



On Track: Group Update #3

It's Thursday again!

Hope your writing's been going well over the past week – and hope you're getting into a good writing routine.

Congrats to Amanda!

Huge congratulations to On Track member Amanda from [A.D. Freelance](#), who emailed me to say that she's been given a writing trial with About.com (a huge, well-known site with tons of great articles covering a wide range of topics).

I've been given a month's trial at about dot com for the digiscraping writing position! As my new website/blog was the site I was setting up to impress the guys at about dot com it's even more imperative that I get to grips with this course, the site and the articles. After all a guaranteed income for writing about something I love and that ties in with my new site/blog is not to be missed!

(If you don't know what "digiscraping" is, I didn't either! It means "digital scrapbooking", and, like paper scrapbooking, it's a way to preserve memories in a creative and engaging way.)

On Track Tip of the Week

Birdy Diamond, from [The Avian Empire](#), wrote in to recommend 750words.com

I love [750words.com](#) as a writing tool. 750 words a day, kyool badges, and neat metadata for you to look at so you can know where your brain is at.

Several writers (including other On Track members) have told me how much they like 750words.com, so if you've never come across it, check it out. It's particularly aimed at people doing morning pages – something recommended in Julia Cameron's book "The Artist's Way" – but there's nothing stopping you using it for any sort of writing you like.

Monday's Assignment

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

On *at least three* days between now and Monday 7th:

Write 500 words *OR* write for 45 minutes.

(If you can do this every day, fantastic!)

See how that feels – too much, or too little? Experiment with different times of day, and different places. Keep a brief log of your writing sessions so that you can figure out what works best for you.

If you get stuck, just send me an email, or let me know on Twitter (@aliventures).

Questions and Answers

After a packed mailbag last week, I've only had a couple of questions in this time. I'm hoping that's because you're all busy writing...

Remember, you can send in questions on *any* aspect of writing – they don't need to be related to the *On Track* course content at all. You'll remain safely anonymous, of course.

1. Redrafting and editing
2. Ebook layout

#1: Redrafting and Editing

I'm now working through the second draft and have completely changed the entire guide. It is now longer, different parts, less formal and the layout is completely changed. I am happy with the way it is looking but am worried that I may finish it, and then completely change it again. I know editing is good, but can you ever have too many changes, and too many edits?

Editing is definitely good. But so is finishing!

In Monday's lesson, we'll be covering the difference between first drafts and final drafts, and looking at how to stay on track as you go through the drafting process – so I'm hoping that will help.

In general, I think that longer projects (like ebooks, books, novels...) need more redrafting than shorter pieces (like blog posts). It's often hard to "see" the structure of something long, and you may realise that your first draft has lots of missing pieces, or isn't in the best order.

It's useful, then, to do one redraft which looks at structural issues: do you need to add or remove whole chapters? Would your material flow better if it was in a different order? Do you have any sections which are a bit repetitive? (These sorts of questions apply to fiction as well as non-fiction.)

After that redraft, you can hone in on the smaller-level stuff. That means looking at the transitions between sections and paragraphs, for instance (see "Flow" in the *7 Pillars of Great Writing* for more on that). You'll also want to check for typos, grammatical errors and other little mistakes.

Problems come up when you keep thinking of new ideas to add, or new ways to arrange your material. It helps to keep your focus quite specific: any brand new material could be split off into a separate ebook, or maybe a blog post. And there's rarely a *perfect* order for your chapters or sections – so don't spend forever jiggling them around.

If you go too far on editing individual words and sentences, you may find that you edit some of the heart out of your writing, too. So by all means edit out clunky bits or mistakes, but don't be afraid to keep in some of your unique metaphors or turns of phrase.

With online content, it's easy to revise or update your material if you later decide that you want to add to it – so don't be afraid to put it out there and get reader feedback, too.

#2: Ebook layout

How do you create the layout of your ebook? What programs, font size, embedding pictures?

I use Microsoft Word 2007, which does the job just fine. I tend to bump the font size up to about 14 for ebooks – otherwise the pages can be a bit cramped and hard to read on a screen.

You can embed pictures by opening them up in a graphics program, highlighting the bit you want (or the whole thing) and clicking "Copy", then using "Paste" in your document. If you click on an image, click the "Format" tab and click "Compress Images", you can compress all the images in your document to make the file size smaller – great if you're distributing it via email or download.

You may want to turn your pages to landscape format, like I do in *7 Pillars of Great Writing*. This is becoming more and more popular in ebooks, because many people read them on wide screens. On the other hand, you might prefer portrait – better for printing and for smaller monitors.

When laying out the text, start new chapters or new sections on a new page. (Don't do this by hitting Enter – use the "Page Break" feature, which is under the "Insert" tab in Word 2007.) If you have a page with a single paragraph or less, try reworking your text to bring it all back onto one page – or bump a second paragraph forwards onto that mostly-blank page.

Use the "Styles" feature to create your headings and subheadings – it makes it very easy to reformat them all at once. And put in a table of contents, too – this will automatically pick up on your different levels of headings. You can see my contents page in *7 Pillars* for an example.

This is a big topic and I've covered it pretty briefly, so if you've got any follow-up questions, just let me know.

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 covering a lot of ground, looking at what to do when life gets in the way of writing, how to plan, and the difference between first and final drafts.