Introduction

Welcome to Supercharge Your Writing Week.

This guide follows on from <u>Supercharge Your Writing Session</u>, though you don't need to have read that one in order to use this. If you've bought both, though, I'd suggest starting with Supercharge Your Writing Session.

In Supercharge Your Writing Week, we'll be looking at how your writing fits into your week as a whole. Instead of looking at how to get the most out of individual writing sessions, we'll be taking a step back to see the bigger picture: the weeks (and months) that make up your writing life.

We all have 168 hours in every week – but how those hours are spent will look different for different writers.

If you have a demanding full-time job but laid-back weekends, your week won't have the same shape as someone who's a stay-at-home parent to three under-5s.

If you're newly retired and caring for elderly parents, your week will be radically different from a student at university with a busy social life.

Obviously, not every tip or suggestion in this guide can apply to *every* writer, in *every* circumstance. But I've tried to keep in mind, when writing it, the different life situations that you might be facing right now – and I hope you'll find some practical and realistic tips for your season of life.

In this guide, we'll be covering:

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1: How Much Writing Should You Do Each Week?

Some writers set a daily target – but many can't (or don't want to!) have a writing session every day. So a lot of writers will also want to set a weekly target, and perhaps that's the case for you too.

But how much should you write in a week?

This is going to look wildly different for different writers. If you're a freelancer or a full-time employee in a writing role, you might be easily writing 10,000 words or more per week. If you're at a stage in life where you have very few commitments, you might be hitting those sorts of numbers too.

Most likely, though, your writing projects are fitting in around a busy life. There's no "right" amount to produce each week – even if you just write 500 words every week, that's over 25,000 words a year.

If you're looking to complete a big project, it's well worth thinking about how much you can get done in 50 weeks (a year, minus a couple of weeks off). That way, it's easier to see how a realistic amount of writing every week can add up.

For instance:

If you're writing a novel, you might aim to write 2,000 words each week. That's 100,000 words in a year – more than enough for a full-length first draft.

If you've started a blog, you might aim to write a single blog post each week, averaging at 800 words. If you skip a couple of weeks, that's still 50 blog posts in a year – for a total of 40,000 words. That's the equivalent of a short non-fiction book.

The key here is consistency. Rather than having a couple of weeks where you write a lot, only to then give up for a couple of months, you want to find a comfortable writing rhythm that you can stick with week after week.

You also want to find a weekly amount that works for you: where you feel like you're making progress, but you're not pushing yourself so hard that you're feeling stressed or resentful about your writing.

Right now, I'm finding that about 2,000 words a week on my novel is my sweet spot. If I write less than that, it's hard to keep up the momentum – but right now, my life is too full of other things to fit in more than that without giving up something else important to me.

But 2,000 words might not be the right amount for you. Perhaps 500 words – or 5,000 words – is a better target.

Can You Vary Your Target From Week to Week?

Maybe you have some weeks that are a lot busier than others. Perhaps your job involves long hours at the end of each quarter, or you normally have time to write when your kids are at school, but the school holidays are coming up.

You don't have to stick to the same target every week. Let's say your schedule involves 3 "normal" weeks then one "busy" week. You might decide to do something like this:

- Week 1: 2,500 words
- Week 2: 2,500 words
- Week 3: 2,500 words
- Week 4: 500 words

That gives you a total of 8,000 words in 4 weeks – the same as if you wrote 2,000 words each week.

If you want to take full weeks off from writing, that's fine, too. I really recommend planning this in advance, though – that way, you're making a conscious decision about when to stop (and when to start again) instead of just letting your writing slide.

What if You Can't Fit In as Much Writing as You Want?

Let's say you map out your week on paper – and you realise that there isn't enough space to fit in the amount of writing you want.

It'd be easy for me to tell you to drop one of your current commitments, or pay for help with cleaning/gardening/admin, or rearrange your life in some other way to prioritize your writing.

But the truth is that sometimes, it just isn't practical or even possible to free up as much time as you'd like. Maybe you're going through a health crisis. Maybe something unexpected has thrown your plans into chaos. Maybe you have commitments that you can't simply ditch (and wouldn't want to ditch anyway) – like looking after your kids, or caring for a relative.

