



On Track: Group Update #4

It's Thursday again! Hope your writing's been going well over the past week, whatever stage you're at in your project.

Important Reminder...

On Monday, I mentioned that next week, we'll be looking at ways to find people who can support your writing. Seeing as we're all in a writing course together, it'd be great if you can hook up with fellow On Track members!

If you're happy to take part, **shoot me an email (ali@aliventures.com) or a tweet (@aliventures) to let me know what you're working on** – you don't need to give me a long description. I'll compile a list of members and projects, so you can find other people who're working on something similar.

Monday's Assignment

Here's a quick recap, in case you've not had a chance to do this week's assignment yet:

You've got a choice this week, depending on where you're at with your work-in-progress.

Either...

#1: Spend half an hour planning out the rest of your project. (With a big project, you'll end up with a zoomed-out overview. With a short ebook or blog post series, you should be able to get a reasonable amount of detail into your plan.)

Or ...

#2: If you already have a plan, spend half an hour drafting the start of the next scene, chapter, section, etc. Set a timer and focus on just writing – don't worry about making it perfect.

(And if you're really keen, you can do both!)

Questions and Answers

I know I packed in a *lot* in Monday's lesson – if you'd like me to go into more detail about any part of it, just let me know, and I'll cover that in the next Q&A.

This week's questions are on:

1. Keeping writing enjoyable
2. Planning and managing your time
3. Citing references in ebooks and blog posts
4. Setting – and meeting – deadlines

#1: Keeping writing enjoyable

How do you keep a longer writing project enjoyable? I tend to find I get to a stage in writing where it all just seems like work and becomes laborious. This makes it hard to keep my motivation up and keep the momentum going. I'd love some suggestions on how to keep the pleasure of writing flowing, especially when you know you're not just writing for pleasure but aim to sell your work too.

I suspect that almost every writer goes through the same thing. I certainly know a fair few with unfinished novel/book manuscripts tucked away ... sometimes, that first initial flush of enthusiasm doesn't seem to last too long.

A few things which help are:

- **Take a break from writing** (or at least from that particular project). The times when you're *not* writing are often just as important as the times when you *are* writing. You might find you get new ideas, or that you simply come back feeling refreshed.
- **Get into a routine.** I know that "write from 9am till 11am" sounds very work-like and not particularly inspiring, but if you let days or weeks go by without writing, it becomes harder and harder to get back into your project.
- **Let yourself enjoy it!** With some projects – particularly those which you're hoping to sell, or at least share with the world at large – it's easy to get a bit bogged down in trying to fulfil a plan, or match up to certain standards. A spirit of fun and play is important in keeping your creative energy alive. Give yourself the chance to explore and experiment.
- **Focus on the reader.** For me, no piece of writing is complete until it has a reader. If I'm producing something which isn't intrinsically exciting, but which has value for the reader (like a software user guide, for instance), I'm often encouraged by thinking forwards to how it'll help people.
- **Talk to someone about the project, or get feedback.** This doesn't work for every single writer, but many find that they get energised by sharing their work-in-progress. When readers respond enthusiastically, it's hard *not* to feel inspired again!

#2: Planning and managing your time

How do you plan your time to work on all your writing? I write for a blog, freelance, and am trying to create an ebook and fit in work and a life. How do you do it all?

I make sure I have regular time slots for my regular work – for instance, I usually write three – four paid blog posts a week, and I try to do these on Mondays.

With bigger projects, like your ebook, you could try working on it for half an hour (say) at the start of your day. It's very easy for these bigger things to get missed out, because they're rarely urgent – but they're often pretty significant milestones in your journey as a writer.

You don't necessarily need to work on all your projects every week, though. When I was taking my Creative Writing MA last year, I'd sometimes work on my novel almost every morning, and then take a break for several weeks to catch up with my paying work! So long as you're switching deliberately between different projects (rather than letting your ebook sit untouched for six months because you got busy), then you should be able to keep everything moving along.

My freelancing partner-in-arms, Thursday Bram, has a fantastic free ebook all about time management for writers – [you can find out more and download it here](#). It's targeted towards freelancers, though pretty much anyone who writes will find it useful.

#3: Citing references in ebooks and blog posts

When writing a nonfiction work, such as an ebook or blog post, how do you decide whether to cite or reference a piece of information, and if you do, how much detail should go into the citation (i.e., author only, or author, title, and publication date, etc.)? This is my first ebook, my previous writing experience having been for academic papers and an article for a professional journal, so I'm used to using lots of citation, footnotes, etc.

It depends a lot on your subject matter, and on what your readers will expect! My ebooks are generally about blogging and writing, and I don't have any footnotes at all – the only citations I put in are when I've quoted someone or when I'm using a particular blog post as an example.

When I put in a quote, I give the author's name and the book title (or blog post title) and linking to the book on Amazon (or to the blog post).

If you want to put in citations and footnotes, I think there's absolutely no reason not to. Readers will probably be impressed! My rule of thumb is to ask myself what the readers would find useful – probably author and title, so that if they're interested, they can do further reading. Author's name alone doesn't do much except prove that you have a source. Unless it's something like an edition of a journal, I don't think you need a publication date.

Do you own any ebooks on similar topics? If so, have a look at what they do, in terms of citations. You don't necessarily have to do yours in the same way, of course, but it can be useful to know what's fairly standard in your area.

#4: Setting – and meeting – deadlines

How do you set appropriate deadlines or workloads when working with writing clients? I'd like to get started doing some writing projects for clients (ghostwriting, copywriting, and staff blogging all interest me), and even went so far as to build a website, but I'm not good about setting and meeting appropriate deadlines, and the thought of unknowingly setting what turns out to be an unrealistic deadline and then blowing it scares me off from getting started. (Especially when I've now read in several copywriting books that missing a deadline is *the cardinal sin you must not commit*).

Nowadays, I normally have a good idea of how long a project will take. But when I started freelancing, I wasn't very sure at all – plus my own deadlines for my personal writing projects tended to be, at best, highly optimistic!

What I did was allow plenty of extra time when I offered an estimate. So if I was emailing on Monday and thought I'd have it done by Wednesday, I'd say "I'll get it to you by Friday." I've *never* had a client object that I turned in work too early. ;-)

Smaller projects tend to be easier to estimate for: you probably know roughly how long a 700 word blog post will take you, but a 10,000 word ebook is a lot harder to judge. So if you can, start small!

I'll often give an estimate for the first draft, rather than the whole finished thing – e.g. "I should have an initial draft to you by Wednesday 16th, and then we can discuss any changes you want." This takes the pressure off a bit, because neither you nor the client are going to expect the draft to be perfect.

Missing a deadline really isn't the end of the world (or of your career). Clients are human too, and they understand that life sometimes goes a bit haywire. If you do think you're going to struggle to meet a deadline, get in touch with the client as soon as possible, and let them know. If you can provide part of the project, that's often useful – e.g. sending five pages instead of eight, and telling them that you get the other three done by Friday.

If doing client work seems a bit intimidating, can you do something like guest posting? It's a good route into staff blogging (and you mentioned you're interested in that), you can set yourself a deadline, and you'll get an idea of how long it takes you to write a typical post.

That's all the questions for this week. If you've got a question (it doesn't need to be related to this week's lesson or to 7 Pillars) then send it in!

Your next lesson will be in your inbox on Monday – we'll be going through different sources of writing support, like blogs, magazines, forums, groups and coaches/mentors. We'll also have a list of On Track members' projects, so if you've not been in touch yet, let me know about yours!