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very two years, my household devolves into full-blown Olympic hysteria. For three weeks, we do nothing but watch the Olympics, cook international food, or cook while watching the Olympics. And on paper, it makes little sense. We’re not baseball people (too slow), basketball people (too fast), or football people (too many concussions). We view most sports the way others view pets, marriage, or children: Fine and dandy for other people, but not right for us, thanks.

But the Games feel different. They’re a celebration of the undercelebrated, the underdog. I love watching the athletes who only enter the national conversation every four years, those unsung champions of the lesser-watched sports: the curlers, the archers, the rhythmic gymnasts. The table tennis champions, training long hours out of the public eye; the synchronized divers, hitting the water again and again and again, day after day, in search of perfection.

Surely no one becomes a curler or a bobsled for gold and glory. I imagine you do it because you must. Because you somehow landed upon this thing, fencing or luging or speedskating, and from that moment you couldn’t imagine doing anything else. You train every day, you suffer humiliating defeat and rejection, and you very likely need to hold down a day job, as all-expenses-paid athletic sponsorships are few and far between. None of this matters. Your goal is to be an Olympian, and you will do whatever it takes to get there.

Ah, but readers, you’re a savvy bunch; you already know where I’m going with this, don’t you? Writers must take inspiration from these athletes. We must want it more than anything else in this world. We must work every day to improve our craft. We must persevere even with the day job, the defeats, and the heartache.

And you’re right. I do want to say all that. But I also want to say this: Do you think anyone ever questions that diver as to why she gets up at 4 a.m. every morning? Does anyone ask if all that practice in the rink, gym, or shooting range is really worth it? Do they ever feel badly for taking the time to train? Does anyone bat an eye when these athletes invest in equipment, professional guidance, or transportation to events?

No! So why do you do it with your writing?

If you really want a piece of this industry – an agent, a publishing contract, a best-seller, or a simple byline – you must immediately stop letting yourself and others treat writing as a hobby. It is not a hobby. It is not a pastime, a flighty notion, or a passing fancy. It’s your passion, it is your life’s work, and it is your dream. It is worth every second and every penny you can spare.

Don’t let anyone – yourself included – relegate it to the sidelines.

Keep writing,

Nicki Porter
Senior Editor
Labors of love

FOR MOTHER-WRITERS, “FINDING THE TIME” IS A MYTH.

By Sarah Bradley

Any woman who struggles to pursue a personal passion alongside the consuming nature of motherhood will inevitably have the following question asked of her: “How do you find the time?”

I hear it all the time as a freelance writer and teacher. At writing workshops, it’s the question I get asked most frequently (especially by fellow mothers). It’s also my least favorite question to receive, because the answer doesn’t come easily.

The truth is that I don’t find the time to write. Finding the time is a myth: the time doesn’t exist to be found. I love my three sons, but they are adorable black holes that consume the majority of my waking hours, nearly all of my energy, and at least half of my brain cells. There isn’t much left of me after bedtime, once the house is beautifully, painfully quiet. Mother-writers know this emptied-out feeling well – it’s a frustrating, unpleasant aching. I spend the day dreaming of time alone to write, but when everyone is asleep, I can only stare at a blank page or blinking cursor, too mentally exhausted and physically drained to write anything down.

I can’t find the time to write, and I can’t wait for the time to find me, either. If I want to write, I have to make the time.

This is not as easy as it sounds. There’s not a lot of balance between the two roles of Mother and Writer, and Mother always comes first. I can’t write until I’ve dealt with the snags and tangles of motherhood first. And making the time is nothing if not an exercise in creativity: I’m constantly searching for the glimmer of a possibility, waiting for moments ready to be stolen. I wonder how many minutes at the computer a long-forgotten toy dragged up from the basement will buy me with the kids. I scramble to prep dinner at 10 a.m. so I can escape to my computer for an hour after my husband comes home. I ask myself how much television is too much for a 2-year-old and if that amount changes when the show is educational. (I suspect not, but humor me.)

I fight for the time during afternoon nap, praying to the naptime gods that the toddler doesn’t decide today is not such a good day for sleeping. I carve the time out of other obligations, foregoing an extra hour of sleep or an early-morning session on the treadmill. I invent time when I’m doing other things, committing sentences to memory while showering or driving in the car or standing at the kitchen counter chopping vegetables or soothing a child to sleep.

I make time for writing because it’s a life preserver in a sea of diapers and tantrums and middle-of-the-night wakings and arguments with a 2-year-old about the color of the sky. I make time for writing because it makes me heartbroken not to. There’s a certain mourning process that mother-writers experience when they stop putting their words to paper. The act of writing clings to them like a phantom limb, a persistent haunting. I had the beginning of a story in mind, but I lost it when the baby dumped a bag of flour on the kitchen floor. I want to write, but I can’t even punctuate an email properly. I
used to have intelligent, provocative things to say, but now my mind has been dulled into oblivion from repeated viewings of Elmo's World.

I didn’t tend to my writing for a long time after having my first son seven years ago. I told myself that the other stories I was telling – in the housework and the laundry, in the crusts cut off sandwiches and the same book read over and over, in the soreness of that well-worn spot on my left hip where he spent most of his day – were enough. And it’s true that those stories, though different than the ones I told in writing, were no less beautiful. But the more children I had, the more I wanted to write. The more I shared my body and time and energy with my sons, the more I wanted one single thing for myself. Something that was just mine. Something that was just mine.

When my second son was a newborn, I wrote my first short story as a mother. It came quickly and furiously, not unlike that child’s birth: inside me one moment, outside of me the next. It felt good – an addictive rush, a wave I was giving my sons a part of me they would never otherwise have. They were getting all of me after all. They were like. “This writing is you. Your voice and your memories of this time in your life. The kids won’t remember it, but someday they’ll want to know what it was like. What you were like.”

This was a revelation. I always thought that making the time to write meant I was refusing to turn over every piece of myself to my sons. There was guilt necessarily attached to that. What kind of mother was I, if I was unwilling to sacrifice everything for my children? In reality, by continuing to write, I was giving my sons a part of me they would never otherwise have. They were getting all of me after all. Maybe it’s inevitable that mothers can’t ever escape their children. Maybe the unavoidable consequence of shaping another person within our own bodies is that mothers can’t ever be truly un tethered, no matter how much growth and change and distance occurs between us and our children.

What I do know is that when I make the time to write, I’m not being selfish or indulgent. I’m not wasting time or dabbling in a trivial hobby. I’m not saying that being a writer is more important than being a mother.

What I am doing is handing my children the last remaining scraps of myself – my most secret and lovely thoughts – and saying, Here. You already have the best parts of me, but take this, too. This is who I am, and it’s yours to keep.

—Sarah Bradley is a freelance writer, creative writing instructor, and the founder of Pen to Paper Creative Writing Services. Her fiction has appeared in The Forge Literary Magazine, Black Fox Literary Magazine, and From the Depths by Haunted Waters Press; her nonfiction has been featured at “On Parenting” from the Washington Post, Today’s Parent, Mom.me, Tonic by VICE, and RealSimple.com, among others. Sarah lives in Connecticut with her husband and three sons, ages 7, 4, and 3.

