

# Are you a 'push' writer or a 'pull' writer?

Do you do your best creative work when you're 'pushed'... or 'pulled'?

[Scott Myers](#)

The other day, I was out for a run. Well, at my age, it's more of a shuffle jog. I wind my way up the path I've frequented hundreds of times toward the loop around our neighborhood soccer fields, and as I turn the corner, I spot him: A runner in front of me!

There's something hard-wired in me, but when I see a runner up ahead, I immediately increase my pace. An involuntary reaction. It's kinda like greyhounds chasing the mechanical rabbit at a dog race:



Sure, my gait may transition from jog to canter, but the speed isn't the issue. It's the impulse to try to catch the dude ahead of me.

So I up my pace. And after about 200 yards, I see I'm falling further behind... and that dude is about 30 strapping years old... and he has tree stumps for leg muscles.

Rationality overcoming instinct, I grant myself an Old Guy Pass and downshift from second to first gear.

*Farewell, youthful rabbit! Meanwhile I, the tortoise, shall continue to plug along, lacking fleet feet, yet ever persistent. Because as the old story of the rabbit and the tortoise goes...*

Ah, screw that old story.

Anyhow I continue with my run, the only thing keeping me company my rhythmic wheezing breathing when I hear a sound. Two women. Laughing. Accompanied by the *thwack-thwack-thwack* of their feet hitting the track. Behind me.

Once again, instinct takes over. Only this response is different than the one I'd had only minutes before with Tree Stumps For Legs Dude. When I saw him, I raised my pace up a notch. Now knowing I had runners chasing me, I automatically lengthen my stride, alter my breathing pattern, and start pumping my arms.

I should tell you, this loop around the soccer fields is precisely .56M long. And the women joined the path nearly at the starting point of the loop. So as I'm gasping for breath, doing my approximation of a sprint, I realize I am committed to third gear for a full half-mile.

So here we are, these two women, who I had not seen, only having heard their voices and their happy feet behind me, and me, the old fart determined not to let them catch me. The thing is, as fast as I am staggering scooting along, I can tell the women are getting closer as I'm now able to make out their actual conversation.

*And he was like all pissed. And I was like, whatever.*

Oh, no. Young women. With all that young person stamina!

Long story short, I hang in there and 'beat' them, making it all the way around that half-mile loop with me holding them off down the home stretch. Then as I downshift, they pass me by without a care or thought. The whole thing is like a Zen experience: Was it really a race if the others were not conscious of it *being* in a race?

I try to process all of this as I head toward home and realize two things. First, after three decades of jogging, you'd think I'd be mature enough not to give into my instincts when seeing other runners. Who gives a flippety flip about any of that?

Then a second thought struck me: Isn't this a kind of metaphor for writing?

Writing a story is akin to a race. We keep running... and running... and running until [hopefully] we reach the finish line.



And Tree Stump Leg Dude? He's symbolic of writing goals. *I will write 5 pages today. I will finish this sequence by the weekend. I will get to THE END by the 15th.* He's up there, ahead of us, encouraging us to get there, hit those goals. That's fundamentally a positive motivator.

And the He Was Like Whatever Young Women? They are metaphors for Fear nipping at your heels. *Oh, crap, what if someone else is writing my exact story? What if I get writers block? What I discover my story doesn't work?* And that is a negative motivator.

The former would be a Pull Writer, one who is propelled by the *pull* of that goal up ahead.

The latter would be a Push Writer, one who is compelled by



the *push* of those fears behind.

Now it's interesting to me that with all my lists and calendars, constituting my daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and yearly goals, given my experiences on my run that day, perhaps I'm more of a Push Writer, rather than a Pull Writer. Understandable from a logical standpoint seeing as I have been [beaten to the starting gate](#) on projects I was writing or was set to write. Nothing like the looming dread of waking up to read Deadline where you see a story idea just like the one you're working on having sold.

But still there is that lizard brain instinct, more powerful for me when I'm being chased... than when I'm chasing something.

Anyway I'm curious if this idea — Pull Writer / Push Writer — has any resonance. What do you think? Make sense? If so, which kind are you more like?

I'm guessing, like myself, most writers have both dynamics at work, but even then, it could be intriguing to consider which one motivates you more strongly: The Pull of writing goals or the Push of competitive fears?

Whatever your answer, just be sure you use one, the other, both or anything else to keep pounding out pages and moving forward...

Just like me when I go for a run... er, lope.

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