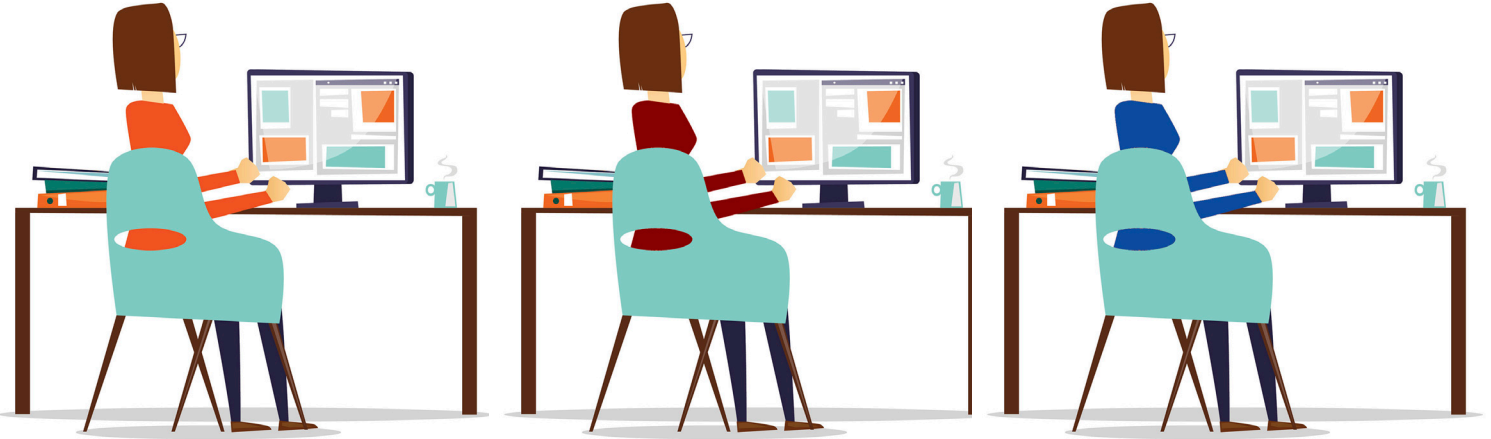


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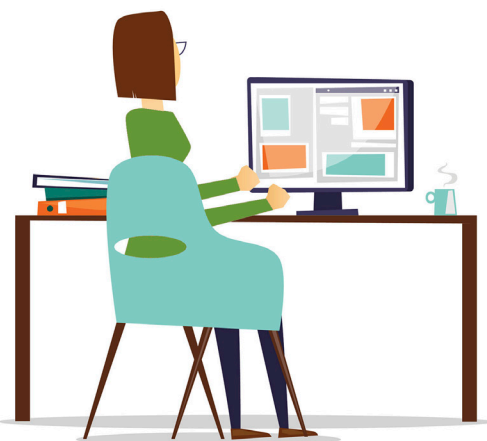
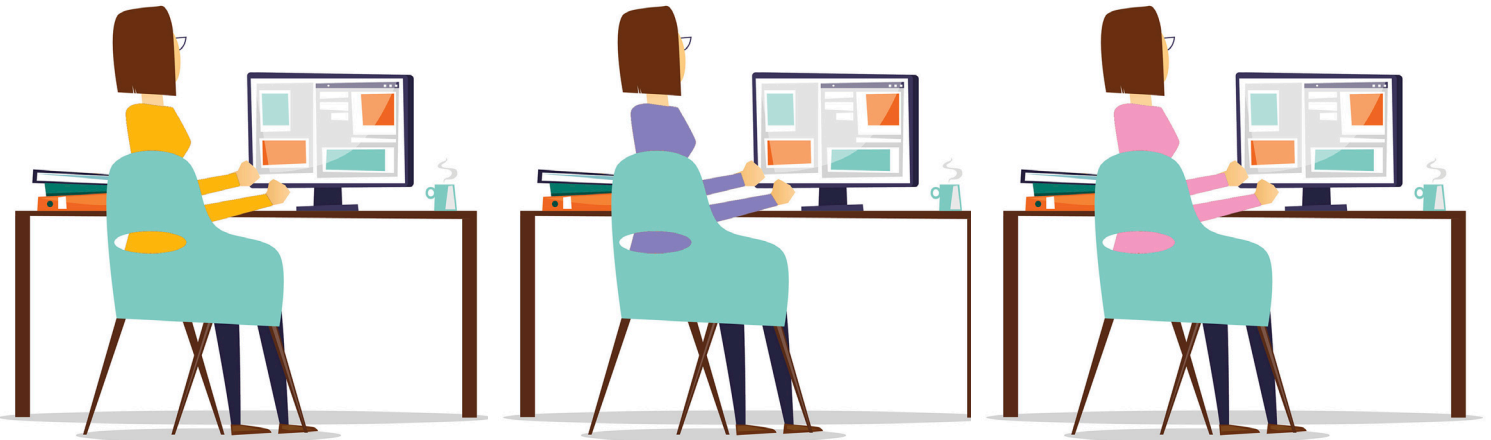


The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

# WRITEON!



# DISCIPLINE



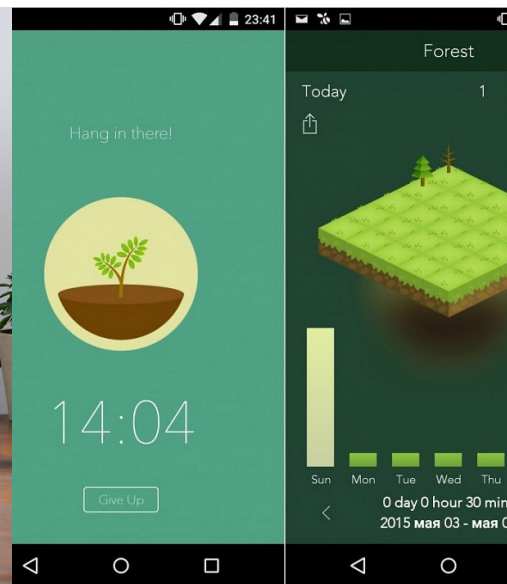
**HABIT AS THE PATH TO DISCIPLINE**

**ACCOUNTABILITY:  
THE UNSEXIEST WORD IN WRITING**

**THE DISCIPLINE TO  
REACH YOUR DREAMS**

**APPS & HACKS TO STAY ON TRACK**

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### WRITE FOR WRITE ON!

You love reading *Write ON!* Now write for it! If you're interested in being a *Write ON!* contributor, pitch your one-time feature articles (2,000 words) or your regular column idea (750-1,000 words) to Features Editor Cara Achterberg at [carasueachterberg@gmail.com](mailto:carasueachterberg@gmail.com).

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

---

If I'm being totally honest with myself (and all of you), I'm really good at taking care of things for other people, but honoring commitments to myself? To my own work? Well, those aren't quite as easy.

Several years ago, I heard a story about a couple who were vacationing in Hawaii. They were playing in the ocean, swimming around, enjoying everything one can expect from a tropical vacation, and then decided it was time to head back. They turned around and realized they were much, much further from the shore than they'd thought they were. It hadn't been intentional, it hadn't been noticeable, but the distance was there all the same. They'd allowed themselves to forget about the little things, to assume they didn't need to check in on where they were, and they drifted.

I think this is true for many of us. We get caught up in work and family and friends and community. All really great things. But then we try to return to our craft, to our writing, even to ourselves and we discover that we are a lot further away than we thought.

I'll never say you have to write every day. I'm not saying you have to write a certain number of words per week. But I would say that putting together a regular system that allows you to keep track of the writing shore, that reminds you to look back and pay attention regularly, is a key to success in anything.

There are many of our members who stay grounded with their writing because they practice the professionalism of honoring deadlines. For these WFWAers, developing the discipline to stay on track with their writing provides additional motivation. The kind of drift that often appears with these members (and really, for many of us) is that of self-care. We lose our discipline to nurture and listen to the body and mind that makes it possible for the stories to come forth. While pajamas make an excellent writing uniform, it's true that diet, exercise, and mental wellness are all things that we can cast aside easily and then realize quite later that we have drifted.