**ASK THE WRITER**

Is “OK” or “okay” the correct spelling? What about the past tense?

This little word gets lots of different spelling treatments, some with punctuation and others with different combinations of capital and lowercase letters. The two you use in your question – OK and okay – are the forms most often supported. You will find them in dictionaries and style guides. When choosing between them, defer to the style guide you typically use, as they vary on this issue. If you don’t need to adhere to a specific style, you can choose between the two. Make sure to stay consistent in your usage, however. All of this also applies to past tense. The past tense of OK is OK’d. (Note the apostrophe as recommended by the AP Stylebook.) Okay simply becomes okayed.

Use this casual language with care. It’s certainly appropriate in many situations, particularly in creative writing, and you might use it to construct a colloquial voice, create informality, and work toward authenticity of character. Still, don’t let it sneak into writing situations where a more formal voice is appropriate, which might include some characters’ voices or more formal articles.

—Brandi Reissenweber teaches fiction writing and reading fiction at Gotham Writers Workshop.
WRITERS ON WRITING

Tom Leopold

Tom Leopold is a comedy writer based in New York City. He has written for TV shows including Seinfeld, Will & Grace, and Cheers and has written for comedians including Bill Murray, David Letterman, Carol Burnett, and Mary Tyler Moore. He is also the author of three novels: Almost Like Being Here, Somebody Sing, and Milt and Marty: The Longest Lasting and Least Successful Comedy Writing Duo in Showbiz History. His other credits include co-writing the musical J. Edgar!, which starred Kelsey Grammer, John Goodman, and Christopher Guest. Currently, Leopold teaches the “Comedy Writers’ Room,” a private master class in TV writing, which he has taught at Columbia University and elsewhere.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU’VE LEARNED ABOUT WRITING?

I’ve written novels and I’ve written all other kinds of things, but I want to speak as a comedy writer, though I think this applies to any kind of writing. If you want to touch people, if you want to steer people, if you want to give them adventure – using comedy writing as an example – make sure you think it’s funny. Now, of course, that’s the obvious thing, right? But so often comedy writers get stuck in writing what they think others might think is funny or what is funny at the moment.

Instead of that – and it’s scary – if you absolutely go with what really, really makes you laugh, there’s a chance other people won’t, because you’re being so specific. But, of course, the more specific you are in writing, the more general an audience can react to. It’s like poetry. The more specific the poem, the more general it is. It’s the same in other genres, too. If you’re writing a suspense novel, make sure you’re in suspense. It’s very simple, but it’s important for a lot of reasons. One is you’ll know how to do it again. So often I’ve worked on shows and pilots, and you want to write what really amuses you, what really moves you. Because then, let’s say you’re doing episode 120, you know that you have a well to draw from, because it’s coming out of you. I know it’s a cliché, but it’s a really great cliché. Have the nerve to write the thing that absolutely drives you crazy, or you love, or you think is hysterical. Because none of us are so original that there won’t be a big swatch of people out there who agree.

I also find that thinking of it that way helps you with rejection. God knows in 50 years of writing, I’ve had plenty of that. Then at least you go down with what you thought was great, or as good as you could get it. There’s a little bit of peace in that. It still makes you double up in pain, but it’s easier to live with.

But when you find those people who really spark to it, you know that you’re on that same wavelength, and it’s the only real wavelength you’ve got. And it takes some guts, you know? Because wow, I’m really putting myself out there. And how else can you really do it? Painful as it is, you might as well go all the way. As painful as writing is anyway, you might as well invest it with yourself.

AND HOW HAS THAT HELPED YOU AS A WRITER?

It’s really helped me deal with rejection. I always say that I’ve been luckier than a lot. I’ve never had a job outside of showbiz, and so I’ve been really blessed that I’ve been able to make a living out of it. But I also say that 94 percent of my career has been disappointment. But that other 6 percent was a gas. It really was. I think that as painful as it is, rejected scripts are like what painters, artists must feel when they go to a gallery, they put their paintings up on the wall, and they don’t sell, so they put them back in their beat-up old Volkswagen and take them home. I have a lot of scripts like that. And sometimes I think, ‘Man, I loved that script. I still love that script.’ Maybe there’ll be a life for it later, or maybe its time will come.

And boy, I’d rather have a shelf of unproduced stuff that I love than a shelf of unproduced stuff in which I tried to outsmart the audience – outsmart the buyer, if you will.

With rejection, you never expect it. And maybe that 94 percent is a high number I’m using as a joke. But even so, you never expect it. I think that’s what makes us such idiots. Because every single time, I think the world’s gonna fall in love with what I’ve written, and mostly they don’t, and I’m disappointed and surprised every time. And you think I would learn. But the thing is, I don’t think you can keep doing this if you don’t keep falling in love with these little babies that you create, that maybe nobody else will like.

I’ve been reading at bookstores, libraries, and conferences for 15 years, and I’ve attended readings far longer than that. I’ve also run a writers’ open mic for five years in a series of dimly lit bars and have been delighted by the authors who can engage an audience in the allotted five minutes. Some authors make the time fly by, and we are so totally with them that we don’t want them to stop, yet other authors seem to be in a state of discomfort and confusion that spreads to the audience like an airborne virus.

There are invariably those people born to the stage, but the rest of us have to learn a whole new set of skills to make readings comfortable and even fun. After all, our primary skill is writing, so it is not surprising that we might feel shaky about being the focus of attention in front of a crowd. But this is where we meet our readers, the people who have chosen to show up for us in a bookstore. Why not make the occasion memorable, engaging, and even fun?

Here are some things to consider before and during a reading that will make your reading a success.

Before you plan a reading
Long before you approach a bookstore with a request to do a reading (assuming this is a local bookstore), become a customer and get to know the staff. When you have friends and family visiting, bring them to the bookshop. Get on their email list of announcements. Support other writers by showing up at their readings. If you are on their mailing list, give other author readings a plug on social media.

Bookshops are one of the reasons that writers exist. I know, there’s a big store in the sky, Amazon, and it only takes a few taps on the keyboard or phone to order a book and have it arrive in a flash. (I do it too sometimes.) But consider what the staff has to do because you want to read your book at their store. They have to contact your publisher to order your books. They have to advertise your event on their webpage, Facebook, email newsletters, and everywhere else. They might hand-sell your book by placing it on the counter or in a prominent spot. They have to physically move a bunch of stuff around to make room for the chairs that they will haul out and arrange. They might set up a sound system. And in indie bookstores with a small staff, someone will end up staying late to put all the chairs away and roll the wheeled bookcases back in place. All of this, just for you.

We owe them a lot. Their profit margin is razor thin. They do all this for the love of the written word, the spoken word, and the rich world of the literary community. Treat them royally. They are my heroes.

