

S1:E3 "Writing 99 Tips" Transcript

May 19, 2022

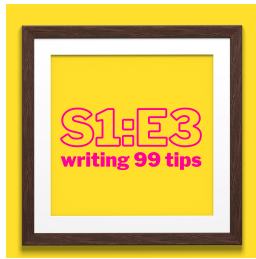
Karen Costa:

Welcome to the ADHD gallery, a podcast about teaching, learning and living with ADHD. My name is Karen Costa, and I'll be your host and curator. This podcast is for the ADHDers of the world. People like me. Join me to venture through this gallery of ideas, curiosities, brain science, random hyperfocus interests, and reflections on what it's like to live with the gifts and many challenges of ADHD. Fellow dopamine hunters, let's be weird together. Stay connected at theADHDgallery.com. I'm aiming to be increasingly less active on social in the coming months, and maybe even years. So my website and email newsletter will be the best way to stay in touch.

Hello, everyone and welcome to episode three of The ADHD Gallery. Come on in. My name is Karen Costa, and I'm your host and curator. Today's episode is called Writing 99 Tips. I have never told the full story of how my book came to life. Talk about it a little bit here and there on other folks' podcasts, but I haven't really had the time to go into the entire backstory and my writing process. So I'm really excited to share that with you today.

As I've mentioned on previous episodes, my goal for The ADHD Gallery is to finish it and get it out into the world. A bonus will be if my stories and my ideas that I'm going to share here in the gallery help other people. So I do imagine that there are some of you out there who are thinking about, dreaming about, writing a book. So again, I want to do this because I want to do this and I want to finish it and put it out into the world. But I do hope that it helps many of you bring your own ideas and books out into the world.

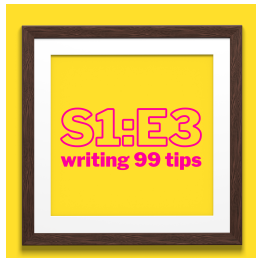
So a little backstory on where I am in this moment. I am back sitting at my desk with Rocky here on my lap. So you know any barking or strange animal noises I cannot take credit for those. That's Rocky, and realistically, this is the life of recording my podcast, so I'm rolling with it. I also thought I'd share that just back from a few days off, traveled down to New Jersey to see family and to be honest, wasn't feeling super motivated today to do this. I am using a little bit of a reward system. I started playing Zelda Breath of the Wild on Nintendo Switch a couple of weeks ago, and I am completely hyper



focused on it, and want to spend all day every day in this world. If you've played the game, you understand, so I am using that as my reward. That's what I'll be doing when I finish recording this podcast. So if you haven't played, check it out.

Okay, let's start with some backstory. I am a book lover. And I want to say a little bit more about that. I not only love to read, but I love touching books. I love looking at books. I love the smell of books. I love bookstores. I love libraries. I love librarians. I love magazines about books, I love other people who love books. So this has been a thing for me my entire life. When I'm not feeling well, like if there's a pile of books in bed next to me while I'm laying there, trying to recover, I feel a little bit better and a little bit safer to know that you know those little worlds are with me. So I have this, I've had this dream of writing a book inside of me for probably my entire life. But it felt like such a big dream, that I would only give it you know, give it to myself in small doses. I would let myself have that dream for like five seconds once a year. Then I turned 32 and quit a full time job that felt like it was, you know, taking the soul out of me because it wasn't the right fit. And I proceeded to write two novels over the next few years after I quit that job. I got some time and energy back. And my creativity just flowed. Those are those two novels, what many people call desk drawer novels? Because you're never going to see them. I did shop them around and I had some agents who were willing to read partial manuscripts but they were not good.