I know how frustrating and discouraging this can be. I've often got a rather rosy idea of how much time I really have available ... and when I sit down to figure out *where* my writing sessions are going in my week, I realise that I'm not going to be able to move as quickly on my novel as I'd hoped.

This doesn't mean that it's not worth writing at all.

When you *want* to be writing 10,000 words a week but you can realistically manage 1,000 – 2,000, it can feel like there's no point even bothering. But even if those words add up more slowly, they'll still add up.

When you don't have as much time to write as you want, it's even more important to make the very most of the time you do have. Try to fit it into your week at the best times for you, and be *really* diligent about avoiding interruptions and distractions.

What if You're Working on More than One Project?

Maybe you've got several different projects you want to switch between. It's not unusual, for instance, for writers to be working on some freelance pieces or a blog alongside a novel-in-progress.

Some experts would tell you to pick *one* project, see it through, then start the next. While I think that might be the most efficient method, I know that it's not the right route for every writer. Personally, I like to have several projects on the go: the variety suits me well.

It can be tough to get much of a sense of momentum if you're working on two or more writing projects at once, though. To make the most of your writing time, you'll want to:

- Limit how many projects you're taking on at a time. While 2 or 3 simultaneous projects can work fine, you don't want to be writing 4 short stories and 2 novels at once. Can you finish off one smallish project before starting on another? Or plan things so that, one month, your focus is on your novel, and the next month, you're getting ahead with blog posts?
- Figure out when in the day or week you're best at each type of writing. I find it easiest to focus on non-fiction (blog posts and short projects like this guide) in the early mornings, and fiction in the evenings.
- Try to keep everything as organized as you can. For me, a separate notebook for each big project works well, plus a whole bunch of easily-searchable notes in Evernote. It doesn't matter what system you use, so long as you can quickly lay your hands on what you need when you sit down to write.

#2: How Often Should You Write?

I meet quite a few writers who think they should write every day. It's often advice they've been given by someone else, rather than something they genuinely want to do.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with writing every day if you want to – and if it works for you. Some people find it really motivating to put a series of Xs on the calendar to make an unbroken chain of writing days.

But sometimes, writing every day isn't a good fit. Maybe it makes you feel stifled or pressured. Maybe you'd prefer to save up your writing time for a couple of long, focused sessions each week. Or maybe you'd *like* to write every day, but it's just not practical for you right now.

So long as you can keep up a sense of momentum with your writing, it really doesn't matter how often you write. I find that about twice a week works for me: if I only write once a week, it's harder to get back into my writing, because I've started to lose the thread of what I was working on during the previous session.

In <u>Supercharge Your Writing Session</u>, we looked at the pros and cons of short sessions versus longer sessions. You might find, for instance, that writing for 1.5 hours every Monday and Thursday evening suits you better than writing for 30 minutes every day ... but over the course of a week, you'll produce about the same amount of writing.

Can You Just Write on Weekends?

Absolutely! For some writers, doing all their writing on a Saturday and/or Sunday works best. Maybe you have a busy day job, but no kids (or older kids), so your weekends are relatively free of commitments.

The one challenge you might have is that if you have 5 or 6 days completely off from writing, it can be hard to get back into it. Try keeping more notes than you otherwise would about where you'd got to and where

you were going next, so you don't end up losing the thread during your working week.

You may also want to allow a little extra time on your "getting started" routine to help you get into writing mode each weekend.

What if You Want to Write Every Day?

Then go ahead and write every day. ⁽ⁱ⁾ Some writers find this suits them well. It might be a great fit for you if you've got a lot of control over your own schedule – perhaps if you're a student, or retired.

Don't feel that you necessarily have to write the same amount each and every day, though. You might find it works best to aim for, say, 300 words most days but 1000 words on days when you have a whole afternoon free.

#3: Fitting Writing Into Your Week

Let's take a look at *how* exactly writing can fit into your week. You might want to use the "Ideal Week" printable to help with this – it's designed for you to map out all the activities you need and want to fit into your week, so you can figure out where writing can most easily become part of it.