The day before the reading
Prepare and practice. I cannot stress this enough. We have all seen authors show up who act befuddled, as if it only just occurred to them to select a reading. This is disrespectful of
the audience and the bookstore. Don’t be that author. Select the passages that you will read and practice reading them. Practice reading slowly, especially if you are nervous. Practice looking up. Practice breathing. I’m serious; if you forget to breathe or you’re reading too fast to take a breath, you will need to slow down. Time the readings. Decide what you will talk about and then practice talking about it.

The day of the reading
Give a sincere thanks to the bookstore staff. After the event, send them a note of thanks.

Tell the audience what you’re going to do. For example, “I will read several short bits, explain how I came to write this story, then I’ll take questions.” If the audience knows what’s coming, they can relax and join you in the journey.

They truly want to know who you are. It has taken me a long time to believe that others might be interested in who I am, but I finally get it. Tell them something about yourself and what inspired the book. Honestly, they can read the book themselves.

Keep the reading segment of the program short. I never read any one section of the book that is longer than five or six minutes. I might say, “Here is the start of the chapter where Delia first meets Detective Moretti.” And I will read only a few segments. Remember, read slowly, look up, and make contact with your audience.

Make your reading choices count. You don’t want to give the entire story away, but the audience should learn the basic conflict that the main characters encounter. What’s at stake for the character? My recent novel required a very particular research about the opioid epidemic, starting a bakery, and mental illness. I talked briefly about the nature of the research and then read from three sections that evolved from the research.

Keep the discussion and reading to 30 minutes and allow an additional 15 minutes for questions. Many bookstore owners say that sales will drop if the event lasts longer than 45 minutes. My favorite part of the event is taking questions. I am fascinated by the observations of readers. And non-writers are genuinely fascinated by our writing life, how we write, where our ideas come from, etc. This is a time to connect with readers and potential readers.

Then make yourself available for signing books, which is another opportunity to connect with readers.

Other options for readings
Team up with other writers and interview each other. I read with Jacquelyn Mitchard (The Deep End of the Ocean) on Cape Cod, and we vowed to ask each other questions that the audience wouldn’t dare to ask us. Mitchard had us howling with laughter with her responses to my questions, and she caught me off guard with hers. And sales were strong. I teamed up with Ellen Meeropol (Kinship of Clover) and Randy Susan Meyers (The Widow of Wall Street) when our books came out at the same time, and we did a series of readings together. The result was much larger audiences because each of us had a different following. We used the interview format after we read for five minutes each.

Consider locations other than bookstores or libraries. How about an art gallery, hardware store, restaurant, or even a gas station (the site of a book launch by John Elder Robison)? I recently attended a reading in a museum of natural history, with the author Jenny T. Colgan, in Glasgow, Scotland. She provided Prosecco and cupcakes, which was enough to get me there. The museum loved the chance to shake up its sedate image for an afternoon.

You’ve poured your heart and brains into writing a book and getting it published. If you give the same attention to preparing for readings, you and your readers will be richly rewarded.

Jacqueline Sheehan is a psychologist and a novelist. Her sixth novel, The Tiger in the House (Kensington), was published in March 2017. She teaches writing at Grub Street in Boston and at international writing and yoga retreats. Web: jacquelinesheehan.com.
My favorite part of writing a story is the research. I know that I may be in the minority, but to me, the beginning of a project is like a treasure hunt – and the treasure is a page full of obscure facts and the names of good sources. Perhaps I enjoy this stage in the writing process because I began my career as a researcher in the Washington, D.C., bureau of the Sunday Times of London, where for three years I was responsible for fulfilling research requests from correspondents throughout the world. This was over 20 years ago, before Google and the internet as we know it; I had to use the now-antiquated system of Lexis-Nexis, the telephone, and my own ingenuity to find sources and information.

Doing research today is a whole different ball game. Not only do we have Google, but Alexa and Siri will gladly do your research with a voice command – look ma, no hands! The biggest game changer, however, is social media, which enables searches by name, industry, or subject. Not only is social media a great way to initially identify a potential source, but reading feeds and posts is also a good way to determine if the individual is the right source for your story. Beyond that, there are myriad ways to track down precisely the expert you need to make your story a success. Below are my best tips on how to find, contact, and follow-up with sources.

**FOR EXPERTS**

**Cast a wide net**

Let’s face it: Everything starts with Google. Do a general search to get a feel for your subject. Look for other articles published on the subject in the past year, and make note of experts quoted. Then search those experts by name to determine if they are right for your piece. Follow secondary threads or sources found in the articles. But don’t just repeat someone else’s work; take the story further.

**Narrow the scope**

Once I’ve done my initial search, I go straight to LinkedIn and do another search by industry, profession, or subject. Zero in on experts, and look for those with a lot of followers. Read their feeds to see if they are a good fit, and keep an eye out for published work. Then go back to Google and search the individual by name. If they are the right source for the story, jump back on LinkedIn and send them a message.

Repeat the process with Twitter.

**Go back to school**

An often-overlooked source of expertise is academia; many professors or teachers are top authorities in their fields, and they are usually happy to share their knowledge. You might already have some ideas about which colleges or universities to approach from your initial search. If not, choose a
Don’t forget professional organizations…

Sometimes we overlook the most obvious answer to a question, but if you are looking to speak to a plumber, you need to go where plumbers congregate (or clowns or hypnotists or dominatrixes, for that matter), and that’s in associations. These groups exist to promote and advocate for their industry, and they are usually all too happy to speak to journalists. My only caution here is that if it is a small group, they may not have a full-time staff, so it may take them a while to respond to queries.

…Or trade journals

As a writer, you probably already know that there is a publication for just about every industry, hobby, and fetish imaginable, and these can be a great resource. Oftentimes, large professional organizations’ websites will link their trade journal, so start there. Once you are on the journal’s site, search by subject or simply read the most recent postings to find experts in the field.

Yes, you should reinvent the wheel

Have you ever noticed that there are certain experts quoted in just about every story? That’s because it’s easy for journalists to work with a proven quantity, and there are times when this is the best option, but it can get pretty boring for readers or viewers. Whenever possible, I try to get sources who aren’t constantly quoted in the media, those who have innovative ideas or who might be just be super interesting. And if I have a choice, I include a diverse range of voices (gender, race, age, and ideas).

FOR CASE-STUDIES OR ‘AVERAGE PEOPLE’ SOURCES

Finding a private citizen who is willing to speak on the record about something can be a little trickier but worth every moment of effort. Facts, statistics, and expert opinions form the structure of a story; a personal narrative brings it to life.

Don’t be shy

It’s unethical to interview close friends but not friends of friends whom you don’t know. Regardless of the subject, there’s a good chance that if you mention your story in your social circle, someone will have a friend whose uncle’s dentist is the perfect source.

Sing like a bird

Because it can take longer to find average folks as sources, I begin my search as soon as I receive the assignment. Jump on Twitter and put out the call, using as many hashtags as possible. Then, re-tweet the call numerous times a day with various combinations of hashtags. Do the same on all your social media platforms, and ask your friends to share your posts.