Whatever way the drift has shown up in your life lately, it is absolutely possible to get back on track. But just like the couple who were in the ocean, it's going to take work. They had to swim and swim before finally setting foot back on land. Deciding to adopt a new writing or self-care habit will take time, and we need to allow ourselves to do the necessary revisions, to try again, to keep striving toward the best edit of ourselves.

In this issue, we have some tips and tools to provide support, and would like to remind everyone that you are not swimming alone. WFWA is a powerful community ready to help and support, a collective entity passionate about serving as your anchor while you negotiate the ocean of writing.



Tasha Seegmiller  
WFWA President



**THERE ARE MANY OF OUR MEMBERS WHO STAY GROUNDED WITH THEIR WRITING BECAUSE THEY PRACTICE THE PROFESSIONALISM OF HONORING DEADLINES. ... THE KIND OF DRIFT THAT OFTEN APPEARS WITH THESE MEMBERS (AND REALLY, FOR MANY OF US) IS THAT OF SELF-CARE. WE LOSE OUR DISCIPLINE TO NURTURE AND LISTEN TO THE BODY AND MIND THAT MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR THE STORIES TO COME FORTH.**

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## ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for writers of women's fiction. The publishing industry is morphing—with new opportunities and, as yet, unknown futures. The founders of the Women's Fiction Writers Association wanted somewhere to amass and disseminate information to and about our chosen genre.

Defining women's fiction has proven as subjective as the types of books we read. For that reason, our guiding statement is broad and comprehensive: Stories that are driven by the main character's emotional journey. Our stories may have romance. Or they may not. They could be contemporary. Or historical. But what binds us together is the focus on a main character's emotional journey.



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Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to: [membership@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:membership@womensfictionwriters.org)

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### LIKE WHAT YOU'VE READ IN WRITE ON?

Send us a letter! We'd love to hear your feedback and reactions on the stories and features. Email them to [writeon@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:writeon@womensfictionwriters.org). Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

## STAFF

### FEATURES EDITOR

**Cara Sue Achterberg** is a novelist, blogger, creative writing teacher, and rescue dog foster mom who lives on a hillside farm in New Freedom, Pennsylvania with her family and far too many animals. She is the author of *I'm Not Her*, *Girls' Weekend*, and *Practicing Normal*. Her memoir, *Another Good Dog: one family and fifty foster dogs*, was released in August from Pegasus Press. For more information, blog links, and plenty of puppy pictures, visit [www.CaraWrites.com](http://www.CaraWrites.com)



### COPY EDITOR

**Sara Dahmen** is a metalsmith of vintage and modern cookware in tin, copper, and iron. Her debut novel, *Widow 1881*, inspired her Port Washington company, House Copper & Cookware. She has published over 100 articles as a contributing editor, has written for *Edible* and *Root + Bone*, among others, and spoke at TEDx Rapid City. When not sewing authentic clothing for 1830's reenactments, she can be found hitting tin and copper at her apprenticeship with a master smith, reading the *Economist* and reference books, brainstorming with her husband, or playing with her three young children.



### CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**Patricia Friedrich** is Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge, 2016), the award-winning *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-compulsive Disorder* (Palgrave, 2015), and several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.



### LAYOUT EDITOR

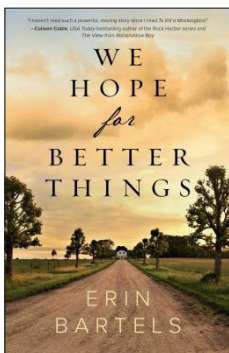
**Sheri Taylor-Emery** is an art director who longs to be a novelist. She's still in awe that her *Rising Star* manuscript, *The Fifty-Week Wife*, landed her a fabulous agent. When she's not grinding her teeth from stress, she's rejoicing in seeing her son and daughter turn into amazing young adults, working at a dog rescue once a week, and corralling a one-eyed dog and four cats at home. She lives with her husband outside of Atlanta. She's repped by Carly Watters of P.S. Literary. Vist her at [writeonsister.net](http://writeonsister.net)





## MEMBER RELEASES

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### ERIN BARTELS

#### *We Hope for Better Things*

1/1/19

When Detroit Free Press reporter Elizabeth Balsam meets James Rich, his strange request—that she look up a relative she didn't know she had in order to deliver an old camera and a box of photos—seems like it isn't worth her time. But when she loses her job after a botched investigation, she suddenly finds herself with nothing but time. At her great-aunt's 150-year-old farmhouse, Elizabeth uncovers a series of mysterious items, locked doors, and hidden graves. As she searches for answers to the riddles around her, the remarkable stories of two women who lived in this very house emerge as testaments to love, resilience, and courage in the face of war, racism, and misunderstanding. And as Elizabeth soon discovers, the past is never as past as we might like to think. Debut novelist Erin Bartels takes readers on an emotional journey through time—from the volatile streets of 1960s Detroit to the Underground Railroad during the Civil War—to uncover the past, confront the seeds of hatred, and discover where love goes to hide.



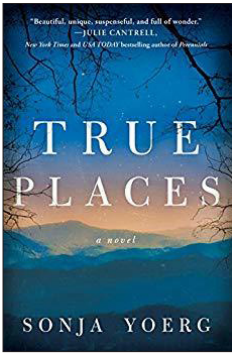
### LILY IONA MACKENZIE

#### *Freefall: A Divine Comedy*

1/1/19

Tillie Bloom, a wacky installation artist, reconnects with three former friends, from the late '50s and early '60s, in a four-day reunion at Whistler, B.C. Their renewed intimacy prompts them to celebrate their approaching sixtieth birthdays together in Venice, Italy. Secrets surface, their stories binding them closer together. Each woman's life has taken a different direction. Tillie and Daddy have both moved to the States from Canada, where Tillie has given herself over to art. Daddy—once a radical feminist/hippie and now a lesbian—has turned into a successful real estate saleswoman. Moll, tres sportif, a housewife and mother of three, spends her free time exploring the Canadian outdoors. Sibyl—also married and a shrewd bookkeeper addicted to 4000-piece jigsaw puzzles, cigarettes, and wine—has a cabin in Whistler, a home in Vancouver, and a flat in Venice. While Sibyl, Moll, and Daddy assume they're in Venice to vacation and deepen their relationships, Tillie has a hidden agenda: she intends to crash the Biennale, an art extravaganza scheduled every other year, hoping to find a larger audience for her art. A humorous yet serious meditation on the relationship between art and mortality, *Freefall: a Divine Comedy* taps into the rich underground springs that feed all of our lives, suggesting that death is more complex than we normally believe—darkness and death being the source of life and not just the end. It also celebrates the imagination.

## MEMBER RELEASES



### SONJA YOERG

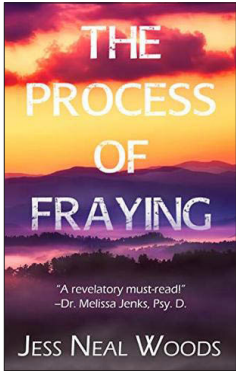
#### *True Places*

1/1/19

A girl emerges from the woods, starved, ill, and alone...and collapses.

Suzanne Blakemore hurtles along the Blue Ridge Parkway, away from her overscheduled and completely normal life, and encounters the girl. As Suzanne rushes her to the hospital, she never imagines how the encounter will change her—a change she both fears and desperately needs.

Suzanne has the perfect house, a successful husband, and a thriving family. But beneath the veneer of an ideal life, her daughter is rebelling, her son is withdrawing, her husband is oblivious to it all, and Suzanne is increasingly unsure of her place in the world. After her discovery of the ethereal sixteen-year-old who has never experienced civilization, Suzanne is compelled to invite Iris into her family's life and all its apparent privileges. But Iris has an independence, a love of solitude, and a discomfort with materialism that contrasts with everything the Blakemores stand for—qualities that awaken in Suzanne first a fascination, then a longing. Now Suzanne can't help but wonder: Is she destined to save Iris, or is Iris the one who will save her?