Because fitting writing in will look very different for different circumstances, I've split this part of the guide into different sections.

We're also going to take a look at weekdays and weekends separately, because for most writers, there's probably at least some difference in your usual routine on each.

Weekdays When You Have a Full-Time Job

Plenty of writers work a regular 9 – 5 job, which might have nothing to do with writing. If this is the case for you, then your writing will obviously need to fit into one of these areas:

- Mornings before work
- Your lunch break
- Evenings after work

All of these can be good possibilities (and they're all ones that I've used while working full-time, at different stages in my life).

Mornings Before Work

If you're a morning person like me, then you might find it works well to fit in some writing *before* your workday begins.

That way, you can write when you're fresh and energised – not when you're worn out from an 8 hour day at work.

This is almost certainly going to mean waking up earlier than you currently do. You might want to do that in stages – e.g. get up 15 minutes early for a week, then get up 30 minutes earlier, and so on.

Mornings work particularly well if you want to write every day, or most day, for a fairly short session. You're probably not going to want to get up more than an hour early to write. (Though if you're the sort of person who likes to get up at 4.30am, by all means go for it...)

Your Lunch Break

Obviously, writing in your lunch break is going to limit the length of your writing session – but it's worth considering as an option. You may well find that having a firm "start" and "stop" time for your writing helps you focus, and if your day job doesn't involve writing, then you may well find that your writing makes for a nice break.

Many years ago, I used to write at lunch times during the data entry summer job I had as a student, and at the full-time job I had after university.

This won't work for all jobs, though – perhaps you only get a short lunch break (or none at all), or maybe your company's culture is one where everyone works through lunch.

Evenings After Work

If you finish work around 5pm, you'll have a few hours at the end of the day that you could plausibly use for writing. This can be tough, though, if you're not naturally at your most focused in the early evening.

You may well also have post-work commitments that rule this timeslot out, or make it tricky. Perhaps – like me! – you've got young children who you want to spend time with after work, or maybe you're taking part in a group or class that meets in the evening.

If you're going to use evenings to write, I'd recommend picking two or three evenings each week, rather than trying to write during all of them. That gives you a bit more flexibility and means you can have some proper down time at least a couple of times a week.

Weekdays When You Have Kids

Writing around small children is tough. If you're struggling to make progress since having kids, you're definitely not alone.

Kids take up a lot of time. And of course, that's probably time you're happy (or at least willing!) to give – but it does mean that you inevitably have less time for writing in your life.

There are also knock-on effects on your time and energy levels from having kids that go beyond the time you spend changing nappies / preparing food / taking them to nursery / doing homework with them / etc, over the years.

Things like twice as much laundry (at least), and a lot more picking up toys and vacuuming, might eat into time you'd have otherwise spent writing in the evenings. Broken nights can mean that writing time you'd have otherwise had at 6am just isn't going to work out.

Plus, you might well have to commit more time to paying work after having kids: you might well need to pay the mortgage or rent on a larger house, for instance, not to mention the money spent on baby gear, kids' clothes, sports groups, clubs, and more.

This means that the flexibility you had pre-kids – where you could, at least potentially, choose to live cheaply and work less – might now be gone.

So please don't feel bad if you're struggling to fit in much writing around your kids: there are a lot of good reasons why!

If you want to write, though, it's hopefully possible for you to squeeze in a writing session or two every week.

Some time slots that might work, in my experience, are:

- In the morning before your kids wake up
- During their nap
- After dropping them off at nursery or school
- After your partner is home from work and before the kids go to bed
- Once the kids are asleep

In the Morning Before Your Kids Wake Up

This is a good time slot if (a) you like mornings and (b) your kids sleep till a reasonable hour.

My youngest woke up at 5am (or earlier!) for what felt like about ten years, but since he's only five, it can't have been quite that long. ;-) If you have a very early rising toddler, then you may well be out of luck with the morning hours.

If your kids sleep till 7 or so, though, or if they're old enough to read or play quietly for a bit in the mornings, then you might find you can fit in a bit of writing.

During Their Nap

If you have a baby or very young child who still naps, then that can be a good opportunity to fit in some writing. This worked well for me when we had *one* child – once we added a second, their naps overlapped briefly, then the older one dropped her nap altogether.