Put up a sign

I’m talking about electronic signs on digital bulletin boards, such as your local listserv. This is my go-to method for finding sources for local stories and always gets fast results. If you need sources from a certain geographic area, join the local listserv temporarily.

Ask an expert

Oftentimes your expert source can put you in touch with the perfect case study, so be sure to ask. If there are confidentiality issues, offer to send your source an email that can be forwarded to their client, patient, etc.

Open your ears

I’ve often found that once I’m researching a subject, I suddenly see it everywhere. Stories jump out from the pages of magazines and voices on the radio. This can be true of sources as well. Listen to what you are hearing from your friends or to the chatter at the grocery store, and you might end up with the perfect case-study to lede your piece.

MAKING CONTACT

Regardless of whether my source is a Nobel Prize winner or the local football coach, I approach everyone with respect for their time and expertise. I send an introductory email explaining the subject of the story, major themes to be covered, and where it will be published. Then I ask if they would like to be included, and request that if they must decline, to please let me know. Before I sign off, I write a few sentences about my work and link any appropriate clips.

Now it’s time to put some of these tips into practice. For those who want to use shortcuts and ask other journalists for sources, my advice is to take the long road. Finding sources is an important skill to master. Not only that, but through the process of researching whom you want to interview, you’ll learn more about your subject, which will result in a better story. Good luck with your treasure hunting.

Jamie Seaton has been a journalist for over 20 years and is a former Thailand correspondent for Newsweek. Her essays and reported stories have appeared in numerous publications, including Pacific Standard, CNN Travel, the Washington Post and O, The Oprah Magazine. Follow her @JamieSeaton.
If you’re like most of us, you’re constantly thinking about your writing projects. New ideas and great phrases pop into your brain at the most inconvenient times, when you’re away from your computer and there’s no pen and paper handy. That’s when we could all use a little tech help.

Since our cell phones and tablets are usually within arm’s reach, using them to write when we’re out-of-pocket makes sense. And many of you may even prefer to write when you’re not tucked away in a home office. Mobile apps allow us to be productive in all aspects of our writing lives, even while on the run.

Here are some handy apps that just might make your writing life easier—and maybe even more fun.

**PRODUCTIVITY**

**ASANA**
Productivity software advertised to take users from “chaos to clarity.” Provides a user interface to keep up with tasks, projects, and conversations, which can be used by either a team or an individual. Allows for easy tracking and monitoring of projects and goals. Interactive with other programs, such as Dropbox, Google-Drive, and OneDrive.

**Cost:** Free for basic version

**Best for:** Writers who want to easily organize and monitor their project goals or coordinate with others (co-writers, writing group members, editors, etc.) as a team.

[asana.com](asana.com)

**EVERNOTE**
Organizational software for saving everything like a virtual file cabinet. Take notes, save pictures and articles, remember links, attach documents, and organize scanned paperwork, all in one place.

**Cost:** Free

**Best for:** Writers who want to easily organize notes and research and then access them anywhere.

[evernote.com](evernote.com)

**ONENOTE**
Software to organize your notes, drawings, and pictures into virtual three-ring-binders. Can be easily organized into searchable sections, and has the capability to add to-do lists and follow-ups and to take hand-written notes. Can be accessed on all devices and between multiple users.

**Cost:** Free

**Best for:** Writers who want to easily organize and save research and notes—and then access them anywhere.

[jotterpad](jotterpad)

Simple text editor for writing notes, books, lyrics, poems, and screenplays. Includes a built-in dictionary and connects to various cloud services, such as Dropbox and Google Drive.

**Cost:** Free for basic version

**Best for:** Creative writers who need
quick access to a writing program without the fuss of a word processor.

KEEP MY NOTES
Handy digital notepad that takes text, audio, and finger-written notes. Includes spell-check and alarms for to-do lists. Also allows picture attachment to notes.
Cost: Free
Best for: Writers who want an easy-to-use digital notepad that can be accessed offline.

JOURNALING
Journaling app with a diary interface and the ability to add photos, videos, and pen notations. Can sync with Google Drive for “anywhere” access. Allows users to import entries from other software or export diary entries to Word or PDF. Also creates a timeline for users to reflect on past entries and lived moments.
Cost: Free for basic version
Best for: On-the-go journalers who want the ability to share entries on social media.

OFFICE
POLARIS OFFICE
App to open, edit, and save office files such as Excel, Word, PowerPoint, and PDF. Allows users to write ideas on the screen and insert photos and videos into documents.
Cost: Free
Best for: Writers who require access to many types of documents from their mobile device.

DISTRACTION BLOCKERS
FOREST
A mobile distraction blocker that mimics a game. The less you use selected games, apps, and the web on your phone, the larger your tree grows. If you cheat, your tree will wither. Has the ability to add “approved” apps that won’t kill your tree.
Cost: Free
Best for: Writers who want help staying focused and curbing “phone addiction.”

DICTIONARIES/ Thesauri
DICTIONARY.COM
English dictionary that includes more than 2 million definitions and synonyms. Basic word look-ups can be used offline. Has audio pronunciation and the ability to search by voice. Also, provides a word-of-the-day feature to expand vocabulary as well as articles and slideshows that contain facts and etymology of words.
Cost: Free for basic, $2.99 for premium (which includes an encyclopedia, slang dictionary, idioms, medical and scientific references, and rhyming words)
Best for: Writers who routinely use a dictionary or thesaurus and need quick access – or anyone just looking to build their vocabulary.

POCKET THESARUS
English thesaurus that provides synonyms and antonyms for over 90,000 words and can be accessed entirely offline. Also, has a floating feature that allows users to see synonyms by just selecting a word.
Cost: Free for basic, $1.99 for premium
Best for: Writers who are constantly searching for just the right word, even while on the go.

POWER THESARUS
English thesaurus that includes 21 million synonyms and antonyms. Boasts a database that’s crowdsourced by writers for continued growth. Includes the ability to filter results by topics or parts of speech. No offline usage.
Cost: Free for basic, $1.99 for premium
Best for: Writers seeking a wider selection of synonyms and antonyms, but don’t need an offline source.

ENGLISH IDIOMS AND PHRASES
App that teaches the meaning of English idioms and phrases, and how to use them in context. Also tests your knowledge.
Cost: Free
Best for: Word-loving writers who want to increase their understanding of the English language.

YOUR QUOTE
A writing and blogging app that turns your writing into Google-able quotes, and allows them to be added to pictures and colorful backgrounds.
Cost: Free
Best for: Writers who want to get their quotes out to the world quickly, and possibly improve their search engine optimization while they’re at it.

K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe: teetering dangerously on the edge is more interesting than standing safely in the middle. She is passionate about women’s issues, loves noisy clocks and fuzzy blankets, but HATES the word normal. Her historical novel, Life Before, is an edgy time-warping tale of reincarnation, social justice, and forgiveness. Web: KLRomocom or @klromo.
Help wanted

How to represent a freelance writing career on your resume.

