

TOO MANY IRONS IN THE FIRE?

by Dennis L. Peterson

After my first book was published (McFarland, 2016), I knew I couldn't rest on the laurels of that success if I was to avoid becoming a one-book wonder. I had to start another writing project right away.

I completed another manuscript and queried several carefully researched publishers about their possible interest. Knowing it might take many months for those publishers to respond to my manuscript, I started a couple of other writing projects.

Within three years, I had completed three book manuscripts. I was so busy researching and writing I had trouble finding time to market. However, I both queried agents to represent me and continued marketing the manuscripts myself.

My efforts landed a contract (without an agent) for one of the manuscripts—not for the book I had expected but for one of the others I had in my “pipeline.”

Having “too many irons in the fire” is not always bad. It offers several benefits.

1. It helps resolve writing problems.

Are you stuck on one project (e.g., you suffer an attack of writer's block or have trouble wording a particular concept)? Jump on another project; keep producing. Getting your mind off the first project frees your subconscious to find creative solutions to your blockage or problem. You return to the original project with a fresh perspective.

2. It allows continued productivity.

While waiting for something (e.g., a book on hold at the library, a resource you've ordered, or the response from an interviewee), you can still produce rather than merely biding (a.k.a. “wasting”) your time.

3. It provides opportunities to explore other media or genres.

Having several simultaneous projects “in the pipeline” allowed me to pursue occasional shorter pieces (e.g., articles and blog posts). Perhaps it will allow you to begin that novel. Or experiment with poetry or script writing. Or write your memoirs.

4. It is a better use of your most valuable resource—time!

The early Puritans called such practices “improving time.” Rather than frittering time in worthless, unproductive activities, you can be putting your time into profitable writing.

List several writing projects you’ve dreamed of doing. Begin them. Don’t feel compelled to finish them all now. Just start. Get those irons in the fire so the next time you experience a delay, you can retrieve one of those irons and remain productive. You’ll be amazed by your increased productivity and success.

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