To make the most of nap time, you'll want to get your writing things organised ahead of time, so you don't spend ages tiptoeing around the house trying to figure out where you left your notebook.

After Nursery / School Drop Off

Once we had one child in school and one in morning preschool, writing time became a little easier to find! Maybe you're at this stage, too.

Our local preschool runs 9am – 12 noon, so I'd drop my son off there, then promptly walk down the road to our local library and write like mad for a couple of hours. I got some of my best, most productive writing done this way: I find it easy to focus in the mornings, and there weren't many distractions around.

After Your Partner is Home From Work

If you're a stay-at-home parent with a partner who works, you might be able to squeeze in some writing once your partner is home from work and ready for a turn looking after the kids.

When our kids were both very small, I used to hand them over to my husband after their tea (about 5.15pm) as he was always home by that point. I'd then write until about 5.45pm, before running their bath. It wasn't as much time as I'd have liked, and it wasn't at my best time of day, but having a consistent, set timeslot made it easier to focus.

If you're going to go down this route, you'll need your partner's co-operation – which is something we're going to come to in the next section of this guide.

Once the Kids Are Asleep

Now that my kids are school-age and I'm working full time, most of my fiction writing happens once they're asleep in the evening. (Pre-work in the mornings, I'm writing blog posts for Aliventures, plus occasional freelance pieces.)

For evenings to work well, you might find that it helps to eat dinner early with your kids. We currently do this on Tuesday and Thursday nights, which frees up those evenings for me to do some writing.

Of course, if you've been looking after the kids all day (or working all day), evenings can be a really tough time to sit down and focus. Make sure you're getting some down time, too, even if that means doing slightly shorter writing sessions than you'd ideally want.

Writing at the Weekends

Chances are, your weekends will look quite different from your weekdays.

Maybe you work long hours in the week, but you have your weekends free.

Or maybe your kids are out at school in the week, but you're busy with lots of activities for them at the weekend.

Or maybe your partner is out most of the time in the week, but they're around at weekends.

Whatever your exact circumstances, there's a fair chance that weekends offer a bit more flexibility than your weekdays. You might be able to try one (or more) of these:

- Block out a weekend morning or afternoon to write for several hours. If you've got kids, this is trickier, but it can work well if you're happy to write quite early or quite late. In our household, we sometimes arrange the weekends so that one adult takes care of the kids 6.30 – 9.30am each day, and the other person can write (or have some much needed down time).
- Take a writing course, class, or group retreat. You might well be able to find a local or virtual one that happens on a weekend. This can be a great way to brush up on specific writing techniques, to set aside time for your writing, and to meet other writers.
- Use your best time of day to write. Perhaps you find it easy to focus from 10am 12 noon, but that's exactly when you're normally at work. At the weekends, you might be able to block out that time to write.

#4: Getting Family Members' Support

Fitting your writing into your week can be a lot easier when you've got the support of family members.

Depending on how old you are and who you live with, those people could be your parents, your spouse, your kids, or other relatives or friends.

Hopefully, you've got at least some emotional support and encouragement from them – but hands-on practical support can make a huge difference too.

Practical Ways Family Members Can Help

This support could take a lot of different forms. Some of the key ways in which family members (or friends/housemates) can help are:

- Avoiding interrupting you when you're writing
- Helping you to set up and maintain a physical space where you can write
- Taking on more chores to free up your time for writing
- Doing some childcare to give you time to write

Avoiding Interrupting You When You're Writing

This is something that pretty much *all* family members should be capable of, unless they're very young.

It'll help if you can go in a separate room from the rest of your family to write, with the door shut. Let them know in advance that you're going to be writing, so they have a chance to ask you anything, or get anything they need from the room, beforehand.

This is really a minimum level of support – and if your spouse, teenager, or another adult in the household continually interrupts when you're writing, you may need to have a conversation with them about that and about how it's affecting you.

If you're in a position where you can't exactly *tell* someone to stop interrupting – e.g. you're living at home with your parents – then it helps a lot to get out of

the house to write. If you can go to a local coffee shop or library, that's a great option; if not, writing in the garden shed, or the attic, or any room that's not too easy to access, can help.