### JESS NEAL WOODS

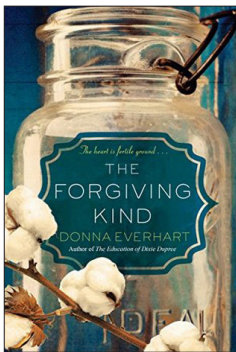
#### *The Process of Fraying*

1/7/19

Violet is a pillar of hospitality and compassion within her community. As a farmer's wife and mother of a large brood, she is resolute, thrifty, and charming. The life that is woven between the land and her family is one of harmony and beauty.

When she begins to struggle with depression, her demeanor changes. At first, the change is subtle, but it becomes increasingly problematic as Violet struggles with bouts of incapacitating depression and anxiety and visions of self-harm. A candle flame offers a way to feel, even if it is the pain of a burn. Her beloved creek becomes ominous as it beckons to her. Having no real understanding of what is happening within her, Violet turns to both the religious and medical communities for guidance. Both fail her. With her identity stripped away and her family reeling from the aftermath, Violet must determine if she can make peace with the changes within herself before she is consumed by them.

The Process of Fraying is a historical family drama that explores the social, religious, and medical stigmas surrounding mental health in the 1940s.



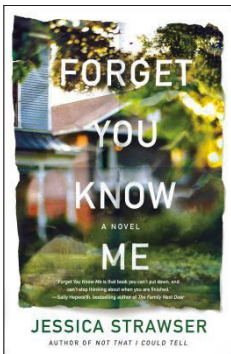
### DONNA EVERHART

#### *The Forgiving Kind*

1/29/19

In this masterful new novel, set in 1950s North Carolina, the acclaimed author of *The Road to Bittersweet* and *The Education of Dixie Dupree* brings to life an unforgettable young heroine and a moving story of family love tested to its limits. For twelve-year-old Martha “Sonny” Creech, there is no place more beautiful than her family's cotton farm. She, her two brothers, and her parents work hard on their land—hoeing, planting, picking—but only Sonny loves the rich, dark earth the way her father does. When a tragic accident claims his life, her stricken family struggles to fend off ruin—until their rich, reclusive neighbor offers to help finance that year's cotton crop. Sonny is dismayed when her mama accepts Frank Fowler's offer; even more so when Sonny's best friend, Daniel, points out that the man has ulterior motives. Sonny has a talent for divining water—an ability she shared with her father and earns her the hated nickname “water witch” in school. But uncanny as that skill may be, it won't be enough to offset Mr. Fowler's disturbing influence in her world. Even her bond with Daniel begins to collapse under the weight of Mr. Fowler's bigoted taunts. Though she tries to bury her misgivings for the sake of her mama's happiness, Sonny doesn't need a willow branch to divine that a reckoning is coming, bringing with it heartache, violence—and perhaps, a fitting and surprising measure of justice.

## MEMBER RELEASES



### JESSICA STRAWSER

*Forget You Know Me*

2/5/19

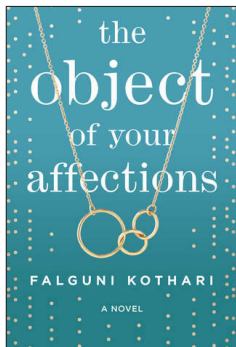
When a video call between friends captures a shocking incident no one was supposed to see, the secrets it exposes threaten to change their lives forever.

Molly and Liza have always been enviably close. Even after Molly married Daniel, the couple considered Liza an honorary family member. But after Liza moved away, things grew more strained than anyone wanted to admit—in the friendship and the marriage.

When Daniel goes away on business, Molly and Liza plan to reconnect with a nice long video chat after the kids are in bed. But then Molly leaves the room to check on a crying child. What Liza sees next will change everything. Only one thing is certain: Molly needs her. Liza drives all night to be at Molly's side—but when she arrives, the reception is icy, leaving Liza baffled and hurt. She knows there's no denying what she saw. Or is there?

In disbelief that their friendship could really be over, Liza is unaware she's about to have a near miss of her own. And Molly, refusing to deal with what's happened, won't turn to Daniel, either. But none of them can go on pretending. Not after this.

Jessica Strawser's *Forget You Know Me* is a "twisty, emotionally complex, powder keg of a tale" (bestselling author Emily Carpenter) about the wounds of people who've grown apart. Best friends, separated by miles. Spouses, hardened by neglect. A mother, isolated by pain. One moment will change things for them all.



### FALGUNI KOTHARI

*The Object of Your Affections*

2/19/19

Two best friends rewrite the rules of friendship, love and family...and change everything they thought they knew about motherhood. Paris Kahn Fraser has it all—a successful career as an assistant district attorney, a beautiful home in New York City, and a handsome, passionate husband who chose her over having a family of his own. Neal's dream of fatherhood might have been the only shadow in their otherwise happy life...until Paris's best friend comes to town. Naira Dalmia never thought she'd be a widow before thirty. Left reeling in the aftermath of her husband's death, all she wants is to start over. She trades Mumbai for New York, and rigid family expectations for the open acceptance of her best friend. After all, there isn't anything she and Paris wouldn't do for each other. But when Paris asks Naira to be their surrogate, they'll learn if their friendship has what it takes to defy society, their families and even their own biology as these two best friends embark on a journey that will change their lives forever. Wry, daring and utterly absorbing, *The Object of Your Affections* is an unforgettable story about two women challenging the norms...and the magic that happens when we choose to forge our own path.

If you have a women's fFiction novel being published in the next quarter (April, May, June) and would like *Write On!* to feature it, please [fill out the submission form here](#).

# Habit as the Path to Discipline

By Barbara O'Neal

Writing a novel requires discipline. We all know that.

But I have a confession: discipline always sounds hard to me, something that's going to be unpleasant and challenging and probably impossible. It sounds like I'll have to give up everything that's fun and focus on all the things that challenge me.

Not true, of course. When I consider what I have to do to get my work done, it doesn't mean giving up lunch with friends now and then, it means staying off the internet, not wasting time with social media, and watching only one episode of a series instead of binging the entire thing.

I am the personality type that Gretchen Rubin calls a Rebel. If anyone tells me what to do, even if I tell me what to do, I resist and undermine at every opportunity.

The only way I can make discipline work is to create good habits.



## **HABITS ARE THE CORNERSTONE OF ALL GREAT DISCIPLINE.**

When you read success stories, whether they're about mountain climbers or weight loss or creating vast empires, you will always find habit at the center of them. A mountain climber trains at regular intervals and pushes her body to adapt to the challenges. Successful weight loss winners figure out a strategy that works for their bodies, and then carry out those methods consistently for as long as it takes. Empire builders like Steve Jobs famously wear the same clothes day in, day out, which might not seem so much like discipline and more like eccentricity until you realize they do it so they don't have to make a decision. They don't have to think about what to wear, which frees their minds to consider something else.

Writing a single novel requires making tens of thousands of decisions, maybe even millions. Every single word you commit to writing down, every punctuation mark, every chapter or scene break, all require a decision. Every piece of clothing, every shift in action, every table setting and character tic and accent and surprise, every touch, every tear, every choice anyone in the entire world makes is a selection. Everything in a novel is a decision.

It doesn't feel that way, thank goodness. A lot of it feels like it's just happening naturally as you drive the kids to school or sit in a boring meeting or hear a song on the radio. Your writer brain is designed to assemble and arrange events and ideas that way.

But trust me, you are making decisions. That's one of the reasons that a long writing day feels so very, very exhausting. You've made ten thousand decisions over the course of that session.

## **DECISION FATIGUE IS AN ACTUAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STAGE.**

According to Wikipedia, it's defined as the "deteriorating quality of decisions made by an individual after a long session of decision-making."

This is why people often eat unhealthy foods in the evening, rather than at breakfast. Grocery stores take advantage of it by putting impulse buys near the register (think about how many decisions you make in the grocery store!).

## FEATURE

Steve Jobs knew that he only had a limited number of decisions he could make in a day before he'd fall to the drag of decision fatigue, so he created habits that removed all thinking from repetitive tasks like getting dressed and deciding what to eat.

In my own life, decision fatigue after writing means that I can't think of what to cook at the end of the day, so one of my habits is to decide what will be for dinner right after breakfast, when I'm fresh. I also try to make monthly menu plans so that I have what I need on hand. If I don't have both a plan for the meal and all the ingredients, I will fall to decision fatigue and feel both exhausted and irritated that I won't have a good meal after such a long day.

