

12 Ways to Watch Less TV and Be More Creative



It's easy to understand the appeal of slobbing out in front of the television when you're exhausted at the end of a long day. We all need a little downtime. But TV can be parasitic: You turn it on because you feel too tired to do anything else—and that's it. Watching TV is not going to restore you. It is unlikely that you'll turn on the TV at 8:00 pm and then jump up an hour later saying "Great! Let's get to work on that watercolor painting!" TV is designed to hook you and keep you on your sofa.

The artist and author Keri Smith wrote on her [blog](#): "A few years ago I turned off the TV for good, not because I think TV is necessarily evil, but because I wanted to take back control of my time and what I put into my head. I wanted

to treat my mind as a sacred space, and begin to fill it with things that would help formulate new ideas, my imagination, and things that benefitted my life instead of taking away from it." Well said.

Let's say that you enjoy television, and it's a fairly regular part of the evening routine at your house. You might not want to get rid of TV altogether. You may be like most mothers, and feel like a vegetable by the time the kids are in bed. If so, try one of these 12 strategies.

- 1. Front-load a few moments of creative practice.** Tell yourself that you *will* watch TV, but first you're going to be creative for just 15 minutes. You may feel like what you produce is drivel, but that's OK. Being brilliant is not the point here. Just engage in creative practice. Write a few lines, draw a lousy sketch. Make some notes about an idea you had while doing the dishes. Simply do something. If you do this every night before vegetating, you may find that you don't want to stop after 15 minutes, or that your short creative stint generates a second wind. You may actually feel energized by the activity. Even if your energy level isn't affected, and you're still dog-tired and head for the couch, you'll feel great knowing that you did a little something important for yourself beforehand.
- 2. Move your body.** Do a little stretching—some yoga, Pilates, or calisthenics on the
- 3. Save it for later.** Use a DVR to record those shows you think you can't miss. Then use the time to read, talk to your spouse, call a friend, or anything else that appeals to you if you're too tired to be creative. You'll end up feeling less tired, and chances are, you'll end up forgetting to watch that "important" show anyway. And if you *do* want to watch the recording, you can fast-forward through the commercials, saving time and brain cells.

4. **Pump up the urgency.** Use a contest or other external deadline to lend you a sense of urgency. When you're working toward something and you don't have daytime hours to make it happen, evening time is suddenly an important resource. You'll get things done despite being tired—and once you're in the habit, you may even lose the fatigue.
5. **Go to sleep.** If you're really too tired to do anything you actually want to do, *go to bed*. You're tired! Chances are, you're not getting enough sleep anyway. It's really OK to go to bed at 8:30 if your body is shutting down. Get a good night's sleep and you'll wake up with lots more energy and creative bandwidth.
6. **Be selective.** Make a list of the three or four weekly shows that you really love, and decide to watch those and only those. Whatever you do, *do not channel surf*. When your favorite show is over, turn the TV off. If you have cable or satellite TV and pick up the clicker, you are guaranteed to be able to find *something* you feel like watching. Why waste your time staring at something you wouldn't even know you'd be missing, if you hadn't stumbled upon it by channel surfing?
7. **Turn on the radio.** Avoid turning the TV on as background noise or to keep you company, whether it's daytime or evening. Inane commercials pollute your mind, and you'll probably end up sitting down and watching something if you let the TV run. If you like the sound of voices, tune a radio to NPR. If you want something more soothing or mood boosting, put on some music.
8. **Surf the creative interwebs instead.** If you think you're just too brain dead to do anything else but stare at a screen, at least head to your computer—or use laptop while you're on the couch—and do something that is vaguely related to your creative interests. Surf the blogs of other writers or artists, collect images you like, read the news in your area of creative interest. Connect with an online community. Do something that feeds your pursuit. While it's still electronic, this activity is at least related to something that feeds you. If you're already regularly connected to the blogosphere, make sure it isn't cutting into your regular creative practice. Save surfing for the evening, or for whatever time of day you're at your lowest energy level. If you're doing research for a book or other project, cap the amount of time you spend researching so that you don't pour it *all* down the internet drain.
9. **Check in with your Big Picture.** Before you plop down on the couch tonight, read your mission statement, if you have one. Is watching TV every night part of what you're here to do? If you were to die tomorrow, would this be the way to spend your last evening?
10. **Fake it 'til you make it.** Pretend for one evening that you are an exceptionally driven artist. Pretend that you are one of those women who aren't tempted by TV and have a lot of energy. Pretend you don't have a TV. Just try it. The results may be addicting—more addicting than the TV.
11. **Use your hands.** If you're going to be camping out on the couch for a while, you might as well do something creative with your hands. Try knitting, needlepoint, crochet, embroidery, etc. The physical movement of these activities is soothing. They're not hard to learn; if you don't yet know a needlecraft, you probably have a friend who would be happy to get you started.
12. **Create an ally.** If you have a spouse or partner who is a serious TV watcher, he or she may feel abandoned if you suddenly start doing something else every night. Explain what you're trying to do. So long as you aren't abruptly and completely removing yourself from an established routine without any discussion, you may find more support for your creative interests than you'd anticipated. If not, keep at it. Over time, you'll find a way to manage both needs.