Helping You Set Up and Maintain a Writing Space

In <u>Supercharge Your Writing Session</u>, we looked at the importance of having a physical space where you can write. While you might not be able to set aside a whole room for your writing, you might well be able to cram a desk into your bedroom, or take over part of the kitchen table.

You might need to rope in the help of family members to set up or maintain your writing space. Perhaps you need a hand building your desk, or you want to get your spouse and kids to keep one end of the kitchen table clear from clutter so you can easily write there in the evenings.

Taking On More Chores to Free You Up for Writing

If you currently do more than your share of chores around the house, can someone else take some of those on? That might mean re-negotiating with your spouse about who does what, or it might mean handing over more responsibility to your children, if they're old enough to help out.

I know that it often seems easier to just do things yourself, rather than try to organize other people into doing them, but even something as simple as having a couple of nights off from doing the dishes could free up more writing time for you.

Doing Some Childcare to Give You Time to Write

Could someone in your family (maybe your parents or a sibling) help out with childcare? Grandparents are often very glad to do this, but you might well find someone else can be encouraged or bribed to help too.

Even if someone else is simply in charge of giving your kids breakfast and keeping an eye on them while they watch TV, that can make a huge difference. It gives you an hour or more in the morning to sit down and focus on your writing, without constant interruptions from your little ones.

Note: I'm assuming here that you and your partner (if you have one) already split the childcare fairly. If that's not the case – if you seem to be doing everything with the kids while they get a lot more time for *their* hobbies and interests – then please advocate for yourself and do what you can to redress the balance.

Your Attitude to Your Writing Time

The way you treat your writing time can help family members to take your writing time seriously, and encourage them to support you in having more of it.

Here are a few things you can do to show that you're taking your writing time seriously:

Write when you've said you're going to write. If you tell everyone you're going to write from 8pm – 9pm on Thursday evening, but then you end up sitting on the sofa scrolling through Facebook on your phone, they're going to assume that your writing isn't really that important to you after all.

Be positive about your writing time. If you get family members to help out with childcare, then complain that you spent ages procrastinating and hardly got any writing done, then they're not going to be so keen to help next time. (By all means vent to someone else, though; we all have bad writing days.)

Don't give in to interruptions. If someone interrupts you repeatedly, get up and leave the room to write somewhere else. If your child keeps interrupting, get another family member to engage them in doing something. I know that repeated interruptions can make it easy to just give up on a writing session altogether – but then people will just assume you weren't that bothered about writing in the first place.

#5: When Your Week Isn't Going Smoothly

However well you plan, sometimes, your writing week just won't go quite how you hoped. Maybe something unexpected came up and derailed your planned writing time, or maybe there's a particular event taking place that wouldn't normally be part of your weekly schedule.

In this last section of the guide, we're going to tackle some issues that might come up, and look at some solutions to them.

Problem #1: You Skip a Planned Writing Session

There are all sorts of reasons why you might miss a planned writing session. Maybe something came up, like an unexpected phone call, or maybe you had to stay late at work, or maybe your child was ill.

Whatever the reason for it, you're simply not in a position where you can sit down and write at the start of your planned writing session.

Here are three things you can do to get your writing week back on track: **Write for as much of your session as you can manage.** I know how very easy it is to give up on a writing session completely when half of it gets eaten up with something unexpected (and often annoying) – but even if you only manage a couple of sentences, it's way better than nothing. Every word on the page counts, plus you'll be keeping with the writing habit.

Jot down some notes about what's coming next. When you miss a session, it's easy to lose momentum. Take 5 minutes to write down a few bullet points about what's coming next with your book/blog post/etc. That way, you can more easily pick up the thread during your next session.

Look ahead in your diary for the rest of the week and find another writing slot. It might not be at the best time of day, it might not be as long a slot as you'd like, and it might mean postponing something else ... but can you find at least a bit of time to make up for the missed session?

Problem #2: You're Too Tired to Write

Maybe you've managed to set aside some time to write, but when that time comes around, you're just too tired or demotivated to get started.

