

MODULE #5: HAVING MORE FUN WITH YOUR WRITING

IN THIS MODULE:

This week, we're looking at how to enjoy your writing more. We'll cover ways to fall back in love with your writing again, and how to inject more fun into your writing life (without feeling that you're "wasting time").

Writing should be – at least most of the time – something fun!

There's sometimes a sense among writers that the writing itself is mostly or always horrible and hard, but *having written* is a nice feeling.

This has been going on for a long time:

I write with great difficulty, but have managed somehow to accomplish 40 short stories (all published in fugitive fashion) and five novels within the last three years, and a lot of special unsigned articles. Believe my forte is the novel. **Don't like to write, but like having written.** Hate the effort of driving pen from line to line, work only three hours a day, but work every day.

– Letter written by novelist Frank Norris, who died in 1905

Interviewer: Do you find it fun to write?

GRRM: I do. Yeah. To the extent that anything is fun to write. **I'm one of those writers who say "I've enjoy having written."** There are days I really enjoy writing and there are days I f–king hate it. I can see it in my head and the words won't come. I try to put it on the page and it feels stiff and wooden and it's stupid. Writing is hard work.

– Interview with George R.R. Martin, in 2011

On one hand, it's important to acknowledge and respect the difficulty of writing: creating something truly *good* can be incredibly hard work. An acclaimed short story or a powerful blog post read by thousands of people might only come after years of practice, and many hours spend thinking about, crafting and editing a piece of writing.

On the other hand, if writing itself always feels like a painful slog – something to avoid, put off, or plough through with gritted teeth – then there are surely more pleasant things you could be doing with your time!

Whatever your current feelings about writing itself – whether you put it off but enjoy it once you start, whether you look forward to it, or whether you find every minute of it like pulling teeth – there are ways to make it more fun.

Permission to Enjoy Writing

Do you ever feel like this when you sit down to write?

I really should be working on something different. Something more worthwhile. Will this even matter to anyone else? I'm not saying anything new here. This part is so tedious. I'm wasting my time – I'm never going to make any money writing anyway.

I think a lot of writers have this negative self-talk going on – I know I still struggle to counter it. It's tough to enjoy writing when you feel your work isn't good enough, or when every minute you spend on one project is a minute you feel you should be spending on something else.

Something that you might find helpful is to give yourself permission to simply write *because you enjoy it*. There's nothing wrong with that!

A few things that can help are to:

#1: Frame Your Writing as a Hobby

I'm always a little wary about saying this, because some writers feel quite offended at the suggestion that writing is a hobby.

Writing can be (and usually is!) far more than a hobby: it's a dream, a goal, a career, even a way of life. But if you're struggling to feel good about the time you spend writing, calling it a "hobby" can help.

Hobbies don't need to be justified. They don't need to make money. They aren't invested with huge, grand hopes. They're just something you do for fun.

Also, hobbies don't need to be something that other people understand or also enjoy. My in-laws love playing golf, and spend a lot of their free time on this. It definitely wouldn't be my hobby of choice – but I know *they* enjoy it.

If the people around you don't really "get" your writing, framing it to yourself as a hobby (and maybe explaining it to them in those terms) might be helpful.

#2: Try to Ditch the Guilt Trips

Quite a few writers I talk to feel guilty for writing. This comes up especially for parent writers and (though I'm generalizing here) for women writers.

There's often a sense that we "should" be doing something other than writing. Maybe it's the housework, or spending more time with our kids, or catching up on correspondence, or organizing the cupboards...

It's hard to just stop feeling guilty, so you might find it helps to:

#1: Plan your writing time in advance. If you've blocked out a couple of hours to write, you may feel more justified in using them that way.

#2: Imagine someone else in your position. Let's say it's your partner who wants to write: would you expect them to feel guilty for writing before doing the dishes? Or would you be happy that they were spending some time doing something that's really important to them?

Another major source of guilt for writers is *not* writing. (In fact, some writers manage to feel bad about writing *and* bad about not-writing.)

Again, this is a case where planning your writing time helps. You don't need to feel bad about spending Monday evening unwinding and watching TV, because you've got some writing time planned on Tuesday.

What if You Simply Don't Enjoy Writing?

Sometimes, you might feel like you've fallen out of love with writing. Maybe you enjoyed writing once – years ago, when you were just getting into it, and didn't have any particular hopes of fame or reward. Or maybe you found it easy to have fun writing at a point in your life when you had fewer commitments and responsibilities.

Today, though, writing might feel like yet another thing on your to-do list.

If this has happened to you, you'll want to figure out whether you've stopped enjoying writing in general, or if you've lost your spark on a particular project.

Not Enjoying Writing in General

Sometimes, *any* type of writing seems like a lot of work ... and not a lot of fun.

This can happen when:

- You've had a number of rejections. Some writers brush these off quite easily; most find them at least a bit disheartening. Some feel crushed by rejection.
- You've tried hard but not made the progress you'd hoped for. Maybe you started a blog a year ago, for instance, you've been blogging twice a week, and you still have only a handful of readers.
- You've got a lot going on in your life. That could be at home: maybe you've got young children, or someone close to you is very unwell, or you're caring for your elderly parent(s) as they become increasingly

infirm. It could be in your day job: perhaps you've got a long, tiring commute, or you've been working more hours than usual.