When searching for a job outside of freelancing, a resume is required. Even full-time freelancers need a resume once in a while. Here are some ideas to position freelance writing on your resume and with interviewers to get the job and keep writing.

You, Incorporated

Roxanna Guilford-Blake incorporated her freelance business and lists that on her resume. As Guilford-Blake Corp’s president, she says, “People seemed to respect me more as a small business owner than as a freelancer, although it was clear my small business was freelance writing and editing.” Tax-related benefits include writing off business-specific expenses, being able to pay herself on an as-needed basis, and controlling 1099 income.

Even if you don’t incorporate, it’s still important to showcase your freelance work as your business – whether you’re writing full- or part-time. Guilford-Blake says, “Don’t frame it as something you did to fill in until you could get a ‘real’ job. Freelance writing is a real job.”

Titles can vary. Some people include “freelance” in their title, but others use different words to meet their goals. Jessica Natale Woollard, communications officer for a public library system, also founded a business. However, she believes her personal brand is stronger, so she lists “Professional Writer” on her resume rather than her company to emphasize she’s a communications professional.

Alaina Leary, publishing house editor, uses “Freelance Editor, Publicist, and Social Manager” for her freelance work. She doesn’t include “writer” as she believes it’s implied from her publications list. She also includes longer-term, more complex, and relevant freelance work as separate jobs to highlight them. She used to list each freelance job separately but abandoned that. She says, “At the time, I thought it made it clear how hard-working and dedicated I am – I did freelance while I was working full-time, for example – but it really just made me look like a job hopper to someone who doesn’t understand freelance.”

Variations on a theme

As Leary suggests, the key word for resumes is relevance. Resumes are similar to articles, op-eds, speeches, and other projects – you write with an audience in mind. Each time you share your resume, it must be targeted.

Client lists are popular, but don’t stop there. It’s important to think beyond names and give scope and context to projects and accomplishments, including details like circulation and demographics. If a client or publication isn’t a name brand, it might be more effective to describe...
them instead. Michael Klein, marketing, communications, and domestic promotion vice president for an agriculture trade association, used to freelance full time. “If the publication is quietly impressive, don’t be shy about letting people know,” he suggests. Klein wrote for one magazine that wasn’t on newsstands and is unknown to the general public. However, it has a circulation of 100,000 and is read in most Fortune 100 boardrooms. “The title of the magazine doesn’t convey that, so I would,” he says.

Ghostwriting can present a challenge. Klein ghostwrote some op-eds on controversial topics as a contractor. He listed the public relations company as the client rather than the authors to avoid being personally branded with the authors’ views. Prestigious clients who don’t require anonymity appear on his resume. Others are described.

In addition to listing your clients, you might want to demonstrate depth of knowledge on specific topics or show you can handle a variety of issues. Consider highlighting your range by mentioning categories of writing, publications, topics, project size, and more. For example, Klein’s resume notes that he wrote on broad topics, such as health care, tax reform, and social security, to show he can handle complex issues. You can also include examples of tight or shifting deadlines that you met; accolades, such as having the most-read article on a website in a given week; and repeat business.

The order of items can matter. “When I was first looking for a new job and for a couple of months after I was laid off, I would lead with the non-freelance job,” Guilford-Blake says. “The full-time job was a better fit, and I wanted to show a history of work in the corporate world.”

Some people have more than one resume. If a freelance opportunity requires a resume, Liz LaBrocca, social media coordinator at a craft retailer, will send one that emphasizes her writing, with some of her sales and administrative jobs removed.

If you’re worried about an employer’s reaction, consider removing freelancing altogether or only including key projects. Leary says, “It’s possible to list the gigs as separate ones with their own title and organization, and if someone inquires as to why the dates overlap, explain that you were part-time at each.”

**Stating the not-so-obvious**

Some people will understand and value freelance writing more than others. “I think one thing that is pretty universally true is that not everyone appreciates or understands what goes into writing,” Klein says.

The same can be true for freelancing. Many people don’t understand that freelance writing involves more than writing. There are business development, research, accounting, and other responsibilities. When job searching, you can market these experiences and skills along with your writing and editing. “You’re selling your whole package,” LaBrocca says. Other points can include business acumen, follow through, reliability, persistence, and organization.

**At the interview**

Beyond your resume, consider how you would discuss freelancing with an interviewer. Most say it has only helped them in their career search. But employer concerns can include the use of proprietary information or organizational contacts, time management issues, doing freelance work on employer time, lack of focus, and conflicts of interest. An employer could worry that your writing could be antithetical to the organization’s mission or undermine your efforts, depending on your writing genre or topics. Leary was once told she had too much writing experience for an editorial job. Guilford-Blake experienced interviewers who were concerned about her ability to work in an office setting because of her freelance work combined with her remote full-time job experience.

Before accepting a full-time job, it’s important to discuss your freelance work and obtain authorization to continue when employed. Some organizations have policies against freelancing. Woollard says, “Before I sign the contract, I always verify I’ll be able to continue freelancing.”

Your freelance writing says a lot about you. Take the time to express the right message about it on your resume and give yourself the credit you deserve.

Jennifer L. Blanck is a freelance writer who also has 15+ years of career development experience. Her writing has appeared most recently in Christian Science Monitor, Entropy, Toastmaster, USA Rice Daily, Whole Grain, and Wine Business Monthly.
Six steps to increase your writing productivity every day.

BY JEN GLANTZ

To write well, you must write. Which is advice that sounds easy to do when someone else gives it you at a party, over the phone, or while you’re at an author’s book signing event. But when it comes to the art of sitting down, with a pen in hand, or a keyboard underneath your palms, you may find yourself making every excuse in the book so you can avoid starting to write that book, that essay, that blog post, or even that email.

Perhaps, in the past, you have tried to get ridiculously strict with yourself. You set a recurring alarm to bother you at exactly 4:35 a.m., Monday through Friday, so that you could have enough time to wake up, brew a fresh pot of coffee, and write for an hour or two before heading off to work or beginning your morning chores. You spent a good amount of cash on one of those fancy notebooks that fit nicely in your purse or backpack so that you could have something to hold your most memorable on-the-go thoughts, phrases, or paragraphs. You may have even invested in a reliable laptop, one that’s the perfect size to fit on any table at any coffee shop or desk, or on your lap while you sit for hours on the couch, brainstorming your next sentence, like a chess player planning their very next move.

But if you have found that your alarm clock or your writing devices have failed you, or just not motivated you enough to put in the time, every single day, to write, then it might be time for some additional tips and tricks that will get you spending quality time, face-to-face, with your very own words, instead of pieces of blank paper.