Fiction. I love reading fiction. I'm always reading fiction. And that is not a talent of mine. I actually released those novels from the desk drawers, you know, they weren't even worthy of the space in the desk drawers. But what those novels did for me is that they allowed me to start dreaming about writing another book, I realized that I could write a book. I realized I could write two books. So it became possible for me, and I started to dream about it more often. And then I actually started to think about what my skills are or were and I realized that nonfiction, probably related to my work in education, teaching and learning, was a much better fit for me than fiction. So I have written many nonfiction book proposals over the years, probably at least a dozen that I have sent around and shopped around. And I've had varying degrees of, you know, partial success in the direction of possible publication with those but nothing was hitting for a really long time. And I wrote a book proposal about the topic of online teaching back in probably late 2018, shopped it to a couple of higher education, trade routes, publications, and God knows — so I do want to say I was really in kind of a dark place around this topic of

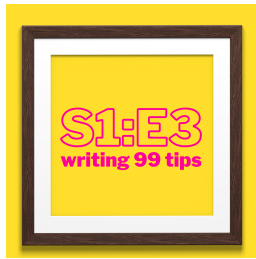


writing a book at that point, and 2018 beginning of 2018, I was, you know, on the floor saying, “What am I doing? Why am I bothering with this? This is never going to happen. Please, you know, universe, direct me. Should I give up on this?” And I sent it out to another publisher. You hear that kind of storyline, and I love reading about people who sent a manuscript to so many people and then finally it clicked. So I sent it to another publisher who wrote back and said, “I don't want this book. But there is a part of your proposal that I think could be a book. It's the part of your proposal about helping educators make videos to engage their students. What do you think about writing that? And what do you think about writing that as a tips book?”

This was at Stylus, who ended up being my publisher. So I thought to myself, “What the heck is a tips book? So I did some research on that and found out that, you know, that was just a specific style book: 13 tips for doing X, 67 tips for doing Y, basically written in a format with very short chapters that was geared toward a practical mindset of helping people to make changes. The original book I'd been pitching was a traditional style book about online teaching, which is a much broader topic than focusing in on the video piece.

So I will admit, I was a little hesitant about this. At first, I had a publisher who was saying “Do you want to write a book for me?” And I pushed pause now, again, I had just been on the floor saying what is going on? Am I supposed to be writing a book? Help me. Help me. So I, you know, I listened to that hesitation. I was nervous about focusing in on a specific area. I was nervous that it would feel limiting. You know, I didn't know. I didn't have my ADHD diagnosis at the time. But I obviously had ADHD. And I, you know, definitely was the type of person who resisted being boxed into, you know, a specific area or detail so I was nervous about that. And I was also nervous about the tips format. I work in higher education. This book was going to primarily be for people in higher ed, also K through 12 educators, and I was nervous that those short chapters and the tips format wouldn't be taken seriously. So I'm going to share later about how those concerns panned out. But I wanted to be transparent that there was a part of me that was like, I don't know if I should do this. Maybe I should, you know, keep trying other routes. But again, I had just been on the floor saying, universe helped me put a book into the world because this is a goal of mine. This is something I've been dreaming of doing. So I said yes.

Okay, I want to talk to you a little bit about my writing process. And transparency: take what you need and leave the rest. This is what I did. This is what worked for me. This



might not be what works for you. One of the things I've learned about having ADHD is that you have to throw out a lot of other people's advice that worked for them, that's not going to work for you. So figure out what parts of this will help you and find other ways that I don't share that work for you. But just because it worked for me, doesn't mean it'll work for you. Figure out what you need. Okay, so I signed my book contract on March 19, 2019. Did I have that date memorized? No, I just looked it up before I started recording in my email because I do not remember details. So I signed my book contract on March 19, 2019. I got to set my own deadline. And the deadline I set was June 30, 2019. So I basically gave myself a little more than three months to write my book. So some of you might be saying Why would you do that, Karen?

Again, did not have a diagnosis at the time, had ADHD. I say that because I was, without knowing it, using a lot of strategies to manage my ADHD that are really sound strategies. And in that example, I was taking my planned summer vacation in July, which is something I look forward to every year. I love that time of year. That is read in the hammock and sit on the beach and relax, spend time with family, be near the water. It's something I treasure and I didn't want to have the need to be thinking about a future deadline hanging over my head and summer over that summer vacation. So I set my deadline for June 30. And I knew that the promise of that summer vacation, knowing that I had finished my book, I knew that that would keep me motivated. So you know, just those little tricks, just like I'm gonna get to play *Breath of the Wild* after I finish this podcast, those are things I've always done without naming them. And they're absolutely those little reward systems to activate that dopamine system in my brain. Those are so important and so helpful to me.