To design a day that allows me to do my writing consistently, I've created habits. I don't want to always wear a black turtleneck and jeans, but I'm okay with a variety of pretty tunics and leggings and black socks to keep my feet warm. I do eat the same meal for breakfast on writing days: hot muesli and vegetarian or chicken sausages.

I walk the dogs after breakfast, usually 30-40 minutes. Sometimes, I frankly don't want to do this. It feels like I need to get to work, right now. But walking that couple of miles every morning, breathing fresh air and getting my blood going, is good for both my body and the work, so I do it. It's a habit.

I'm always glad I did it.

When I get home, I make a cup of tea or coffee and carry it to my work station in my office upstairs. This signals to my brain that it's time to get down to business. I turn off social media because I really can waste hours and hours there, and it feels like working because I'm sitting at my computer typing words.

### **IT'S NOT WORKING AND I KNOW IT. SO DO YOU.**

I use Freedom to lock myself out for a couple of hours. My uncle was a psychologist who specialized in creating systems of efficiency for businesses and he told me that the brain likes blocks of time. Ninety minutes of deep focus is about what most brains like, he said, but I like a bit longer—100 to 110 minutes is good.

I set a timer on my phone. I write the start time in a log I keep every day.

And then, I begin. Until that timer goes off, I'm not allowed to do anything but write. It's acceptable to take one minute (and I do mean one) to look up a fact on the internet, but then I have to get back to it. If I'm having a hard day with words, I will find myself spending much longer than a minute or two tracking down facts, and at that point, I will use Freedom to also lock me out of the rest of the internet for the established time.

Which leaves me stuck with the writing. Which is something I love, even if it's hard sometimes. If I stick with it, most of the time, I'll find a way into the work.

Sometimes I don't, and at the end of the block, I give myself permission to do something else. Research or reading. My uncle also used to say that you should know when you're just spinning your wheels. Don't sit there and spin—find another way to use your time. Fill the well, have lunch with a friend, spend time with a child or aging parent. Whatever.

### **HABITS FORM A FRAMEWORK SO THERE'S SPACE FOR YOUR WORK.**

Habits circumvent the rebellious impulse to do something else. For rule followers, habits are a shiny tool of productivity.

What do your writing habits look like now? If you know, that's great. If you don't, keep a log of your writing time, how much you write, what circumstances surround you. If you haven't read Rachel Aaron's blog on how she doubled her word count, I highly recommend her system of tracking this information. Once you know what works best for you, it's easier to create habits and routines that help support it. If you work best at coffee shops during the afternoon hours, prioritize that time for writing. If you know, like me, that you work best if you get some fresh air, arrange your life so that you can get that walk.



**MY UNCLE WAS A PSYCHOLOGIST WHO SPECIALIZED IN CREATING SYSTEMS OF EFFICIENCY FOR BUSINESSES AND HE TOLD ME THAT THE BRAIN LIKES BLOCKS OF TIME. NINETY MINUTES OF DEEP FOCUS IS ABOUT WHAT MOST BRAINS LIKE, HE SAID, BUT I LIKE A BIT LONGER—100 TO 110 MINUTES IS GOOD.**

## FEATURE

I can feel some of you resisting, coming up with reasons this just won't work for you. You have day job, or children, or aging parents, or an illness.

All the more reason to do your best to create structure. This is your life, after all. You're the only one who can fill it with the things you want. No one is going to come into your world and magically create Writing Time for Your Novel. You have to do it.

Examine your daily routine for places you might be able to create habits that will remove the need to make a decision. What parts of your day demand the highest number of decisions? Often it's morning, when you have breakfast, dressing, choices for children or spouses, plans for the days. Maybe you are required to do the shopping for a family, or you have a high-decision period at your job. If you don't know what times of day are the worst, notice when your stress levels are the highest and you'll have a good idea.

Once you have that information, see if there are a few choices you can streamline by making habits to off-load the decision making. Do low-priority decision-making at night, when you're out of steam anyway. Making lunches for your children might be something that could be done then, for example. You can decide on what to wear in the morning, or plan some other ordinary human task.

Another trick is to group stressful tasks together in a single session. For example, I take the first Sunday afternoon of the month to plan the coming weeks. I write down everything that needs to get done, including work and home, friends and health. I plan meals, make a grocery list, and then do the actual shopping.

Then, again on Sunday afternoons for the sake of habit, I plan each week. I note what the weather will be, write out the meals I have in mind, notice what kind of writing load I'm looking at.

Just those two habits save countless decisions—and hours—over the course of a month. I'm not rigid about it; if I change my mind or want to do something else, I can. It's just that by giving myself the luxury of making a bunch of decisions all during a stretch of time that I'm not writing, I give myself the luxury of stress-free time for writing, the thing that I love.

### ONE LAST THING.

Make a habit of doing the most important thing first. We often choose the easiest thing, but because of all the reasons I've just listed, it's far more important to get the important thing done. Do your writing before you do social media, before you call your writing buddy, before you answer email. Make it your habit to take your goals and yourself seriously. The reward will be more and better work.



**EXAMINE YOUR DAILY ROUTINE FOR PLACES YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO CREATE HABITS THAT WILL REMOVE THE NEED TO MAKE A DECISION. WHAT PARTS OF YOUR DAY DEMAND THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF DECISIONS? ... IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TIMES OF DAY ARE THE WORST, NOTICE WHEN YOUR STRESS LEVELS ARE THE HIGHEST AND YOU'LL HAVE A GOOD IDEA.**

---



**BARBARA O'NEAL** is WFWA's 2019 Guiding Scribe. She is the author of eleven novels of women's fiction, including *How to Bake a Perfect Life* and *The Lost Recipe for Happiness*. Her award-winning books have been published in more than a dozen countries, including France, England, Poland, Australia, Turkey, Italy, Germany, and Brazil. She lives in the beautiful city of Colorado Springs with her beloved, a British endurance athlete who vows he'll never lose his accent.

# SPLIT INFINITIVES

The infinitive is the most basic form of a verb, the one used when it is not attached to a subject or a verbal tense. In the sentence, *He travelled to see her*, the verb to see is in its infinitive form.

When a verb is in its infinitive form, it does not receive any endings such as -s, -ed, or -ing. A verb in its infinitive form can be used as another grammatical category, such as in the position of a subject, and, therefore, as a noun:

■ e.g. **To visit London is to fall in love.**  
(Where the subject is to visit London)

Prescriptive grammar establishes that one should not split an infinitive by placing, for example, an adverb between the particle to and the verbal portion of the infinitive.

Therefore,

■ e.g. **He worked to quickly remove the stain from his shirt**

is considered a split infinitive and prescriptively wrong. However, the form occurs often enough in informal speech, and it is up to a writer to decide where its use is appropriate.

