

Writing and the Creative Life: The Magic of Ambient Noise

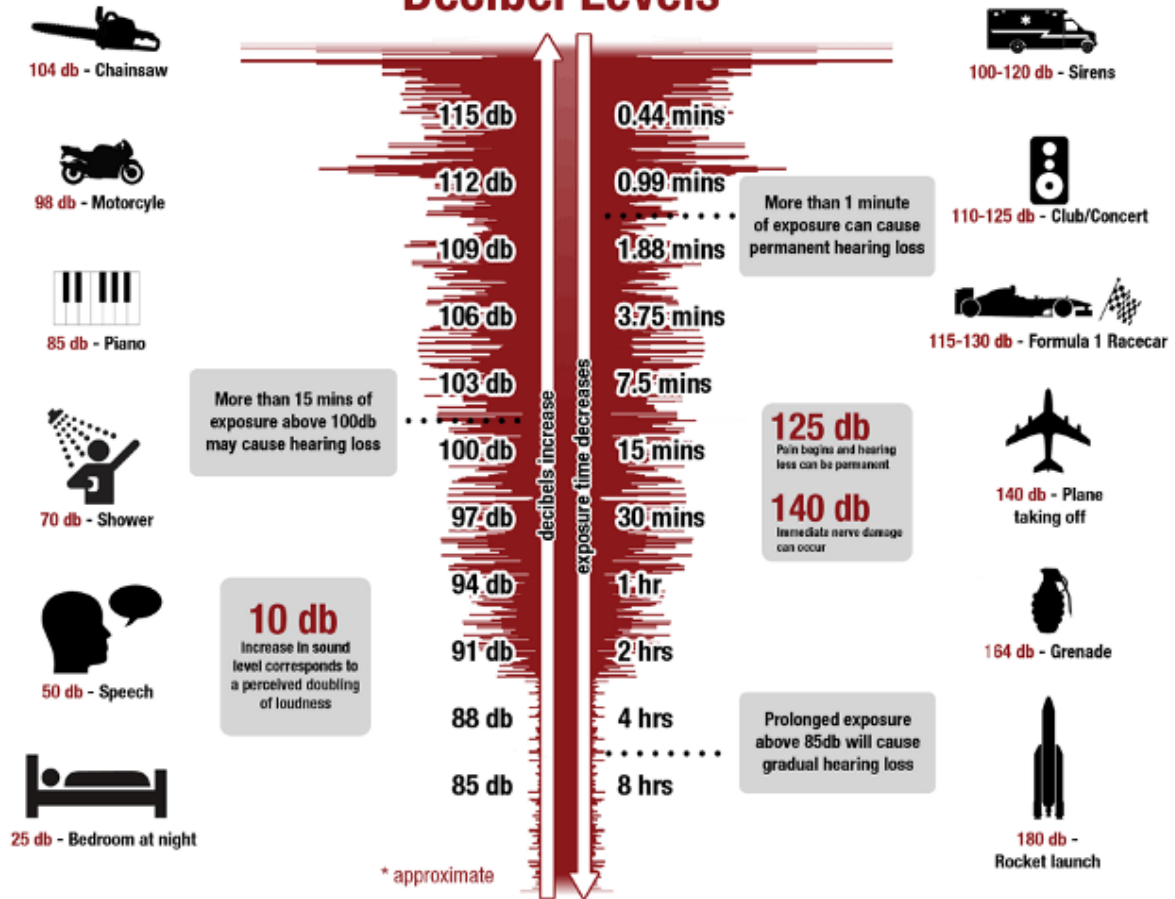
[Scott Myers](#)

There may be a decibel level of ambient noise to facilitate creative thought.



1 in 5 teens suffers from some degree of hearing loss.

Decibel Levels*



Signs of hearing loss in people:



Tinnitus (ringing, buzzing, hissing, or roaring in the ear)



Muffled hearing



Pus or fluid leaking from ear



Listening to music or TV at a higher volume than in the past



Ear pain, irritation, or itching



Difficulty distinguishing words that people are saying

sources: <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov> • <http://www.sonicelectronix.com> • <http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/hearing-loss-symptoms> <http://www.turnittothelleft.com/news/keymessagesandfacts.htm> • <http://www.infographicsshowcase.com/hearing-loss-statistics-infographic-hearing-facts>

70 decibels. Not 50 dBs. That's too low. Not 85 dBs. That's too high. Nope. 70 dBs of ambient noise appears to be just right when it comes to enhancing one's creativity.

That's the conclusion of this [study](#) as reported in the University of Chicago Press.

50 decibels or less isn't enough to heighten creativity.

85 decibels or more actually can inhibit creativity.

70 decibels is the magic number.

So we know that. But what *kind* of ambient noise?

I know a lot of you have the habit of transporting yourself and your laptop to the local coffee shop. Somehow the background noise of baristas in action, patron chatter, and obscure instrumental music over the sound system stimulates you to write, think, create.



Image for post

For a short New York Times video on the subject, go

[here](#). In it, they talk about a website called [Coffitivity](#).

Check it out. That's right, you don't need to go anywhere to revel in the inspirational tones of people talking and cups clinking, whiffs of virtual java wafting through your imagination.

Speaking of which, I hate working in coffee shops. I get distracted by conversations. All those people moving around distract me. The occasional hiss of the espresso machine. The inevitable crash of some klutz dropping a dish. Plus there's this.

I don't drink coffee.

So even if I mainlined caffeine, I would find zero creative inspiration inside a coffee shop.

But I do love ambient noise. The cleansing wash of white noise. Specifically rain.



I've got rain apps on my iPhone. My iPad. My MacBook Pro. My Mac Air. Strap on my Bose headphones, turn on my rain, and I am loaded for creative bear.

Seriously, when it *actually* rains, I will still sometimes run my rain app.

Here is a great site: [Simply Rain](#). You can control intensity, create oscillation, even add thunder if you'd like.

And be sure to aim smack dab for the 70 dB level.

Coffee shop. Rain. White noise. If you are having trouble concentrating or want to try an experiment to give your creativity a jolt, try the magic of ambient noise.

Writing and the Creative Life is a weekly series in which we explore creativity from the practical to the psychological, the latest in brain science to a spiritual take on the subject. Hopefully the more we understand about our creative self, the better we will become as writers. If you have any good reading material in this vein, please post in comments. If you have a particular observation you think readers will benefit from and you would like to explore in a guest post, email me.

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