The other thing I want to say is that I think a lot of folks with ADHD have been taught that we need more time. We need that, that extended time or longer deadlines, and I don't know about y'all, but I find I work better with shorter deadlines. Again, that might not be true for me, or true for you. It's true for me. I'm going to share a video for you in the show notes called "Helping ADHD Learners Land the Plane." So something I talked to educators about is how we, one of the typical accommodations for students at any level who have ADHD, is to give them extended time. And there's actually some research that extended time without the appropriate supports makes things worse for ADHD learners. We're just like a plane that's up there circling, running out of gas. We don't, we don't need more time. We need help landing the plane. So extended time can be okay if we've got additional support, but extended time alone doesn't help us, and I actually find that sometimes shorter deadlines with the appropriate supports are more



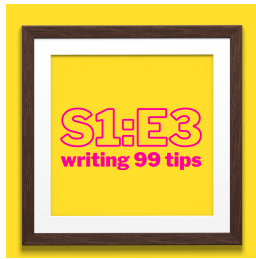
effective. So something to think about if you're thinking about writing a book or if you're planning to write a book and you're deciding on a deadline. I did this from March 19 to June 30. And I actually beat that June 30 deadline.

Okay. So how the heck did I do that? How did I write a book in three months? So I don't know how I came up with this system. Again, I was, I think this is true of a lot of folks with ADHD or undiagnosed ADHD or those who self diagnose, we have all these magical smart systems that we've just created. Because we've lived, you know, in these bodies and brains for so long that we figure things out. We're incredibly creative and smart about developing our own strategies. So I don't, you know, I wasn't like, oh, how exactly, what are the best systems and what are they? I didn't research systems. I just kind of did this intuitively based on what I thought would work for me.

So I printed out monthly calendars for March, April, May and June. Found those online, downloaded them, printed them out. And then I used I guess what I would call a backward design system. I wouldn't have called it that at the time. It was intuitive. It's what I knew that I needed to succeed. So the first thing I did was I wanted to give myself a buffer. So my deadline for my publisher was June 30. I gave myself the deadline of June 23. I wanted to give myself a week in case, you know, anything wild happened and I needed some extra time.

I also knew that I wanted to do two rounds of edits and revisions. I wanted to do one round using Grammarly.com, the pro version. I think it cost me like 50 bucks. I cannot recommend this enough if you are working on a serious writing project. It was a wonderful investment. There is like a little writing bot person who talks to you about your writing. And we were in a full friendship, like we were best friends by the time that round of editing was done. So what I would do, or what I knew I wanted to do, was to plug in every single tip I had, 99, into Grammarly one at a time. And Grammarly would tell me I was using the passive voice or I was reusing the same word over and over blah blah blah. So love Grammarly, and I knew I wanted to put every one of my 99 tips into Grammarly and edit it.

I also knew I wanted to print out a hard copy or an analog copy of the book and edit it that way. With, you know, red pen going through that paper version of my book. And I wanted to do again, got to do all 99 tips. So I had those two rounds of editing in mind. I basically worked backwards from that June 23 deadline I had given myself, so I would say to myself okay, I can probably do, you know, revise 10 tips today. So I'm going to

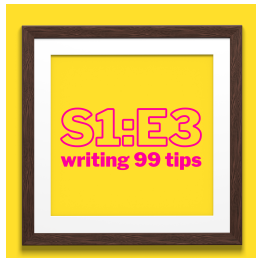


write on my printable calendar for June 22: Edit 10 Tips Analog. Then I would write on June 21: 10 tips Analog, and so on and so forth until I reached my 99.

I took my weekends off. Some days I had other work to do or family commitments. So maybe I would edit one tip that day. I tried to do at least one thing for the book every weekday, over the course of that three months, to build in consistency. So again, I haven't really written anything other than what's in the book proposal at this point. I'm just imagining what my process would be and putting that onto these printable calendars. So I then had the editing dates written out. I went to writing time at this point, so I would plan to write anywhere between one to three tips each weekday. And the tips were, just to give you an idea, about two to three pages long, sometimes less, sometimes a little more. So if I was writing three tips, I was writing about nine or 10 pages on that day. Not huge, but a decent gradual progress toward my goals.

