



On Track: Group Update #6

It's the very last group update today. (Aww...)

If you've already done the survey, thanks! If not, it's at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/R733GPX> - this is your chance to give me feedback on the course. (You're also welcome to email me, of course: ali@aliventures.com.)

Congrats to Stephanie!

Stephanie wrote in this week to say:

I have one small success and I feel is a step in the right direction. I'm working on a course called Axiomatic. The course will be centered around an ebook I wrote. I'm still working on editing the book but it's coming along. Its title is Guiding Principles of Natural Horse Care - Powerful Concepts for a Healthy Horse.

My success, is that I created a sign-up page with some information about the upcoming class at the domain <http://www.naturalhorseconcepts.com> I also created a simple banner for the course and placed it on the side bar of my website <http://www.soulfulequine.com> The landing page is not really a full blown landing page yet, it's very simple and the copy is probably not the best, but it's something.

Big congrats to Stephanie! Getting a landing page up is a really key step – even if it feels like a small one. It takes a lot of bravery to make that first step in getting a course or ebook ready for sale. Also, great work on a very slick, professional website: it's easy as writers to feel that our words are all that should matter ... but readers inevitably judge those words by the way they're packaged.

Contact List

Plenty of On Track members are on Twitter, if you want to hook up with them. You can find the full list at <http://twitter.com/#!/aliventures/on-track-members/members> or use this list below:

AB: <http://twitter.com/herblackness>

Ainslie: <http://twitter.com/ainsliehunter>

Amanda & Millie: <http://twitter.com/AmandaandMillie>

Birdy Diamond: <http://twitter.com/BardicRaven>

Cal: <http://twitter.com/CalOlson>

David: <http://twitter.com/dckirba>

Emily: <http://twitter.com/EmilyMHelms>

Ije: <http://twitter.com/IjeUde>

Karen: <http://twitter.com/HiringHowTo>

Kapil: <http://twitter.com/KapilApshankar>

Laneth: <http://twitter.com/LanethSffarlenn>

Leslie: <http://twitter.com/leslieajoy>

Matty: <http://twitter.com/mattyblu>

Milo: <http://twitter.com/milomclaughlin>

Pete: <http://twitter.com/Peatee53>

Prime: http://twitter.com/prime_sarmiento

Roberto: <http://twitter.com/artypartyvictim>

Solo: <http://twitter.com/Guadalupesolo>

Stephanie: <http://twitter.com/stephkrah1>

Stephey: <http://twitter.com/stepheybaker>

Tim: <http://twitter.com/timsbain>

Tracy: <http://twitter.com/tlewilson>

Willie: <http://twitter.com/williehewes>

And Sue, who isn't on Twitter, would be happy to hook up with other On Track members via email: s.lambertv20@gmail.com

My Ebook Rewrite...

Back in week two – a whole month ago now – we were setting milestones, and I told you that:

I'm rewriting my Staff Blogging Course, and aim to write a chapter of new material by next Monday. And by 28th February, I'll have finished the whole rewrite and launched the new version. You'll get to hear about it before the end of On Track...

Well, I'm thrilled to be able to tell you that I did it! The whole rewrite is finished, and the Staff Blogging Course has now become *The Blogger's Guide to Freelancing*. You can see it for yourself at www.bloggers-guides.com ☺

World-Changing Writing Workshop

Prime tweeted about this, and thought it would be something that interested On Track members. And I agree!

Pace and Kyeli Smith (@pacesmith and @kyeli on Twitter) run an annual online World-Changing Writing Workshop. You can buy the "workshop in a box" from 2010 on the [World-Changing Writing site](#) and you can [read my review here](#).

Or, keep an eye out for this year's Workshop. Pace and Kyeli haven't confirmed all the speakers yet, but I can let you in on the fact that I'll be one of them. Woo! ☺

Monday's Assignment

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

Assignment

It's all too easy to come to the end of a course and suddenly lose momentum – and I don't want that to happen to you. **Pick one (or more) of these next steps, or come up with your own:**

#1: Buy a writing book or ebook that takes you closer to your goal. I've got [reviewed some here](#).

