



On Track #5: Sharing Your Love of Writing

Writing can be a lonely occupation – especially when you're working on a big project. You might spend hours every week at your desk, writing and writing, without anyone encouraging you or offering feedback.

Perhaps your family and friends are supportive of your writing, but don't really understand you – they don't see why writing matters so much. Maybe they're indifferent. Or maybe they're actively hostile, resenting the time that you spend writing, or making fun of your dreams.

But **there are plenty of people out there who love writing just as much as you do**. And even if you don't know *any* writers, you can build up a support team.

Here's how – I've started with the easiest, lowest-pressure methods:

#1: Read Writing Magazines and Blogs

Want to be surrounded by people who are passionate about writing, and who totally "get" it? Then pick up a writing magazine, or read (and comment on) a writing blog.

Flicking through a magazine – or reading the latest posts from a writing blog – isn't just a way to get solid information. It's a chance to feel like part of a world-wide community of writers.

Magazines

I like the UK's Writers' Forum (<http://www.writers-forum.com>) and Writing Magazine(<http://writersnews.co.uk>) – both with plenty of content for beginners as well as intermediate writers, and with great interviews with well-known authors.

If you're in the US, try Writer's Digest - <http://www.writersdigest.com>.

All these magazines have useful content on their websites, including articles and links to resources.

Blogs

There are dozens of great blogs about writing, and they're all totally free to read.

If you're not sure where to start, check out the 2011 Top Ten Blogs for Writers:

<http://writetodone.com/2010/12/21/top-10-blogs-for-writers-2011-the-winners/>

And if you have a favourite writing-related blog, let us know about it – either drop me an email (ali@aliventures.com) or share it with the On Track (#ontrack) group on Twitter.

#2: Join a Writing Forum

Reading about writing is great, but a step up from that is being able to interact with other writers.

There are *loads* of online forums aimed at writers, whether you're a novelist, a blogger, a poet, or a bit of everything.

Forums are a perfect place for asking tricky questions, trying out ideas and making new friends. You might like to check out these:

Forward Motion for Writers (free) - <http://www.fmwriters.com>

This is a massive forum including free classes, critique groups and more. Aimed primarily at fiction writers seeking traditional publication.

Writers Talkback (free) - http://www.writersnews.co.uk/writers_talkback

This forum is from Writing Magazine and Writers' News, though you don't need to read the magazine to join the forum. All sorts of writers, fiction and non-fiction.

ProBlogger forum (from \$5.95/month) - <http://www.problogger.com>

This forum is aimed at bloggers and has exclusive content for members. If most or all of your writing is blogging (or related material like ebooks), you'll want to give it a look.

#3: Join a Writing Group

Writing forums and online critique groups are fun – but for the best support and interaction, look for a face-to-face group that meets locally. It's easy to drop out of a forum when your writing's going badly, but once you've made friends with other writers, you'll probably stick with in-person meetings.

It can be pretty daunting to show your work with a group, but it's one of the fastest ways to improve – and to keep up your momentum on a big project. (Towards the end of this lesson, I'll give you some tips on how to share your work.)

Try your local library, newspaper, or online classifieds (like Craigslist) for details of writing groups in your area.

Forums and Groups: Do We All Need to be Writing in the Same Area?

You might choose to join a group or forum where everyone's writing in the same area as you – perhaps you're all short story writers, or all freelance bloggers. You might even narrow it down to "science fiction novelists" or "romance writers".

I've personally benefited a lot from having a wide range of readers critique my work – whether or not it's the kind of thing they'd usually read. And I love getting to read outside my own comfort zone. Often, techniques from one area or genre of writing can shed new light on different work.

On the other hand, it can be very discouraging to have writers dismiss your work because they don't understand the conventions of what you're writing. Novelists might be snooty about your ebook. Literary writers may blast your comic romance (or, conversely, commercial novelists may roll their eyes at your thoughtful, lyrical literary novel).

Find a group where you're comfortable – but not complacent. You want to be supported, but also challenged where necessary.

#4: Finding a Writing Mentor or Coach

Writing groups and workshops are great, but – realistically – the members aren't going to have time to read huge chunks of your work-in-progress, or to offer in-depth feedback. The best way to get full support is to find someone who'll work with you one-on-one.

There are a couple of ways to do that:

Taking an MA

I took an MA in Creative Writing at Goldsmiths College (part of the University of London), and had excellent individual tutorial advice and feedback – along with lectures, seminars and workshops.

If you have the time and money to study creative writing in an academic context, it's a great thing to do – but it's a significant investment. Here in the UK, you're likely to pay £4,000-£5,000 to take an MA, and it's hard to get funding.

Finding a Mentor/Coach

You might prefer to look for a mentor or coach who you can hire for a short period of time, or for a specific project. You could, for instance, pay for a full critique of your novel – or you could work with a coach on a weekly or monthly basis while you get your ebook finished or build your blog readership.