Sometimes I would set the goal to write one tip and I would just have an amazing writing day and I would write five. I definitely tried to under promise and over deliver to myself, right? I think that's a great strategy. When writing a book is, you know, plan for what you think you can do and under promise, and then if you can keep going and if you've got that energy, you'll feel even more motivated to keep going. So as I was completing these tips, once I had all this planned out on these printable calendars, I would start crossing things off. And the thought of writing an entire book, if I have allowed myself to even entertain that for a moment, I think would have shut me down. I don't think I let that thought come into my mind. I think some part of me knew that I couldn't think like that. And it just shut off that conversation in my brain.

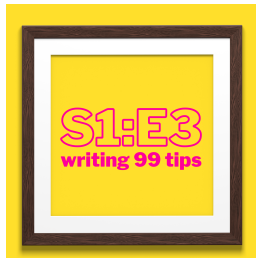
Again, it really was an intuitive process. My brain somehow knew that this was a lifelong goal and a dream of mine and it just kind of organized to set me up for success. You know, obviously I put a lot of work into this and had support. But I do, I want to thank my trusty ADHD brain and all of the many, many weird strategies I've developed over the years. So I really thought of it as, what is my plan for the next day, those calendars, like I saved them, I think for a year and a half after I finished the book, because that is what allowed me to write this book, these, you know, four monthly calendars that had what exactly I needed to do each day. So I didn't think, I'm writing a book. I thought I'm writing one tip today or I'm writing three tips today. And that was what allowed me to chip away at this and keep going. And I think whether you're calling it tips or pages or podcast episodes, whatever the case may be, you know, this is a great strategy for folks with ADHD, or anybody who needs help with organization and motivation. Thinking about



things one day at a time, breaking things up, you know, we call it chunking, in the learning sciences, breaking things up into smaller pieces can really help us stay motivated and not thinking about that necessarily, you know, big goal. Once you get the big goal in place, kind of setting that aside and focusing on the small goals.

So again, I want to share that might resonate with you and for those of you who are writing or working on other projects, hopefully you got some ideas from that, but if not, if you have another process, if you prefer longer deadlines, if you want to use, you know, a digital tool instead of those printable calendars, whatever the case may be, find what works for you trust your brain. And, you know, follow that intuition about what you need to do to succeed. I will say that I definitely had those little moments that crept in once in a while where I thought, Who am I to be doing this? I can't do this. This is too big. But I will say that because of that system I had in place. I remember saying to myself more than I doubted myself, this is what I'm supposed to be doing. So it's absolutely in that flow state.

Okay, so I want to share a little bit about why I am so glad that I wrote this specific book. So I mentioned earlier that I was a little nervous about writing a book that was focused on this more specific area of videos versus the bigger picture of online teaching. And I was a little nervous about this tips format. Looking back, in hindsight, I'm really so happy they worked and, you know, both of those things I was concerned about ended up really being blessings. So my book was released in April of 2020. Yeah, those were the early days of the pandemic. Remember when we had no idea what was going on and just chaos, wild? You know, full lockdown. And the other thing that was going on at that time? Every, basically every teacher in this country, had been shifted or forced into teaching online. And while a lot of folks had already been teaching online and had some skills in that area, a lot of educators had not received the training that they needed prior to this. And were really, really scrambling to take care of themselves and their students on top of the stress of the pandemic and the fears that were going around with that. And folks are like, how do I do this online teaching thing? So ultimately, I am really glad that I wrote this book focusing on videos in this tips format, because it felt like it landed at the time when it could really be of service. I did not plan that. Certainly, obviously, but the timing was, it was just really interesting. And despite all the challenges that were going on at the time, I was really glad to be able to say to people, this book might help you. This book might give you some really practical five minute strategies that you can start using today.



The other thing that I was really happy about, in addition to writing a book about videos specifically, was that I was able to say to people with a straight face, this is a book that's accessible to you at the start of a global pandemic. Because I knew these two to three page chapter tips, I knew that people could pick this book up and read a tip in a few minutes and learn something about teaching that they could start using immediately: something simple, something sustainable, that would help them and help their students and they would feel like they accomplished something. So many times when I read a book or try to read a book with longer chapters. I feel myself getting, you know, bogged down, and then I start saying to myself, why can't you stick with this book until you finish this chapter? You know, everybody else can do that. Blah, blah, blah. I love reading books with short chapters. Because it gives me that feeling of accomplishment. When I finished the chapter, I did it. I finished this chapter. I learned something. I got a concrete idea that I can start applying in my life or my work, or that inspired me somehow. So I really was so happy that I ended up writing in the tips format, so grateful to John Von Knowrring and Stylus for suggesting that. I hope we see more books with tips or short chapters, whatever we want to call things. I think they really speak to this moment in time and we have so many challenges and so many other things on our minds.

