

87 In his book Paper: An Elegy, Ian Sansom ~~makes~~ a point that strikes ~~me as really profound~~

me as being really profound, as well as funny:

"The ultimate goal of all technological development seems to be a paper-like device on which information can not only be accessed, sent and read, but also marked up in a paper-like way."

Allow me to introduce a solution: paper. Actual paper.

(Pause.)

(There are no square brackets on this machine. Please accept round ones instead.)

(Pause continues.)

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Something interesting occurred to me just now.

I had the frisson that comes from realising that I have made it all the way down to this part of the page. You don't get that on a computer because every page goes on, essentially, forever.

The reason this excites me is because it reminds me that every format imposes specific considerations on the writer. And thank goodness for that, because the restraints are precisely what give us a container for our creativity: some kind of edge to push against.

This book I am writing, about How To Write, will be full of examples of these freedom-giving restraints. Without a restraint, when absolutely everything is possible, the prospect is overwhelming, and we shut down, give up.

One restraint might be a shortage of paper. Another, on which like ~~me~~ Burgess I built a career in journalism, is the shortage of time.

Nothing focuses the mind like a deadline.