Some thoughts/ideas to keep in mind:

Process

Learn what works for you — what kicks up your creative urge? What makes you anxious to sit down and write? Do you need daily goals? Weekly ones? Does tracking the number of words/sentences/pages make you crazy or does it keep you on track?

Figure out what works for you and follow it. Filter all advice through that filter. And if it doesn't work for you, toss it. There is no magic bullet.

Keeping that in mind, here's some advice for you. Use it or not — it's up to you!

Routine

Writing should become a routine for you. Whether it's daily or weekly, make it a part of your life. It's like exercising, or kissing your spouse before leaving the house, or fixing lunch for the kids — make it a part of your life. The only way to be a writer is to writer. The only way to do that is to make it a part of your life.

It's up to you to decide how *big* a part of your life it will be. I spend about 25-30% of my waking hours as a writer of fiction (either in writing, researching, promoting, or networking). That's an average. You decide how much it will occupy in your life. Obviously, the more time you have to devote to it, the easier it gets.

Self-Editing

You need to self-edit, but figure out when it's getting in the way and when it's helping. For example, don't sit down, look at your work, and say, "Oh, I should change that. If I change that, then I need to go back and change that, so…" That just stops your forward progress. Save most of your self-editing for the end.

There's a few things you should try to learn to do as you go along (see "Process," above — if this works for you, do it. If not, figure out some other way to incorporate this into your writing routine).

There's phases of editing you'll need to do.

Basics: plot, character, setting, conflict. Off the top of my head:

- Did you resolve all plot points? Did you answer all the questions that were raised?

- Were your characters consistent throughout the story? Did they maintain the deep basics of personality (ways of talking, acting, doing)? You expect them to change in some ways because of what happened, but certain basics should remain.

- Were your characters unique? I tend to have 2 male characters use the same phrases or move the same way. Each character is unique and should have unique ways of talking, acting, thinking. It's easy to differentiate male/female, but make sure you differentiate individual characters.

- Were the details about the setting consistent and truthful (did you do good research)? Did you add details about the weather, the other people around them, the appearance of stores or boats or airplanes?

- Conflict: is there internal and external conflict? Internal conflict is usually more interesting.

- Voice=your style. To define your voice, refine your writing.

- Details: do you have unique details? Think of 10 ways to describe a bar (dark, smoky, crowded, dingy). Now throw those out and jot down 10 more. Use *that* set of ten to describe it.

- Showing vs. telling: instead of writing *Emma was pissed off* write *Emma stomped into the room and slammed her book on the table. "I hate snow."*

- Another good way to play up the difference between characters is to show us how they view others: *Booker glanced at the woman. Her tight blouse and jeans highlighted her curves. She was padded in all the right places.* Or *Mitch glanced at the waitress. She looked too small to pick up such a heavy tray.*

- Maintain a tight point of view (POV). Write your scene in the 'head' of the person who has the most to lose. That gives the POV a lot of punch. Don't *head hop* within a scene: don't go from John's POV to Mary's in the same scene. This will force you to rewrite some scenes, but they'll be better for it. Yes, some authors head-hop and get away with it. When you sell a million copies of a book, you can head-hop, too.

- Did you resolve the conflict between your characters? If you didn't resolve it, did you leave the reader knowing *why i*t was unresolved? Will you resolve it in the next book?

Mechanics: here's some things to look out for that are strictly mechanical (technique):

- Check word usage & develop a list of unnecessary ones. I usually do a global search once I've finished the entire book. Sometimes I'll do it as I go along, but usually I wait. Here's some of mine:
  - a bit
  - had (change "He had an apple in his hand" to "He held an apple")
  - even
  - some

- o though
- o almost
- o really
- o that
- o was …ing (*She was standing at the rear of the room* to *She stood at the back*)
- o up, down, in, out, over, under
- o felt, saw, heard (instead of *I saw him leave the room* just *He left the room*. Or *It felt like ice on his face* to *Icy pellets rasped his skin*)

- Repetition. Look for repeated words. I often have two characters use the same phrase. People don't do this. They're unique. So develop unique ways for your characters to express themselves. Also avoid repetition in describing things: tall, short, thin, fat: find other ways to describe:

  I peered up at him. "How tall are you?" I demanded. I was five-foot-six and he was at least half-a-foot taller than me.

  His lips twitched. "Tall enough to see that cat behind you, wiggling its butt to jump."

  I whirled.

- Beware the Adverb. Just search for "ly" and see if you can find another way to phrase it. Instead of "He moved slowly, inch by inch" use "He inched his way through the bushes"

- If something doesn't feel right, read it out loud. That often will help you figure out where it's goofy.

- Check each scene: do you have at least one of the five senses used? Smell, touch, taste, sight, and sound. Make sure you don't use the same sense for the same character. I tend to have one character always see things & note it, another smell things. Shake it up. Make your characters & your senses well-rounded.

- Don't use narrative when dialog will do. If you can have characters talk & move the story forward, do it.

  Instead of:

  He thought about his brutal father and the bleak Christmas mornings the family spent, waiting for Dad to come home and yell at them.

  Try this:

  John's fists clenched as he stared at the sparkling Christmas lights. "I hated that son of a bitch for what he did to us."

Jane touched his arm. "Why? What did he do?"

"He ruined my childhood." He glanced at her then his tense jaw softened. "That won't happen with our kids. I promise."

- Shake up your sentence structure. If all of your sentences are short, toss in some long ones. Don't start every sentence with "She" or "He". Look for that (it's like repetition) — sometimes you need two in a row, but try to find ways to avoid it.
- Look at each phrase, each word: is it needed? Does it add to the plot, to the character, to the conflict?

Pace: check these things that can slow pacing

- Check and make sure you don't have digressions into long descriptions, etc. Make sure you're getting to the heart of the matter in each scene.
- Start scenes/chapters/the book with something that raises a question. Look through your chapters: what's the first line that raises a question in the reader's mind – a question that isn't answered immediately? That's where you start. The first page MUST raise questions and introduce a major conflict, otherwise no one will keep reading.

  Here's an opening line in one of my books (*Brilliant Disguise)*:

  Shannon Delgardie looked down into her husband's grave. *You asshole. If you weren't already dead, I'd kill you myself.*

- Start the book in the right place. You can't stand near a reader and say, "Oh, wait. It gets really good on page 2. Just read a few more paragraphs." Try this: go ahead and write your book. Then see if you can cut out the first few paragraphs. Can you move those somewhere else? If you can, you're not at the start of the book.