Prescriptive grammar would dictate (for those interested in following it) that

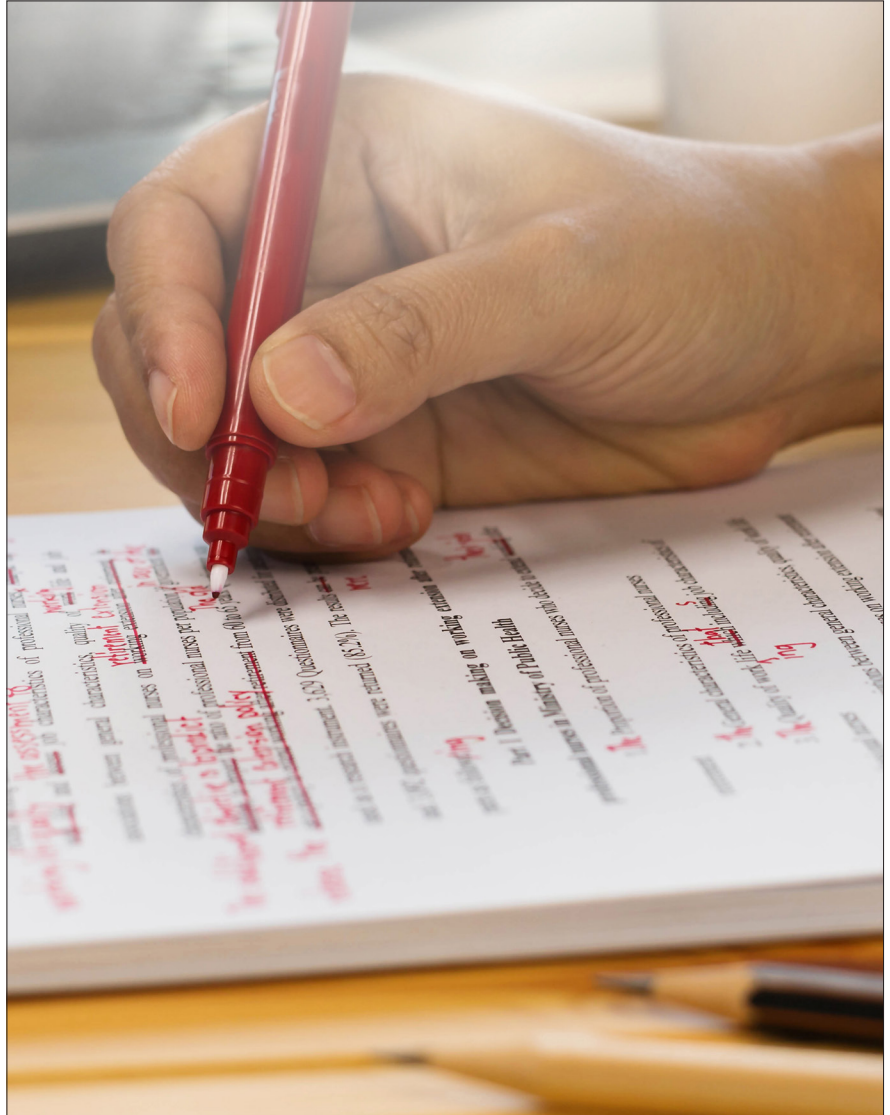
■ e.g. **He worked quickly to remove the stain from his shirt**

OR

■ e.g. **He worked to remove quickly the stain from his shirt**

should be used instead.

Note that each of these sentences has a slightly different meaning, with quickly modifying, in one case, the manner in which he worked and, in another, the manner in which he removed the stain.



**PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR  
ESTABLISHES THAT ONE  
SHOULD NOT SPLIT AN  
INFINITIVE BY PLACING,  
FOR EXAMPLE, AN ADVERB  
BETWEEN THE PARTICLE TO  
AND THE VERBAL PORTION  
OF THE INFINITIVE.**

# Accountability: The Unsexiest Word in Writing



By Alison Hammer

**Fifteen years.** That's how long it took to finish writing the first draft of my first novel. Crazy, right? What's even crazier is that the first draft of my second novel only took two months.

Why such a drastic difference? I credit two things. First, I finished the damn draft. I wrote forward, never stopping along the way to edit or second guess myself. I just kept writing until I wrote those precious two little words on the very last page.

The second and biggest thing that made a difference was accountability. Not the sexiest word in writing, but I'd argue it's one of the most important—especially if you're as good at procrastinating as I am.

By some stroke of luck, the timing worked so I was ready to start my second novel just as National Novel Writing Month was kicking off. If you haven't heard of NaNoWriMo, the online event challenges writers around the world to write 50,000 words during the month of November.

Sounds like an impossible feat for someone who took more than a decade to write her first book, right?

That's what I thought. But it turned out that for a

deadline-driven, annoyingly competitive person like myself, that structure was just what I needed. I became addicted to entering my word count at the end of every writing session—constantly chasing the daily word count goal that would help me cross the 50,000 word finish line.

My mantra during those thirty days was “If I don't write today, I won't be able to say I wrote every day.” It might sound silly—it was silly—no one cared whether or not I wrote every day, but it kept me accountable. That one little phrase stopped excuses in their tracks. It was the motivation I needed to squeeze a few minutes of writing between work and happy hour, before brunch or before I went to bed.

For most of us, writing is just one item on the long list of things we have to make time for in our busy lives. And unlike making dinner for our family, going to work or doing laundry, there are no consequences for skipping a day of writing. No one will starve, you won't lose your job, and you won't have to buy new underwear (who hasn't been there before?!) if you don't write.

That's where accountability comes in. And like the creative process, there are many different ways you can create accountability in your writing life.

## FEATURE

### STICK TO A ROUTINE

If you're an early bird, there is a whole community of crazy (if you ask me) people who check in using the hashtag #5amWritersClub. One of those early birds is WFWA member Kathleen Williams West.

"I write at 5am because nobody needs me then," West said. "My family is sleeping, and I love the feeling of starting my day and already having accomplished something major."

Like Kathleen's family, I am usually sound asleep at 5am. It's already a struggle to wake up every day for work, so waking up earlier just isn't an option for me. Instead, I've gotten into the habit of staying at work for an hour after I finish for the day. To help my brain switch from "work mode" to "writing mode" I have a playlist that I only listen to when I'm writing.

Try a few different options, and when you find something that feels right, commit and stick to it!

### FIND A PARTNER

Are you one of those people who will do almost anything for your friends, your family, your neighbors, your co-workers, your neighbor's co-worker and pretty much everyone but yourself?

If that sounds even a little bit like you, then you might be a good candidate for an accountability partner. When another person is counting on you to help them stay accountable with their writing, it will be harder to make excuses.

WFWA Secretary Michele Montgomery and her accountability partner schedule writing dates several times a week, even though they are two time-zones apart. They start and end each writing session with a quick phone call to talk about what they're working on and report how they did or didn't do at the end of the allotted time.

"I hate talking on the phone," Michele said. "But I will get work done if I know I will have to SAY that I played around instead of writing. That would be so much easier to text."

Lisa Montanaro and Ann Bremer became accountability partners after meeting at the 2017 WFWA Retreat. They plan accountability phone calls once a month to talk about their goals and progress, and keep in touch with daily check-ins through Facebook Messenger.

"We both finished our manuscripts on New Year's Eve," Montanaro said, "So now we're finally swapping pages. When it comes to our writing, we are a perfect match!"



### JOIN A GROUP

If the idea of a one-on-one partnership sounds like too much of a commitment, there are several online groups or communities you can join for a little extra accountability.

If you're on Twitter, there's an active writing community there, ready and waiting to engage. Try throwing out a tweet with the hashtags #WritingCommunity and #AmWriting if you want to feel like you aren't writing alone!

WFWA member Sharon Peterson (@Stone4031) has over 4,000 Twitter followers. She agrees that "the Twitter writing community is one of the most supportive and active groups you'll find online. It's been a vital tool in my writing journey."

Another WFWA member, Jamie Raintree, runs a Facebook Group called Motivated Writer where people check in with their writing progress. She also has a 'Writing and Revision Tracker' that you can purchase to help keep track of your writing goals.

And of course there's the Every Damn Day Writers Facebook group I run with fellow WFWA members Bradeigh Godfrey, Sharon Peterson, Kathleen Williams West and Casey Dembowski.

Our group officially started a few years ago when a group of about twenty WFWA members started a Facebook group to support each other during NaNoWriMo. When November was over, we didn't want our daily check-ins to end, so we kept it going in a brand-new group.

**ARE YOU ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO WILL DO ALMOST ANYTHING FOR YOUR FRIENDS, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR NEIGHBORS, YOUR CO-WORKERS, YOUR NEIGHBOR'S CO-WORKER AND PRETTY MUCH EVERYONE BUT YOURSELF? IF THAT SOUNDS EVEN A LITTLE BIT LIKE YOU, THEN YOU MIGHT BE A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR AN ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER. WHEN ANOTHER PERSON IS COUNTING ON YOU TO HELP THEM STAY ACCOUNTABLE WITH THEIR WRITING, IT WILL BE HARDER TO MAKE EXCUSES.**

*Continued on page 14*

## FEATURE

We recently made the group public and now have over 200 members who pop in almost daily to share their progress on days when they did great and share their struggles on the inevitable days when life gets in the way.

Member Laura Kaste Broullire said the best part of the group “is that gentle little reminder that in order to succeed, we must persevere. And it’s important to write even a little bit every damn day, even on the days we don’t feel like writing at all.”