To get you started, here are six tips that will help you step up your writing productivity game every day.
Turn off your Wi-Fi
When you sit down to write, turn off your Internet connection – whether on your phone, your computer, or your tablet. That way, as you are writing, you won't be tempted to pause for a few minutes...which turns into a few half-hours...to browse the internet or catch up on what your friends have been up to on social media. You also won't be able to check emails, respond to messages, or read the news, which may put you into a funk that will make you want to ditch your writing goals for the day.

Turning off your Wi-Fi – or even shutting off your non-writing devices, like phones and tablets – will help you stay productive during the time you have designated as your writing period for the day.

Find your own writing atmosphere
Think back to days in the past when you were a writing machine. When the words flowed so well and you found that you were writing a couple thousand words, or for a few hours, without giving into any distractions. Where were you? What was around you? Was it hot? Was it cold? Was it loud? Was it silent?

Imagine what you believe is your most productive writing atmosphere and try to recreate that every time you sit down to write. For some, writing at public places, like a local library, a coffee shop, or even on a train or airplane, is what gets them fired up in the creativity department. For others, they crave silence, privacy, and the comfort of their own desk, couch, or corner of their home.

Thinking about the details of your ideal writing environment (right down to what you should be wearing, drinking, eating, and sitting on) can help you design a situation that breathes your own kind of comfort and cuts out any unnecessary environmental distractions that you know will annoy you or cut into your focus.

Begin with a free write
When you're ready to spend an hour or two writing, one of the things that may make your time less productive is simply the art of starting. Figuring out what your first word, sentence, or even paragraph should be can weigh on you so much that you won't do anything except hit your keys a few times or draw squiggly lines on your paper.

Or perhaps you’ve found yourself starting out with a solid first paragraph but no idea what to write next. You may even have gotten a full page of writing done but now find yourself suffocated by self-edits or wondering if what you wrote was good, which is putting your writing for the day at one giant, seemingly endless, pause.

The best way to begin your daily writing is with a no-strings-attached free write. Whether or not you’re timing your writing session or aiming to hit a certain amount of words, begin by closing your eyes and letting yourself write for five minutes. Try not to pause from writing, read what you wrote, or try to plan what you will write next. Consider this a warm-up to get your fingers woken up and your brain ready to write out the next part of your story.

After you’ve done this warm-up, you either can delete what you wrote or use parts of it. Either way, it will be a good way for you to begin, without having the pressure of writing something brilliant the moment you sit down.

Pick a reliable time of day
Depending on the person, our minds, bodies, and moods function well together at certain times of the day. For some of us, waking up early and writing is an easy and enjoyable way to kick off the day. For others, sleeping in and snoozing their alarm clock for 45 minutes is the only way they are able to start the day. Some people find they feel extra creative only when the sun goes down, when it feels like the entire rest of the world has gone to sleep.

Get to know yourself and your mind and body exchange. What time works best for you? Can you carve out a chunk of time to write then? If so, then pick that period as your reliable writing time of the day.

If not, it may be a good idea to examine why that time makes you feel the most productive. Is it because you’ve had enough rest right before? Is it because you drank a few cups of morning coffee? How about because it’s the time of day when people at work seem to leave you alone and you’re
void of new emails or phone calls coming in? Once you determine why that time of day is a jackpot for your creativity, see if you can recreate that “why” in other moments of the day when you may have the time to write. That might mean a 20-minute nap or a shot of espresso is the trick to creating a new reliable time of the day for you to write.

**Schedule it on your calendar**

If you are the kind of person who schedules everything on the calendar and takes those appointments seriously (meaning you would *never* just not show up for a dental appointment or book club meeting), it may be a good idea to schedule your daily writing. Even if you have a busy and unpredictable schedule, blocking out the time to write will get you in the habit of being productive with your writing goal.

Set your writing schedule either at the start of the week (based on what you have planned out for that week so far) or every night before you go to sleep. That way, when you wake up in the morning to start your day, you will be able to see what time you have blocked off for writing, whether it’s only 20 minutes, an hour, or several hours.

Have a plan in advance. So when distractions (like long midday lunch outings with your friends or a marathon of your favorite TV show) happen, you’ll have a harder time giving into them and ignoring your schedule. You’ll also be able to look forward to your daily time with your words, rather than finding yourself stressed out about when you will find the time to write during an extra-chaotic day.

**Get an accountability buddy**

You might have the best intentions when it comes to writing. But more often than not, life gets in the way, and you might find that even though you have scheduled a specific time to write every single day, you’re not in the mood, and you would rather use that time for something else, like a nap, a walk outside, or binge-watching your new favorite show.

Team up with an accountability buddy. Perhaps there’s a fellow writer or someone else in your life who you trust, respect, and know you will listen to who you can ask to be your buddy. Set goals with one another, whether it’s a daily word count or a certain amount of writing time each day, and hold each other accountable for them. If you are open to sharing your daily work with them, doing a writing swap can allow you to get instant feedback that might inspire you to make changes or keep you on track when you pick up where you left off the next day.

After you find a person you feel comfortable doing this with, set goals and rules before beginning. You may also want to set consequences for one another, whether it is if they miss a day, they must write double their word count the next day, or they have to donate money to the other person’s charity of choice.

**Understand that changing your productivity does involve keeping yourself on a set schedule, whether that’s picking a specific daily time to write or simply making sure you spend a certain amount of minutes writing each day.**

Jen Glantz is the founder of the viral business Bridesmaid for Hire, the creator of the blog The Things I Learned From, and the author of the Amazon best-selling book *All My Friends are Engaged*. Her new book, *Always a Bridesmaid for Hire*, published by Simon & Schuster, is available now. She is a freelance writer for more than 25 different websites, including Today.com, Glamour.com, Prevention.com, BRIDES Magazine, and Bumble (the dating app). She teaches creative nonfiction and memoir writing at Gotham Writers Workshop in New York City.
From blog to book deal

Can a blog still lead to a publishing contract in today’s oversaturated market?

By Eliana Osborn
There was a time about 10 years ago when, if you had an awesome blog with a decent following, there was a pretty good chance an editor would be getting in touch with you to talk about a book deal. There was Julie Powell of *Julie & Julia* fame, who turned her cooking blog into both a book deal and a blockbuster movie starring Amy Adams and Meryl Streep. Jen Lancaster went from wittily blogging about unemployment on jennsylvania.com to being the *New York Times* bestselling author of nine memoirs and five novels. Darren Rowse, who found considerable (albeit meta) success while blogging about blogging at problogger.com, published *ProBlogger the Book* in 2008. Today, it’s in its third edition, and he runs a podcast, edits two mega-popular websites, and has speaking engagements around the globe.

In a 2009 Mashable article, “From Blog to Book Deal: How 6 Authors Did It,” in every case, agents or publishers approached the bloggers, not the other way around. That’s right: Not that bloggers would be able to find an agent willing to talk, or a chance of getting a proposal in the door at a small publishing house. Thanks to the success of a few big blog-to-book conversions, editors were actively pursuing popular blogs – no querying necessary on the blogger’s part.

