

Setting and Accomplishing Writing Goals

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Okay, you really want to write, edit, and publish a book in the coming months. Good! The first (and most important) thing you need is the desire to accomplish this goal.

But will that desire still be this strong tomorrow? Or next week? Or next month? Who knows. This is why it's important to set realistic goals and understand how to actually achieve them.

Step #1: Define your writing project

- You've probably already done this, but...
- A novel? A memoir? A novella? A collection of short stories? Whatever.
- How many words? Usually, authors set a target word count before beginning. Of course, it may grow or shrink as you progress through the writing, but you still should start with a target number of words.
- How will it be structured? Chapters? A collection of short stories?

Example: A novella (15,000 to 20,000 words) that will be a prequel for my current series, to be used as a reader magnet.

Step #2: Set a finishing date for the first draft

- You first need to set a target finishing date, and it must be within the realm of possibility for *you*.
- However, you still want to push yourself at least a little bit. After all, this is how we get better at something, right?

Example: I'm will finish writing the first daft of my novella by April 18 (eight weeks).

- For *me*, this is realistic. In my current situation (including other projects I am working on, travel plans, family commitments, etc.), I should be able to do this.

Easy, right? Once you've set this date, move on to Step #3.

Step #3: Decide what type of *measurable* incremental goals you'll use

- The key word here is *measurable*.
- For something to be measurable, you must be able to determine with confidence that you have completed the goal.
- The obvious choice is to use incremental *word count* goals. Easy to measure.
- But some authors don't like counting words...
- Instead, you could use chapters. Or short stories. Or scenes (page counts are irrelevant because this changes with formatting and fonts... but that doesn't mean you cannot use page count as incremental goals if you want to).
- You could also create incremental goals based on *quality* (as long as they are still quantifiable). Examples might be: *Write chapter four, then rewrite chapter 4 to make it more emotionally powerful*. These two goals are still measurable, even though the second one is quality rather than quantity.

Example: I am going to use word counts for my incremental goals.

Step #4: Incremental goals divided by weeks (or days)

Examples:

25,000 words ÷ 8 weeks = 3,125 words per week

Or... if I want to work on this project only two days per week (so I can work on other projects):

25,000 words ÷ 16 days = 1,562 words per day, two days per week.

Or...

8 chapters ÷ 8 weeks = 1 chapter per week

Or...

8 chapters + 8 chapter rewrites = 16. 16 ÷ 8 weeks = 1 chapter and 1 chapter rewrite per week.

These incremental goals don't seem so bad, right?

Now, ask yourself: How long does it take me to write 1,000 words?

If you're just starting out, this might be difficult to answer, but it's a useful estimate to know.

To get your estimate, come up with a writing prompt, then write until you hit 1,000 words. How long did it take?

Keep in mind that authors usually write faster if they outline the story first..

Example: I can usually write 1,000 good words in about three hours.

Now, ask yourself: Is my overall target date realistic?

Example:

From above, I'm going to use: 25,000 words ÷ 16 days = 1,562 words per day, two days per week.

Yes, I can write 1,562 words per day, two days per week between now and April 18 (8 weeks).

This would be 4.5 hours of writing, two days per week.

I typically write at least 6 hours per day most days, so I know this will fit within my current lifestyle.

Now, ask yourself: Does my target date intuitively sit right with me?

If you feel uneasiness in your gut about your target date, your subconscious might be telling you you've set the bar too high. There's no shame in lowering it.

Example: My past writing experience makes me comfortable with my target date.

Step #5: Schedule your writing time

This is critical. Scheduling your writing time—and keeping those appointments—is the foundation of writing discipline. Therefore, it is the key to success.

If you miss a writing session (it happens... because life happens), immediately reschedule that session to make up the missed time (without pushing your next scheduled session forward).

Example: For eight weeks, I will work on my novella from 7:00 AM to noon each Wednesday and Thursday. The two consecutive days will help with flow. If I miss a scheduled session, I will either reschedule it for the same afternoon, or I'll reschedule it for the next day.

THAT is an actionable plan!

REMEMBER: A book is written one hour at a time. Focus on small, achievable, incremental goals. This makes the task seem less overwhelming.

Step #6: Set up additional strategies for success

Ask a specific person to read your book *as you write it*.

Your best friend. Your boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, or wife. Your mom or dad. Someone from your writing group.

Send this person what you have written on a specific day, at a specific time, each week.

Stick with this schedule, and tell your reader to send you a scathing insult (or whatever) if you miss a deadline.

Establish a way to report your word count each day you're scheduled to write.

Either visible just to you, or visible to a wider audience (as an additional incentive).

Example: William Schlichter posts his word count on Facebook every day.

Example: I track my word count in Scrivener (my writing app).

Example: Share your cumulative word count with your writing group at each meeting.

Establish a reward for yourself for each week you complete your incremental goals.

Example: Binge six episodes in a row of The Walking Dead (or whatever show floats your boat).

Example: Treat yourself to a Casey's apple fritter (this works for me!).

And have an even better reward for when you finish the entire draft!

Establish a corrective strategy for when you fail to meet a week's goals.

Example: Read a few chapters of a motivational writing book, or listen to a few good writing podcasts.

Put all these events and deadlines in your Google Calendar!

Set up a specific calendar with a specific color for all the reminders related to this project.

Set alerts for each event.