WFWA and Every Damn Day member Sharon Rothspan Kurtzman adds that “Writing is such a solitary pursuit. It requires so many hours on your own, focused and concentrating. Even on days where I mostly stay off social media, I click on this group, because I’m grateful for the community, and I know though I may be working alone that day, I’m not really alone.”

### SET REALISTIC GOALS

The best way to set yourself up for success is to set realistic goals. I know several writers who have committed to writing at least 100 words a day. That’s just about twice the length of this paragraph—totally doable, right? And I have a feeling that most days, they don’t stop at 100 words.

In the past, I took a slightly different approach. Always an over-achiever, I tried to write 1,000 words a day. It’s an ambitious goal, and one that I didn’t always reach. It was so satisfying when the alert popped up on Scrivener, letting me know that I reached my daily target. And when I don’t, well, it never feels good to fall short.

Last week I was scrolling through Instagram instead of writing (remember I’m REALLY good at procrastinating) and I was inspired by a post from new WFWA member, Meghan Scott Molin.

The picture showed a close up of her Scrivener target word count—and the goal was set for 2,000 words. I was surprised, because I thought I was an over achiever! When I asked Meghan about it, she said, “My minimum words per day is 250, my ‘ideal’ is 2k words, but I consider 1k a good day’s work.”

I love the idea of having a minimum. It just changes the mindset—anyone can sit down and bang out 250 words, even if you aren’t feeling that inspired. And most of the time, inspiration tends to find you once you just start writing. That’s why #ButtInChair is one of my favorite writing-related hashtags. Sometimes that’s the hardest part: just sitting down to do it!

### FORGIVE YOURSELF

Last, but certainly not least, it’s important not to be too hard on yourself. Life is hard enough, and the good thing about writing is that your words and your story aren’t going anywhere.



**LAST, BUT CERTAINLY NOT LEAST, IT’S IMPORTANT NOT TO BE TOO HARD ON YOURSELF. LIFE IS HARD ENOUGH, AND THE GOOD THING ABOUT WRITING IS THAT YOUR WORDS AND YOUR STORY AREN’T GOING ANYWHERE.**

To me, Writing Every Damn Day is more of a philosophy than a rule—and I’m starting to realize there might be a less intimidating way to think about it. I was in a meeting at work the other day and glanced down at a co-workers phone. He had a picture in the background that said “NO ZERO DAYS.”

I asked him about it after the meeting, and he explained that it was a philosophy that came from a Reddit article that can be adopted to anything that you’re working on. Including writing.

It’s kind of perfect. If you think about it, there are so many ways that you can have a ‘No Zero Day’ with writing. You can read books in your genre, you can be thinking about a character or a plot point, you can be writing or editing or beta-reading. There are so many ways to keep working on your craft and keep that momentum going.

And that’s what really matters at the end of the day, because these future NYT Best-Selling Books aren’t going to write themselves!

Happy writing!



**ALISON HAMMER** has been telling stories since she learned how to talk. On weekdays, she spins stories for brands as a VP Creative Director at a Chicago advertising agency. On nights and weekends, you can find her writing upmarket women’s fiction. Her debut novel, *You & Me & Us*, is coming out next spring from William Morrow (HarperCollins). She is represented by Joanna MacKenzie at the Nelson Agency. Follow Alison @ThisHammer on all the social media channels, or visit her website at [www.alisonhammer.com](http://www.alisonhammer.com)

# The Discipline to Reach Your Dreams

By Cara Achterberg

Publishing a novel seemed like an easy dream. I'd read plenty of best sellers and smugly thought, "I could have written that." Sometimes I even thought, "I can write better than that." Convinced of my inevitable success, I spent many blissful hours penning my first novel and breezily told people, "I'm writing a novel," to which they'd say, "I can't wait to read it!"

I don't think I've ever enjoyed writing as much as I did ensconced in that happy naïve bubble, right up until the moment it was popped by the harsh reality of what it would take to succeed at publishing.

Success in publishing, like success in other arts, can many times depend on connections and timing, which is frustrating to an introverted nobody. Particularly an introverted nobody who lives in a hollow out in the sticks, where the idea of a fun night out involves having a beer in the fancy new salad bar café near the produce section of the grocery store. It can be discouraging, to say the least, since connections and timing are often not within our control. Everything else, though? It's well within our realm.

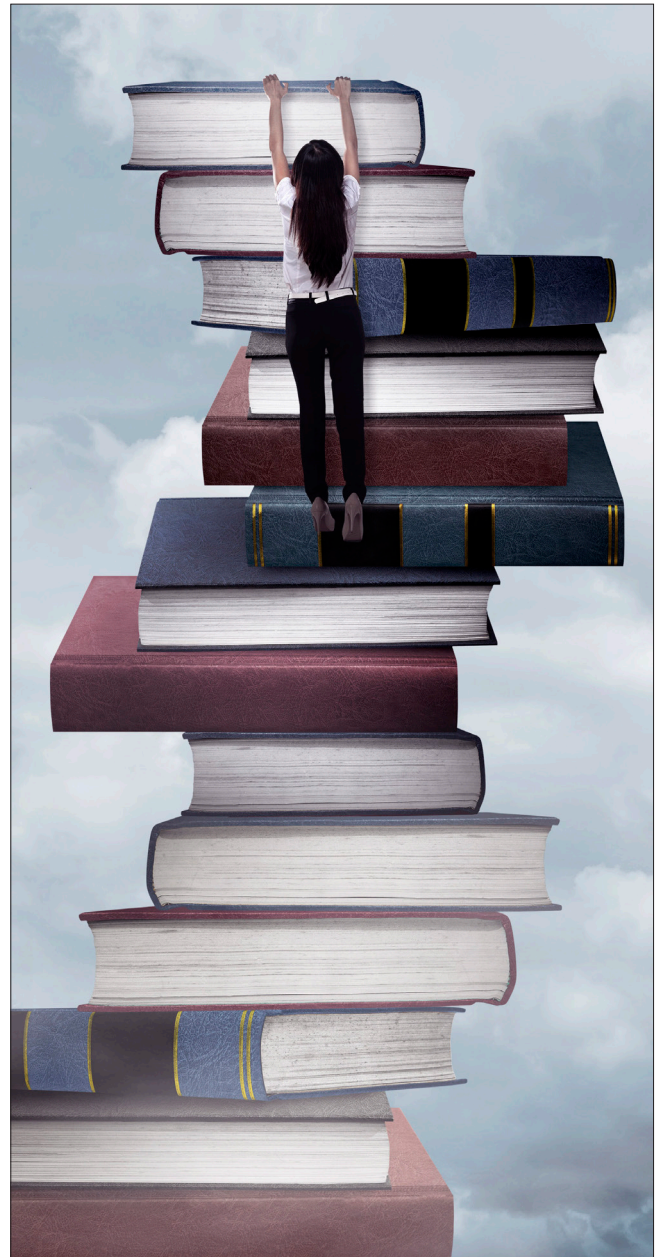
After I finished that first novel, a tome that was nearly 150,000 words, I did a quick once-over to check for typos and began sending it out. As you might imagine, a cascade of rejection letters followed. Instead of giving up, though, I did what I should have done in the first place, and began learning how to write professionally.

As far back as I could remember, I'd been told my writing was good. I had talent. But talent in publishing is only one little piece of the puzzle, an important piece, but only a piece. There are plenty of talented people out there who will never be published. Getting published requires persistence, but more than that, it requires enduring discipline.

## **WHEN I MADE THE DECISION TO PURSUE MY DREAM,**

I wasn't blessed with time or money to enroll in an MBA, but I could carve out time to read while the kids napped or I lingered in the carpool line. So I read book upon book on craft, article after article on publishing, and subscribed to magazines, blogs, and websites that explored every aspect of the writing process. I underlined the best advice and tried out many of the exercises. I realized that the authors of those best-sellers I'd scoffed at knew a heck of a lot more than me. But I took every scrap of advice to heart and I began writing again.