Today, these Cinderella stories are becoming rarer and rarer, thanks to a bit more market saturation and a lot more competition. But that doesn’t mean the blog-to-book pipeline is closed.
Finding platforms in more places
Publishing may be an industry with tighter purse strings these days, but the basics of how money is made hasn’t changed. Jane Friedman is a Publishers Weekly columnist and a fount of knowledge she shares at her blog, JaneFriedman.com. She says, “As much as ever, publishers still seek authors with proven concepts or content with an established audience.”

What made blogs such fertile ground for publishers was that they were a new place to find authors who already had platforms. Imagine the excitement for an editor or agent. It’s like stumbling into a conference center with a speaker in front of a captive audience of 50,000 people – a speaker you’d never even heard of. But blogs aren’t the only player in the existing platform game anymore: “Now, social media, multimedia, and online communities are a way to create and distribute content in a manner that’s on par with, and sometimes better than, blogs,” Friedman says.

Blogs-turned-books isn’t a dead-and-done trend. But, like big shoulder pads and tapered jeans, the fad went a little crazy and had to be moderated. Today we also have podcasts, which function in the same way blogs do, generating engagement and enthusiasm. Friedman cites Instagram and Wattpad as other examples of places where creators are posting content and finding an audience. “Authors’ online platforms still translate into book deals,” she says. Blogs just aren’t the only way to build that platform nowadays.

Turning your blog into a book
With plenty of past blog-to-book experience, the publishing market has learned a few things. According to Nina Amir, inspiration to creation coach and author of How to Blog a Book: How to Write, Publish, and Promote Your Work One Post at a Time, there’s one major issue inherent in the very concept.

“Posts are typically not written with a book in mind,” she says. “Therefore, they don’t always make sense when compiled into a book manuscript.”

A reader can tell right away if a book is just recycled blog content patched together into a lazy manuscript. You might be able to self-publish such a book and get a few buyers via upsells off your website. But a good blog-turned-book is one that takes the subject of your site and goes from there. Amir says you should start planning based on one such topic, “then determine what posts work in that framework. This also tells you how much new content you need to create.”

Literary agent Maria Ribas of Stonesong, who also blogs at Cooks & Books (cooksplusbooks.com), gets asked about blog-turned-book deals a lot. How many readers do you need? How many page views, followers, or comments does it take to show an editor that you’re worth publishing?

With the disclaimer that every agent or situation is different, Ribas says that “a great goal for a blogger to have is 50,000 true fans.” That isn’t subscribers or unique visitors or anything like that – true fans are people “you feel certain would buy your book within 6 to 12 months of launch or even pre-order it before it releases.” You control that – through your passion and connection to your readers, making them care and engage with your brand.

That’s platform. That’s an author’s relationship with the audience, wherever that comes from – remember how Friedman said that was what made blogs a fertile ground for publishing in the first place?

Ribas suggests a formula like this: platform + concept + storytelling = a successful book. Bloggers with bigger numbers in the platform and concept department might be weaker on storytelling, or vice versa. But the book gets off the ground at least with the other strengths making up for it, and it’s key to show publishers all of your skills.

Amir sold her book, How to Blog a Book, based on a proposal to a publisher. She had a blog with growing traffic and other blog experience. She had a lot of other skills to show that she had a place in the market “and that I was willing and able to be a good business partner.” That’s key, especially in working with a smaller house where you’ll be heavily involved in sales.
and promotion. Proving that you know what it takes to move a book makes your proposal that much stronger.

**Promising markets**

Amir considers prescriptive nonfiction – think “how to” books – a field doing well for blogs-turned-books. There’s always a lot more for anyone to learn about – improving your life, yes, but also, say, improving your investing skills or learning a language.

Here, “authors become experts and authorities as they blog,” Amir says. Along the way, they’re building audience and platform, too. So what happens when the print title comes out? The keys to success are already in hand, and these authors often do quite well.

Many bloggers with highly shareable, meme-like content have gone on to write more than one book. Visually focused books are another market showing growth, a consideration for writers who may want to play with other forms besides words.

Ribas says the elements of platform matter differently in different categories. Few fiction blogs transition into books. (I know, back in Charles Dickens’ day, serialization was all the rage and people keep trying to bring it back. Trust me, that’s an uphill battle.)

Some memoirs have found great success, and those are the big titles the public hears about. But this is one of the categories that’s hardest to make a dent in, blog-based or otherwise. Ribas says her equation for book success in the memoir market is more heavily focused on concept and storytelling, rather than platform.

**Where to take your idea**

Some agents specifically represent blogs-to-books and might have experience in the field. But you don’t have to target just those agents who mention this designation. Those who deal with your genre will respond to a compelling book proposal laying out some of your content and platform. Having a blog shows that you aren’t new to your concept and that you’ve been producing and interacting with an audience over time.

If your blog doesn’t reflect your best self, or if it looks unprofessional, these are things that need to be dealt with before you get in touch with an editor or agent. Turning your blog into a book can’t work if your blog has no value on its own.

Wherever your writing shows up, it is part of your portfolio of work. It can build your body of work and draw readers to your brand. Thinking about your long-term publishing goals can seem far-fetched when you set out to blog about your favorite show, but an eye toward professionalism whenever you attach your name to work is something to consider.

If you have an idea for a great nonfiction book proposal, securing a domain name now and starting to blog won’t hurt anything. Even if you don’t earn a book deal just from your blog alone, growing an audience will always increase your standing with a publisher.

**Eliana Osborn** is a busy freelance writer focusing on education and family issues for national publications. She is hoping meditation really is going to solve everything.

**Platform + concept + storytelling = a successful book.**
Points for effort

Personal rewards increase productivity and efficiency in your writing.

By Melissa Hart
After poet and essayist Mare Hake completes a difficult piece of writing, she drives to her local market in Lakewood, Washington, and purchases a chocolate-covered donut, and then eats it in her car before she drives home.

“Decades ago, I was profoundly depressed,” she explains. “The therapist noticed that I really enjoyed reading the daily newspaper and doing the crossword puzzle. She told me I had to go for a half-hour walk every morning, and if I did that, I could read the paper and do the crossword. In the same way, I hold myself accountable and reward myself as a writer.”

This positive reinforcement is one element of operant conditioning—a learning process that allows us to modify the behavior of animals and people by rewarding desirable actions. Just as a dog will sit for a treat, or a child will do chores for allowance, writers can train themselves to complete the rough draft of a manuscript or clear the terrifying hurdle of submitting a piece for potential publication.

Identify the problem, a goal, and a reward
Freelance writer and novelist Sarah Howery Hart says it’s imperative that writers identify a specific problem, a goal, and a reward for any behavior they wish to change. In her conference workshops titled “Stuck, Tired, Bored, and Distracted: How Writers in Distress can use Psychology Tools to Overcome Common Writing-related Problems,” she teaches techniques learned in her doctoral study of psychology to help writers become more productive and efficient.

One of the most common complaints she hears is the lack of time to write. “First, we need to determine what that means,” she says. “Maybe it means that you do things that interrupt your own writing, like checking emails and social media. Your next step is to determine how often this is happening.”