If you're looking for professional one-to-one fiction help from a published author, I can recommend Lorna Fergusson, who's a great teacher. She offers editing (<http://www.fictionfire.co.uk/page15.htm>) and mentoring (<http://www.fictionfire.co.uk/page16.htm>)

And, as you probably already know, I also offer writing coaching – I've worked with all sorts of writers, mainly novelists and bloggers. I'll help by giving editorial suggestions, but I'll also work with

you to help you with any bigger issues around writing – like strategy, structure and motivation. You can find out more at: <http://www.aliventures.com/coaching>

(If you're buying coaching from me, don't forget to mention that you're an On Track member – you'll get a \$30 discount on your first session, making it \$49 instead of \$79.)

On Track Members and Their Work

Since we've got a bunch of fantastic writers right here in On Track, I thought it'd be great to help you get in touch with one another.

These brave souls were willing to have their contact details put into today's lesson. Why not drop one of them an email to see if they'd be interested in swapping some writing feedback with you?

Emily – emily.m.helms@gmail.com

I'm working on a short ebook. I'm a musician, and the goal of the ebook is to help other musicians get more from their music practice sessions.

Leslie – leslie@socialmediamercenary.com

I'm working on an ebook covering Web Analytics, Social Media Metrics, and Social Media Monitoring for freelancers and super small businesses

Sue – s.lambertv20@gmail.com

[I'm] working on blog posts. I conduct historical research, local, social and family history in libraries and archives and then write up the findings. The blog aim is to share snippets of this research with people.

How to Share Your Writing With Others

I've never met a writer who was totally comfortable about showing their work to other people. Most writers find it pretty scary to read a piece out to a critique group, or even to post a bit of their work-in-progress online.

It helps to remember that *everyone* feels nervous about their writing – it's not just you.

When you're getting ready to show your work to a group, or to a coach:

- Choose a piece which you're not totally confident about. I know it's tempting to use your "best" work – but you'll get better feedback if you pick something which you're considering reworking.
- Explain what stage you're at. Is this a first draft or a final draft?

- Tell them what sort of feedback you want. Do you need to know whether the structure works? Or do you want them to focus on the individual word choices?
- If your piece is an extract from something longer, give a very short summary of what's gone before, if that will help the reader to understand this section.
- Check for spelling mistakes and typos. These are really no big deal in a first draft, but they're distracting for readers (and they can be a bit embarrassing to you!)
- If you'll be reading your work out loud, practice it through beforehand. This helps you get rid of any clunky sentences or tongue-twisters.

And when you receive feedback:

- Take note of any disagreements: different people may have very different opinions!
- Try not to get defensive. Sure, maybe someone's clearly misunderstood your work and perhaps you think they read carelessly – but as the writer, it's your job to listen and consider carefully whether you need to make it clearer.
- Take notes, if you're getting feedback live (rather than as written comments)
- Don't be disheartened if all the feedback sounds quite negative. People often don't comment on the parts which are working perfectly well.
- Ask questions if you want advice on a particular section or aspect of your work: *Could you follow my explanations in chapter four?* or *Did the dialogue between Jake and Sue sound convincing?*

Chances are, you're going to end up critiquing other writers' work at some point. When you do, it's helpful to:

- Find some positive things to say, as well as pointing out areas which need work.
- Give feedback on the piece as a whole (e.g. the structure and ideas) as well as suggesting areas where the writing could be stronger (e.g. sentences where a word could be cut out).
- Judge the work on its own merits. Whether or not you *like* it isn't really important, unless you're in the target audience. Does it *work*?
- Make specific suggestions for changes. It's not all that helpful to say "this line of dialogue doesn't sound authentic". How would *you* change the line to make it better?

Assignment

Start building your support team, by doing one (or more!) of these:

#1: Join an online forum and write at least one post.

#2: Get in touch with one of the writers listed above, or share what you're working on with the Twitter group (use the #ontrack hashtag so your tweet stands out).

#3: Find out about a local writers' group and put their next meeting in your diary.

Coming Up on Thursday 17th

On Thursday, I'll be sending round the fifth group update. As usual, if you've got any writing tips to share, or any successes to celebrate, drop me an email – ali@aliventures.com

And, if you forgot to let me know about your project for today's list of writers, drop me an email or tweet and I'll include your details in the Thursday update.

There'll be a Q&A as usual, so if you've got any questions about writing support, critiquing or any aspect of writing at all, send those my way too. ☺

Coming Up on Monday 21st

Next Monday will be our very last On Track lesson – so we'll be looking at the resources which can help you with staying on track over the next weeks and months. We'll cover some internal resources (like tenacity, focus, voice and courage) as well as some external ones (like time, information and supporters).

I'll also be sending you a link to a quick survey to find out how On Track was for you, and to ask for your opinion on some future ecourse possibilities...