Julia Cameron's book, *The Right to Write*, convinced me that what I needed to do was build my writing muscles. They were strong in some areas and weak or nonexistent in others. When I taught horseback riding for a living, I told my frustrated beginning adult students that riding wasn't as easy as it looked because it required muscles that you rarely, if ever used. You had to build those muscles from scratch with practice.



Continued on page 16



I wrote every day, even if I didn't feel like it. The only way to become a good rider is to ride, and the only way to become a good writer is to write. There are no short cuts. As Malcolm Gladwell exhorts in his book, *Outliers*, it takes 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to become an expert at anything.

I was far from 10,000 hours, so I wrote and wrote and wrote. I wrote about causes I was passionate about. I wrote about what I was learning as a mom. I wrote stories that I made up while running. I wrote about what I knew: organic food, growing vegetables, training horses, fostering dogs, and raising kids. Most of this I published on my blogs. It wasn't fiction. My novel was forgotten. But I was writing; I was slowly building my muscles.

**WRITING A BLOG IS A GREAT DISCIPLINE FOR ANY WRITER.** It forces you to not only write on a regular basis, but to polish that writing for others. To date, I've written 798 blog posts on five blogs (two of which I still write regularly). The research, writing, and editing for each post ranged between two and ten hours, usually on the higher end. That's a lot of hours and a lot of muscle building.

I wrote a column for our local paper about issues that raised my blood pressure, and I began blogging and writing for a regional parenting magazine. Both of these organizations paid me very little for my efforts except the pleasure of seeing my name in print. But they gave me my first experience with professional editors who taught me much more than I could ever learn in a book: the weight of each word. Every article I turned in inevitably came back with the instructions to cut five hundred words. I learned quickly which words were vital to the meaning of my piece, and which were simply me overtelling it. And then I met a woman who had self-published her book. It was a skinny, odd book and I didn't love it, but what I learned from her changed everything.

I told her I was a blogger and columnist but hoped to make a living with my writing and someday be a traditionally published novelist.

She asked, "What's stopping you? You should be shooting higher than the local paper. What have you got to lose?"

Ever since the rejections from that first novel, when I'd faced up to all I didn't know, I'd kept my nose to the ground and my tail between my legs. I was still working on my novel, but mostly I was writing essays and articles, stockpiling my writing on my computer, editing it until my eyeballs were numb, but certain it wasn't good enough to pitch to real editors and agents.

**I TRIED TO MAKE REAL CONNECTIONS WHENEVER POSSIBLE. THAT WOULD BE MY WRITER BRAND: AUTHENTICITY. I FRIENDED PEOPLE AND INQUIRED ABOUT THEIR WRITING. I OFFERED ADVICE TO YOUNGER WRITERS AND RESPONDED TO EVERY COMMENT.**

**MY ATTITUDE CHANGED.** I'd instilled plenty of discipline in to my actual writing, but what I needed to apply it to was getting published. No more writing willy-nilly and wherever the wind took me. It was getting me nowhere. Success in school and work was easy to see because it was clearly measurable, visible. I needed a tool to track my progress and eventual success.

So I created the Spaghetti Book. I figured, like the old adage says, if you toss enough spaghetti at the wall, something will stick. The key here would be putting lots of good pasta in the air. I bought a blank journal and used leftover stickers from my kids' art projects to paste the word "spaghetti" on the front.

Then I began sending my articles and essays and manuscript samples to anyone and everyone I could. I set my goal as one submission each week, but many weeks I sent as many as five. I scoured the internet for opportunities, studied the mastheads of magazines at the library, and poured over publishers marketplace books twice as thick as my phone book.

In my Spaghetti Book, I listed the name of the publication, editor or agent, what I was sending and the date I sent it. When I got a rejection (and I got plenty), I crossed out the entry with a black marker. When I got a rejection with helpful feedback, I highlighted the entry with a blue marker. When I won a contest, I colored the entry with yellow highlighter. And when a piece was published (sometimes for real money!), I highlighted it in bright orange.

The Spaghetti Book filled up fast. There was a lot of black marker, but there was also plenty of bright color! I was getting articles published in national magazines that paid real money and essays printed in anthologies that turned up occasional royalties. My writing was appearing on some of the blogs I used to follow from a distance. It was exciting, but I still hadn't achieved my dream: publishing a novel.

It was time to apply my new discipline to the connections and timing I had so little control over. Again and again, I'd read that agents and editors looked at your platform. I had a small platform as an organic lifestyle blogger and was developing one as a dog rescue advocate, but I needed a platform and brand for my fiction writing.

Social media appeared to be the key, but I was wary of the wasted hours I already spent on Facebook, oogling former high school classmates, bragging about my kids, or following links to bizarre news stories. So I set a schedule. I had time in the late afternoon when I was too tired or preoccupied by the evening's plan to write. I would commit thirty minutes (or until the kids called) to learning Twitter, creating a writer Facebook page, and making connections.

It didn't take long until I was connecting with writers all over the world. When I made a new connection on twitter, I'd explore the person's feed, check out their blog and website. I'd like and comment and many times, message the person with a question or a comment or a simple "thanks for the follow". I tried to make real connections whenever possible. That would be my writer brand: authenticity. I friended people and inquired about their writing. I offered advice to younger writers and responded to every comment.

And then one December, I was sitting in a dark parking lot waiting to pick up my daughter from a Christmas concert. She was late, so I opened my phone and checked my email. Amongst the normal flotsam, there was a message telling me that I was a runner-up in a writing contest. I'd won an iPad mini! I was sending out so much spaghetti at that time, I didn't even know what contest the email was referring to.

When I got home, I pulled out the Spaghetti Book and paged backwards nearly six months and found the entry. It was from the previous July. I was thrilled, but it got even better. The next day I got an email from the editor who'd read my manuscript asking whether I might be interested in working with him on publication of the manuscript I'd entered.

Eight months later, my novel, *I'm Not Her* was published. And two more books followed. It was almost ten years to the date from when I started that first novel until I held my book in my hand. If you'd told me back then it would take ten years, most certainly, I would have given up right then. Instead, by being disciplined to study, write, submit, and connect regularly with goals and deadlines I set for myself, I got there.

All the daily action, the incremental progress, barely visible to the naked eye, culminates like Malcolm Gladwell's tipping point, and suddenly that dream that seemed so far, far away is within your grasp. And in the end, sure talent and timing are a factor, but the discipline to do the work despite the inevitable frustration, rejection, and tedium is how you will succeed.

### TIPS FOR DISCIPLINED WRITERS:

■ **BE A REAL BOSS.** The best thing and the worst thing about being a writer is that most of us don't have a boss. You must be pragmatic about setting writing schedules and goals. No one else will do it for you. If you want to move your writing forward, you have to take responsibility for your progress.

■ **STOP WRITING BEFORE YOU'RE FINISHED.** When working on a story, stop work when you still know where it's heading. Leaving off in the middle of a scene makes it easy (and sometimes urgent) for you to jump right back into the story.

■ **THROW OUT PLENTY OF PASTA.** Submit freely to contests, magazines, and newspapers because any chance you get to work with an editor will teach you, and those lessons and connections will help you move your dream forward. The more you are putting your writing out there, the more chances you have that something will stick. I would advise against entering contests with entry fees unless they're well-regarded and offer guaranteed feedback from legitimate writers or editors.

■ **KEEP TRACK OF YOUR SUBMISSIONS.** Having a record, not only helps you see if you've submitted to an agent or editor before, but it's concrete evidence of the effort and progress you're making. And, if you hear from an editor way down the road, you'll be able to track down what they heck he's talking about. Be sure to keep track of not only the name and contact person or email, but the policy for response. If it says "responds within six months if interested" mark down that final date.

■ **WORK SOCIAL MEDIA WITH INTENTION AND BOUNDARIES.** Even if you hate it, treat social media as part of your job. Set a time limit and learn the different platforms. Everything is bearable in small bites! I still set aside thirty minutes every day to check in on social media, because I've felt the pay off. Back when I got that first book deal, I knew writers I could reach out to for blurbs or advice, guest posts or reviews, or simply to say thanks.