I don't think there's an easy fix here. You may find it helps to take some time deliberately "off" from writing, without putting any pressure on yourself to produce anything.

You might also find it rejuvenating to join a writing group or take a writing course: perhaps being around other writers will help you re-engage with your own writing (and it may set you off on a new path, too).

Not Enjoying Your Current Project

Perhaps it's not so much that you've fallen out of love with writing in general – just with the one particular project you're working on.

Maybe that novel that seemed so promising just isn't engaging you, now that you're a couple of chapters in.

Maybe that blog you were excitedly planning for a year has ended up being far more work than you'd initially expected – and you've already said everything you want to say about your topic.

Are you the sort of person who, once you've started reading a book, sees it through to the bitter end (even if it's boring you to tears)? Some people are like that with writing, too: they feel that they should *finish* every project.

One perfectly valid way to finish a project is to decide it was an experiment that didn't work out.

Sometimes, you'll start things that don't quite work. And that's a good thing! If you only ever started on writing projects that you were 100% sure would work, there'd be an awful lot of chances (and fun) that you'd miss out on.

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Here's a list of projects I've abandoned at various stages of incompleteness over the past twenty years of writing:

- A near-future SF novel I wrote in my teens (actually probably more like a novella). This was invaluable novel-writing training, it went through several drafts, it was something I really enjoyed working on between the ages of 14 and 16 ... but it wasn't of publishable quality.
- A traditional fantasy novel I wrote while at university. I got this one to the point where I was shipping it around to agents – but there was nothing particularly special or different about it, and I decided to let it go a long time ago.
- A contemporary novella I wrote during NaNoWriMo 2007. This was absolutely critical in establishing my writing career, not because I ever finished it or did anything with it, but because it taught me I *could* write around a full-time day job. It never got past a scrappy first draft.
- A blog about healthy living / dieting for office workers. This was my first ever blog, and I got to the point where it had about 800 RSS subscribers (this was back in 2008 when RSS was still popular). It was my training ground for learning how to blog. I gave it up blogging there about six months – but it brought in advertising income for the best part of a decade, until I sold it.
- A blog about being a successful student, aimed at undergraduates. This was my second blog, and I kept it up for a few months before I realized my heart really wasn't in it. It brought in a bit of advertising income.
- About twenty short stories that I finished, sent out for competitions or magazines, and never got published. I consider these “abandoned” in the sense that I'm never going to revise or resubmit them.

And those are just the projects that immediately come to mind! I'm sure there are plenty of others that I abandoned at various levels of completeness.

If I told you that you *had* to stop work on your project, how would you feel about that?

Disappointed? Angry? Relieved?

If you're no longer enjoying the project you're working on (and if it's more than just a temporary week or two of struggling), then there's no shame at all in stopping.

If you're not sure whether it's the project itself or if you're just feeling tired and burnt out, then take a deliberate break from your project (at least a couple of weeks, ideally a month) – then reassess.

Have More Fun With Your Writing

If you simply feel like you're in a bit of a rut with your writing – which can happen if you've been working on the same project, or the same types of thing, for a long time – then try a few ways to have more fun:

Play a Game

You might want to use a set of Story Cubes (dice with pictures on) to come up with new ideas for your story, or simply as a writing exercise. There are loads of different types available on Amazon.

Take on a Challenge

Some writers feel inspired by particular challenges – either ones involving specific prompts, or ones that involve writing a certain amount in a fixed period of time, like NaNoWriMo.

Try a Very Different Style or Structure

If you've written a lot of good but “normal” blog posts, you might want to try doing something in a very different style. This can be a lot of fun for readers as well as for you as the writer. I still remember Darren's post “[5 Things You Should Know About My Dad the ProBlogger](#)”, written from the perspective of his infant son in 2007.

Make Writing More of a Treat

Little things can make a big difference to how you perceive your writing time. Making your favourite drink before you start or going to a café to write can make it feel like more of a treat. You might try writing in bed, or buying a new notebook and pen (they don't have to be expensive).

If you take one thing away from today's lesson, make it this: you have permission to ENJOY writing.

Even if time is short (and I can totally sympathise if that's the case!), find just a little bit of time to play with your writing – ten minutes, say – without any expectations or pressure. Let us know how you get on. 😊

How the Assignments Work

During this week and the rest of the course, your only assignment is to reach the writing target that you set yourself in week two. If you decide your target isn't working for you, it's fine to set a different one.

ASSIGNMENT

Your assignment this week is simply to reach the target that you set for yourself in week two.

Even if you don't quite get there, it's fine to "check in" for your reward stamp anyway – just tell us how you got on:

[facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019/learning_content/?filter=535219726991649](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019/learning_content/?filter=535219726991649)

If you prefer not to use Facebook, you can email me (ali@aliventures.com) with "Module #5 check in" or similar in the subject line.

What's Coming Up Next Week:

Well done on reaching the end of this week's module. Remember, if you have questions at any point, please do ask in our Facebook group. If it's something you'd prefer to discuss privately, you can email me at ali@aliventures.com.

Here's what to expect in Module 6 next week:

MODULE 6:

Next week, from Monday 18th February, we're going to look at ways to keep up your momentum for the next few weeks or months. We'll be taking a step back, too, to assess how the past four weeks have gone for you – and then we'll be setting new targets to achieve during the four support weeks.