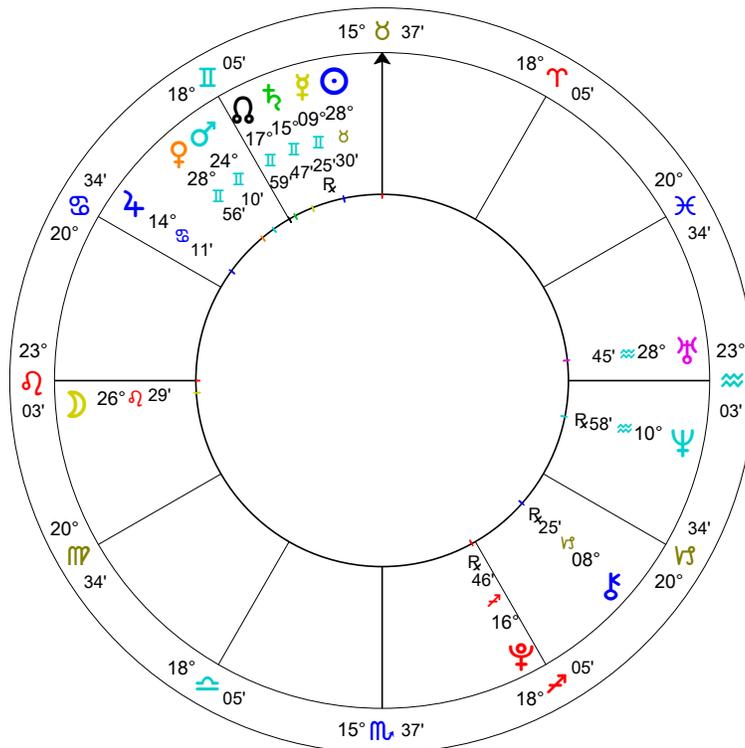
¹⁶ According to AstroDataBank, Jean Auel was born February 18, 1936, 5:35 PM CST, Chicago, IL, 87W39; 41N41. The data is rated AA, birth certificate in hand.

¹⁷ Facts taken from an interview with Auel, “A Literary Light Steps Out of the Caves,” by Jeff Baker, *The Sunday Oregonian*, May 5, 2002, p.1, and from USA Today's online version for 6/14/01, at <http://www.usa.com>.

JEAN AUDEL:
 February 18, 1936 at 5:35 PM CST
 Chicago, IL 41N52; 87W39
 AA, from birth certificate



THE SHELTERS OF STONE
 TOPS NY TIMES BOOK LIST:
 May 19, 2002 (Solar chart)
 Source: *New York Times* of that date



Jupiter does rule publishing, and not surprisingly, transits to Auel's natal Jupiter in Sagittarius as well as transits by Jupiter have figured significantly in her writing career. Her main character was conceived in 1977, as Jupiter was in Gemini in her 10th house, and Neptune in Sagittarius in the 4th began setting off her mutable planets. *Clan of the Cave Bear* was a best-seller in 1980, as transiting Neptune in Sagittarius and Saturn in Virgo aspected natal Jupiter in Sagittarius.

Over the previous few years, as *The Shelters of Stone* was finally taking shape and gearing up for publication, both Saturn and Jupiter were traveling through her 8th, 9th, and 10th houses. She herself was traveling, researching caves and archeological sites in southern France and northern Africa to recreate the atmosphere of prehistoric times for *The Shelters of Stone*. Using that research, she is already at work on her sixth book.

Some Final Words for Authors

Astrology, as you have seen, can be a great aid to the writer, but all the Mercury aspects in the world won't make you a writer unless you make it your priority. My pay-as-you-go system can offset some of writing's down side by providing immediate rewards and boosting your career through some helpful exposure. If you have something to say—and you must if you've read this far—you owe it to yourself and your potential readers to get on with it! I have a feeling that once you get going, the heady discoveries you make and the satisfaction of sharing what you know will sweep you along. Best wishes in your quest.