The other quick thing I wanted to share, kind of a funny story. I got diagnosed in March of 2020. So the book hadn't quite come out yet but it was written and on the verge of publication. And I was as I was talking to the psychiatrist, excuse me, psychologist, who diagnosed me, we sat down at that initial meeting, and I was telling them a little bit about myself. And I was telling them about my work. And I said, oh yeah, you know, I just wrote a book. And, you know, I was trying to balance telling him about my challenges, but also my accomplishments. And he said hold on, hold on there. And he said, Tell me about your book. So I said, Oh, it's called 99 tips. And it's, you know, short chapters to help educators with online teaching and creating videos. And he kind of chuckled to himself and he said something along the lines of, oh, that's really interesting. That's like the perfect book for someone with ADHD to write. And I kind of, part of me now thinks, oh, that's a dig, right. Like, I could have written, if I really wanted to and felt compelled to, we I can write anything that we want, right. But what I think he was saying is that this is a really great example of alignment, and that's how I'm going to choose to take it at least, but this idea that the book was shorter, more accessible chapters and language might be a gift that ADHDers can offer themselves and the world. So I love that story. How he said, Oh, that's a great book for an ADHD, somebody with ADHD to write. I didn't know that at the time when I started writing the book, but it was a great book for me to write.



Okay, two years later, two years, I couldn't believe that when I was writing down some notes for the show, I couldn't believe it right? COVID has collapsed time. Sometimes it feels like it's been 100 years and sometimes it feels like it's been, you know, it started last month. But it has been two years since my book was released. And as I mentioned, my goal, much like with this podcast, my goal was to finish it. My goal was to achieve that dream of writing and publishing a book and having that book in my hands to touch, and then I set the goal to reach one reader. I like to set you know, low. Keep the bar low for myself, and I have definitely accomplished those goals. So for that reason, I am really proud of myself for finishing this, for achieving this dream of mine. It has helped me, putting this book into the world to connect with so many people.

So I guess that leads to the question, will I write another book? Today? The answer is I don't think so. And of course, I change my mind. Life changes, things happen, opportunities arise. Who knows? Never say never. But if I had to answer today my answer is no. I, this is what I feel. The publication timeline for traditional publishing is very slow. And that's not a criticism. It's just a reality. Right? There's lots of things that need to happen behind the scenes. There are now these, you know, supply chain delays, all kinds of things going on. But it can take, you know, one to two to three years once you sign your book contract for your book to come out into the world.

And if that is your path, you know, it certainly was mine a couple years ago, and if that is still your path, of course, do you. I have previously said today that I'm a lover of books and authors and librarians and everything to do with reading. So I'm not here right now saying I don't love books, and I don't want more books in the world. I want so many more books in the world and I'm going to buy them all. And I will probably buy 10 today and pile books around me because that makes me feel safe and happy. However, for me, I just feel like that timeline doesn't work. I feel like there is this sense of urgency in the world and in my, you know, part of the world in higher education, working with teaching and learning, talking about trauma, ADHD, things like that. I feel the sense of urgency that the thought of saying to myself in the world, I have this great information that I think is so valuable to you, you'll get to read it in two years. I just don't feel right about that. Now, again, I'm gonna buy all your books this year, next year, two years from now. So if that's your path, please follow it. But I'm feeling like my path is to think about more immediate ways to share my ideas with the world, such as The ADHD Gallery.

Okay, everyone, that's a wrap for episode three. Thank you so much for making the time to listen today. I know that you have a lot of choices about what to give your attention to.



And it is an honor that you chose me and Rocky and the ADHD gallery. Your support means the world to me: please rate the podcast, share with your friends and colleagues. And of course, make sure to sign up for my email list by visiting theADHDgallery.com I hope this was helpful. I hope some of you will think about putting your words and ideas out into the world. Whether it's in a book or some other big project like a podcast or a newsletter, or something like a performance or things that haven't even been invented yet. We need your ideas. We need to imagine and create a new world. Thank you, friends.