■ **MAKE A CONSCIOUS EFFORT ON A DAILY BASIS TO MOVE TOWARDS YOUR DREAM.** A friend of mine is a renown pianist who performs all over the world. Early on, when I confessed my writing dreams to her, she told me, "Just do one thing every day that moves you towards your dream and you'll get there." I took her words to heart, and I've tried to do one thing every day, whether it's writing an email, making a connection on social media, posting to one of my blogs, or sending out a query. Like the quarters in that arcade game that fill a shelf until there's so many they spill over the edge, these little efforts will add up and one day pay off.

# TRIBE TIPS APPS & HACKS TO STAY ON TRACK

We asked members for their favorite writing tools and apps, those they swear by to stay on track. Here's what they said:

"I use **SCRIVENER** for my actual writing, as I love how it tracks. I use Alexa as a timer, which is nice! I use an old fashioned calendar/planner to map out my writing blocks now as I like to see it visually every morning." – Lisa

"I use Scrivener and I love its tracking features. I can see my word count per day, per month, etc. Even more important than word count for me is how often I get my tush in the chair each month. I aim for five days a week." –Sheree

*Scrivener is book writing software sold by Literature & Latte. More than a word processing program, it allows users to import, collect, store and organize research links, photos and notes related to their project. Authors can write and revise, organize, brainstorm, and outline as well, and all project-related items are kept together in a digital binder. Dynamic, but requires some learning. Originally created for iOS, features in Windows are not identical. – Eds.*



"I just started using the **SELF JOURNAL** to plan daily writing time plus other writing-related activities. So far, it's working! Plus, there's room for documenting exactly how much time I'm spending on each goal / activity, how much progress I'm making, etc. Writing it all down helps me focus. I tend to stick to a plan once it's in black and white rather than abstractly floating in my head."

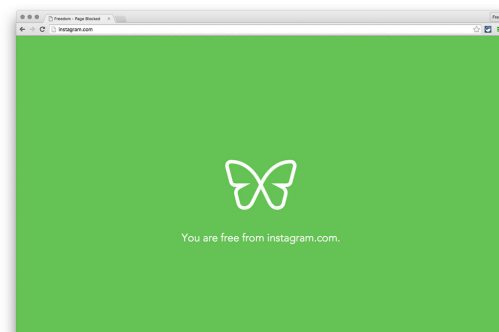
– Suzanne

*The Self Journal, a physical journal sold by BestSelf, is broken into Daily, Weekly, and Monthly sections. It's designed as a system that allows users to set big goals, break them down into smaller steps and stay on track toward completion with 30-minute scheduling, daily tasks, daily wins, lessons learned, and more. – Eds*

"My best friend while writing is **FREEDOM**, an app that blocks me from the Internet. I usually use it just to block social media, but if I'm having a day that finds me procrastinating in other ways, I'll block everything."

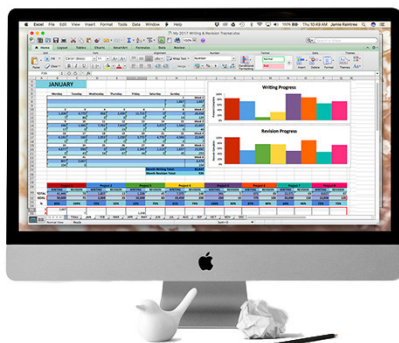
– Barbara

*Freedom allows users to select apps and websites to block and set how long the block should last. Individual or recurring blocks can be scheduled in advance and synched across all devices. The first seven sessions are free, and then a paid subscription is required. Common Sense Media notes that personal information is sometimes sold to third parties. Available for all platforms. – Eds.*

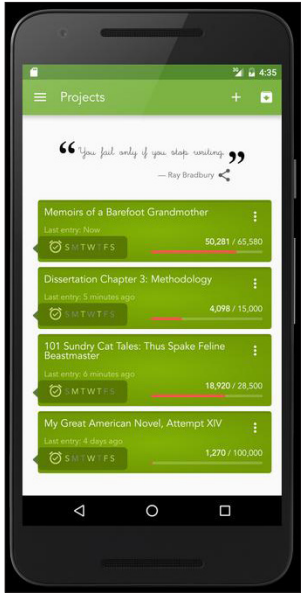


"I use **JAMIE RAINTREE'S SPREADSHEET** for tracking my word count on different projects. It's nice because it lets you set goals and see how close you get to meeting them." – Samantha

*Author Jamie Raintree's Writing & Revision Tracker is multi-page database workbook with daily, weekly, monthly, and annual writing statistics for up to 10 projects. It automatically calculates daily, weekly, and monthly totals. Users can track revisions by word count or page number, and track annual progress per project. Graphs display progress toward monthly writing and revision goals. Works for PC and Mac. Sold on her website. – Eds.*

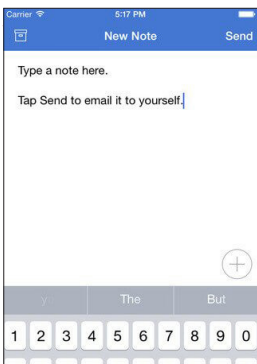


# TRIBE TIPS APPS & HACKS TO STAY ON TRACK



**“WRITEOMETER** is terrific for word count, and is a great tool not only for accountability, but to see how many words you need to generate a day to meet a deadline. Love it.” – Kim

*Writeometer is a free, Android-only app that allows users to set a daily goal, a total goal for a project, how many minutes, and which days of the week to use as writing time. It then gently reminds users to write for those minutes each day. It includes a log for tracking stats and a toolbox.* – Eds.



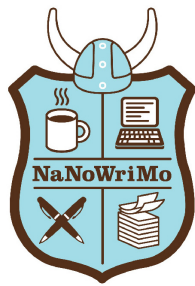
**“THE FOREST APP.** The longer you focus, the more real trees the company will plant! If you leave the app, your digital trees die. I haven’t used it yet but wanted to pass along.” – Carrie

*Forest is a productivity app that uses digital trees as an incentive to keep users off their devices and fully engaged with the task at hand. As a timer runs down, a tree or shrub grows, and all trees become part of a long-term forest. But if users click out of the app, the tree dies. Users can create lists of approved apps. By connecting with others via social media, users can combine their earned coins to plant real trees for farmers in developing nations. Available for iOS, Android and Windows phones.* – Eds

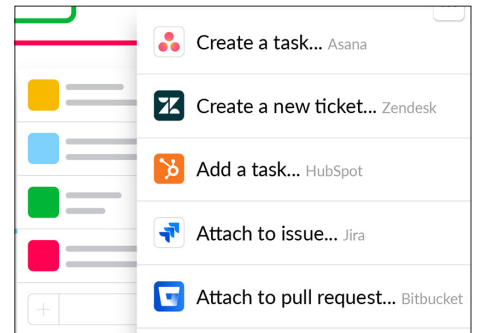


**“Writing sprints with writing group pals. We coordinate on SLACK and use the free NANOWRIMO GROUP SPRINT FEATURE for the actual sprints.”** – Diane

*Slack, an acronym for ‘Searchable Log of All Conversation and Knowledge’, is a cloud-based set of collaboration tools. It is used to facilitate real-time communication between team members across continents and time zones.*



*NaNoWriMo, an abbreviation of National Novel Writing Month, is an annual, internet-based creative writing project that takes place during the month of November. With resources like author pep-talks, writing sprints, and genre-specific support forums, it’s a writing community for anyone who wants to complete a novel or needs incentive to get words on the page. Both are free and work on all platforms.* – Eds.



**“CAPTIO.** It’s a super simple app on your phone that lets you write a quick note when an idea strikes and sends it to your email for later. Yes, you could do the same by opening your email app, putting in the address and hitting send, but this is easier, avoids getting derailed by other emails in the inbox that need to be answered and (for me) a great way to capture thoughts on the run before I lose them.” – Lainey

*Captio is an app for quickly capturing notes, photos, ideas, etc. and sending them to yourself with one click. It keeps notes in a running ‘list’ for easy viewing. Requires one-time purchase fee. Available for iOS devices only.* – Eds.

## FINAL THOUGHT

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Totally stolen from Laura Drake

**ROME WASN'T BUILT  
IN A DAY, BUT  
THEY WERE LAYING BRICKS  
EVERY HOUR.**



**WRITEON!**