Please don't beat yourself up about this. Writing is hard work. Hopefully, though, one of these things will help:

Plan a much shorter writing time. Tell yourself you only have to write for 10 or 15 minutes. If you get on a roll – great, keep going! If not, don't worry, you met your target.

Get more sleep. I know this is often easier said than done ... but if you find you're too tired at 8pm to write, maybe it's time to get a really early night. That way, you might have far more energy the next day.

Drink caffeine. This one won't be for everyone, but it can be a helpful instant boost if you're a tea/coffee fan. Chocolate's a good option, too!

Change your writing sessions to a different time slot. If you're *always* too tired to write in the evenings, then move your writing sessions to a different time of day. This might mean making them shorter, changing your schedule around a bit, or negotiating with family members ... but it's well worth doing if it means you have the energy and enthusiasm to write.

Problem #3: You Struggle to Focus When You're Writing

So you sit down to write, at the time you'd planned, feeling at least somewhat enthusiastic. You get a few sentences down ... and then, somehow, you find yourself scrolling through Facebook instead of writing.

It can be really tough to focus sometimes, and again, please don't feel bad if this is a problem you have. Some simple things you can do to hugely improve your focus levels are:

Make a plan at the start of your writing session. If you don't know what ground you want to cover, it's easy to get stuck – and that's where you end up breaking off from writing and doing something else instead. Writing down a

quick plan for your blog post or your scene-in-progress can make it much easier to stay focused.

Turn off your internet connection. Trust me, it works! If you really need to stay online – e.g. you write in an online app – then try one of the many browser extensions or apps that help you focus. RescueTime (which I cover <u>in</u> <u>this blog post</u>) is one of my favourites.

Set a timer. Commit to writing, and nothing else, for 20 minutes (or pick a shorter or longer time interval if you prefer). Set a timer going – and write. You might be surprised how much you can get done.

Tip: Supercharge Your Writing Session covers a lot more about focus and avoiding distractions/interruptions, so if this is a particular issue for you, you might want to check that out.

Where Next?

There's no one "right" way to fit your writing into your week. Some writers are happiest writing all day on a Saturday, and that's it. Others want to write for an hour every morning.

What matters is finding what works for you and getting into a good routine.

The rest of the materials in the Supercharge Your Writing Week pack are printables designed to help you plan out your week. Each one has a nicely colored version, and a stripped-down black and white version in case you don't want to use much printer ink!

Your Ideal Week (.pdf)

This weekly calendar is designed to let you map out your ideal week. You can map out how you want your weeks to look, to make it easier to plan - and easier to deal with unexpected requests. (Print it twice for a "week 1" and "week 2" if that suits your life better – e.g. if you work shifts or have your kids every other weekend.)

Writing Week Planner (.pdf)

This page is designed for planning your writing week. You can use it in conjunction with the "Writing Session" planner, if you have Supercharge Your Writing Session. It takes a bigger picture view of your week and lets you plan what you're going to write on different days.

Weekly Routines (.pdf)

This sheet lets you plan starting and ending routines for your week. These don't necessarily need to be writing-related – you might find it helps free you up to write if you can reliably tackle admin tasks at the start of each week.

Happy writing,

Ali

P.S. I'd love to hear how your writing goes – and which tips or resources from *Supercharge Your Writing Week* helped you most. Drop me an email any time at <u>ali@aliventures.com</u> to let me know.

More Resources to Help You

If you want to go further with your writing, check out these resources on my website:

Supercharge Your Writing series (\$8 each)

Find the rest of the Supercharge series at aliventures.com/supercharge

Get Writing (\$20)

Get Writing is designed to let you dip into (or dig deep into) four key areas of writing: short stories, novels, blogging, and freelancing. It comes with a bunch of extra goodies, too, including checklists, prompts, and much more.

Check it out here: aliventures.com/get-writing

Self-Study Packs (\$20 each, or 6 for \$50)

The self-study packs are sets of seminars that cover specific topics, such as managing your time, self-publishing, freelancing, and more. You can choose any packs for \$20, or get the full set for just \$50.

Check them out here: aliventures.com/self-study-packs