#2: Subscribe to two or three great writing blogs. I particularly like [Men with Pens](#) and [Copyblogger](#). "Subscribing" to a blog means getting updates to your RSS reader or straight to your inbox, so that you don't miss out on any new posts.

#3: Find a writing buddy. Email one another regularly to share your progress.

#4: Book a coaching session. Mention "on track" and you'll get \$30 off your first session with me, making it just \$49 instead of \$79. Or, if you prefer, you can have an email session for \$34 instead of the usual \$49. For more details, [see my coaching page](#).

Questions and Answers

This week's questions are on:

1. Chapter outlining for non-fiction
2. Ebook cover and banner ad design

#1. Chapter outlining for non-fiction

How do you chapter-plan for a longer work of non-fiction? Let's say you have a broad subject in mind for a non-fiction book, how do you decide what to leave in and leave out? How do you decide how to order your chapters? Any other related tips on deciding what goes where in a larger outline?

There's no one right way to outline, but with something book-length, I find it helps to be clear about what I'm *not* including. For instance, I decided that neither of my blogging ebooks were going to have lots of technical details on how to set up WordPress or choose webhosting (as there are plenty of other resources on that, and I wanted to focus on the writing bits of blogging).

It's not always obvious, though, whether a particular chapter should be in or out. I sometimes ask other writers to look at my outline, to get their thoughts (and I've had friends send me their outlines, too). Sometimes, another person can have a clearer view – they're not so close to the project as you are.

You might want to think through:

- The title or potential sales copy for the book: what will your readers expect and want?
- Your audience: how advanced are they? Will you need to cover everything in a step-by-step way, or can you take basic knowledge for granted?
- Is this a stand-alone book or part of a series? You don't necessarily have to put everything you know on this topic into one book.

I usually aim for a list of potential chapters first, then order them. I ask myself what people will need *first*. I try to put the more advanced material towards the end of the book. I look for chapters which link together or build on one another, and try to group them together sensibly.

Inevitably, I find that I need to reorder things as I go along – so don't get too bogged down in this stage: your perfect chapter order will probably only emerge once you start to write.

#2: Ebook cover and ad banner design

What would you recommend for designing your ebook marketing images and cover? I realize the best approach is hiring someone for this, however, if that's not in the budget just yet what would you recommend? I'm not a graphic designer but I'm pretty good with creating my own banners, modify images, etc.

When I started out with ebooks, I created my own covers (using stock photos from istockphoto.com and MS Word). I then used a bit of software called eCover Software Pro ([reviewed here](#)) to turn the flat images into things which looked a bit like book covers.

They weren't *too* bad, but I'm really not a graphical person, so I pretty quickly moved on to paying someone to do it for me!

You can see one of my early efforts here: <http://www.aliventures.com/quit-your-day-job/>

If you can't afford to hire someone, I'd suggest buying some good stock images and using Paint.NET or another free image editing program. I use MS Powerpoint 2007 to create button-type images using word art and styles etc – you can also use that (or Word) to add shadows and perspective to your images.

You might want to ask a few friends (perhaps on Twitter) to take a look at your images and give you some feedback: what looks great to one person doesn't always work for another.

Once you've sold enough ebooks to pay for cover design, though, it's probably worth paying someone. My cover designer for the Blogger's Guide ebooks was Charlie Pabst, of [Charfish Design](#). He's a great guy and if you tell him your budget, he'll be able to tell you what he can do within it.

The logo for On Track and the cover for *7 Pillars of Effective Writing* were done by my younger sister, Jo. They're fantastic, aren't they? (Proud big sis!) ☺

Don't forget to do the survey! <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/R733GPX>

Next Monday (28th), I'll be sending you a package of all the course materials, so that you can keep them safe on your computer and refer to them whenever you want.