She offers her participants worksheets to help them measure how often a particular behavior occurs, and then asks them to evaluate whether the behavior is truly a problem. “Let’s say you find that you check your email once an hour while you’re writing. Is that excessive? Only you can determine that,” she says. “If you check your email and then move on to Facebook and then to Twitter—even if you’ve only checked once, this can take an entire 15 minutes out of your writing hour. Also, you lose your train of thought and can’t remember what you were going to write next.”

She advises writers to set a goal—for instance, writing for an hour without checking email or social media. “And then you have to determine your reward schedule,” she says. “How often will you need to reward yourself? At first, this may be frequently.”

She asks writers to make a list of what they like, and what they like to do. “Maybe you like to read, hang out with your dogs, watch a particular TV show, or go for a run,” she says. “It’s very personal. Look at the list and pick out what’s most rewarding—identify what you’d like to do today as a reward, and then tell yourself, ‘If I write for an hour without interruption, I’ll earn 15 minutes of reading time.’”

She urges writers to assess their progress periodically. “After a day, after a few days, are you meeting your goals?” she says. “If the reward didn’t work, you may need to revisit it. Maybe reading a book for 15 minutes wasn’t the strongest reward for you because you read for two hours when you go to bed at night. Maybe you’d rather go to the gym or out for a half-hour run.”

Do something kind for yourself
Boston-based author Karen Pryor has a background in behavioral psychology. She’s the author of Don’t Shoot the Dog: The New Art of Teaching and Training, about clicker-training, in which a trainer shapes the actions of a trainee by using a plastic clicker paired initially with a desired reward. For a dog, this might be a piece of freeze-dried liver; for a horse, a peppermint candy. Writers crave all sorts of rewards, from a cup of great

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coffee to a pair of new shoes to Hake's chocolate-covered donut.

“You can train any living creature,” Pryor says, describing how she used positive reinforcement in graduate school, a tedious subway ride from her home in downtown New York. “Classes were at night, and I was always tired,” she explains. “So when I got out of the house and drove to the subway station, I gave myself a small piece of chocolate. When I got on the train, I got another piece of chocolate, and when I got to the university, another. It’s silly, but it worked for me.”

She tells writers to pick a simple goal that’s easy to reach and break into steps. “Maybe you come up with a title first, and then write an outline, rewarding yourself for each step,” she says. “Or you’ll tell yourself, I’m going to write 500 words today, and when I’ve finished, I can go for a walk or watch television or play with my kids.” It’s very reassuring, and it’s a nice way to do something kind for ourselves. We’re always pretty stingy with ourselves.”

The power of kittens and candy
Tim Kim, program director at National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), believes wholeheartedly in the power of positive reinforcement to build a writing habit. Every November, he and other staff members at Berkeley’s Office of Letters and Light send motivational emails and videos to the hundreds of thousands of people across the world who’ve committed to writing 50,000 words of a manuscript in a month.

Writers register online for free, then log a daily word count on NaNoWriMo’s website. At the end of 1,667 words, they earn a badge that they can then display on social media. They earn another when they’ve completed 5,000 words and another at 10,000 words. “These all help celebrate your progress as you continue working on your goal,” Kim says.

He also enjoys online reward sites like “Written? Kitten!,” which shows writers a new photo of a kitten every time they meet their pre-programmed writing goal, and a Pokémon widget that evolves depending on the number of words you write. “They’re these little, positive motivating tools,” he explains. “On the Camp NaNoWriMo site, there’s a neat bullseye illustration that allows an arrow to shift toward your goal every time you log in a new word count.”

Need a more tangible reward? On the third Sunday of November each year, NaNoWriMo holds “The Night of Writing Dangerously” and invites writers to the Julia Morgan Ballroom in San Francisco for six hours of writing, dinner, and drinks. “We also run word sprints,” Kim says. “You give yourself 5 or 10 or 15 minutes to focus on your writing with as much purpose as you can, and then you share how many words you’ve written. The person who writes the most gets a crown.”

And should you hit your 50,000-word writing goal that night, you can run up to the podium and ring a big bell. As if that’s not reward enough, staff also provides vats of M&Ms, licorice, and lollipops. “Maybe every 500 words, you let yourself eat an M&M or a Hershey’s Kiss,” Kim explains. “You’re not binging; you’re just giving yourself a little treat, whether it’s every 100 or 500 words, with chocolate or Skittles or Starbursts. Writers find this motivating.”

Are you a writer who could care less about chocolate or ringing a big bell? Then consider shopping. Kim describes a past intern who didn’t allow herself to shop online for the month of October but created a wishlist to reward herself during November. “Every week she met her word count that month, she’d allow herself to buy something off her wishlist,” he explains. “It was so smart.”

Enrich your entire life
Amy Sutherland is the author of several nonfiction books, including What Shamu Taught Me About Life, Love, and Marriage: Lessons for People from Animals and Their Trainers. In it, she describes the positive reinforcement techniques she learned from reporting on an exotic animal training facility – techniques she uses on herself today.

“Writing a book is like being mauled by a grizzly bear,” she says. “You’re glad you survived, but you are in bits and pieces. ‘Writing is tough,’ she observes, “but a subject can be reinforcing, like with my last book. I never tire of reading and thinking about dogs.”

She rewards herself by taking quick breaks to do physical things around her house, and she always takes time...
for lunch. “Also, if I’m really having trouble writing, I go on to other tasks, like going over notes, writing outlines, something to keep me engaged and productive,” she explains.

Sutherland agrees with Pryor that it’s important to start small with a writing goal—write perhaps 15 or 30 minutes a day at first, and extend it when you feel comfortable. “The general rule of animal training is to break down big or challenging behaviors into small parts,” she explains. “Don’t expect yourself to sit down and write the Great American Novel. That’s like expecting a dolphin to learn how to flip in one training session.”

Trainers use the word “enrichment” a great deal in their work. The term refers to their commitment to making the quality of an animal’s life satisfying. Sutherland makes sure she’s built enrichment into her work and personal life, as well.

“My office is nice,” she says. “I walk a ton. I have this weird love of grocery stores, so I go to them often during the week. I spend a TON of time with my dog. My husband and I listen to a lot of music each night. You need to think of your whole life as part of your writing process.”

Habit and community—essential tools for writers
Kim of National Novel Writing Month agrees with Sutherland. The almost 400,000 participants on six continents find the common pursuit of a goal incredibly reinforcing, especially combined with the nonprofit’s online rewards and community write-ins. Still, Kim notes that the underlying message of the event is the importance of establishing a regular writing practice.

“A lot of folks who participate have never written creatively before, never established a creative writing habit,” he says. “At the beginning of the month, people walk in as mechanics or teachers or stay-at-home parents, and they walk out writers because they’ve created this habit for themselves.”

He and other staff members hope that people will continue writing every day, supported by the NaNoWriMo friends they’ve made in November. “This combination of habit and community gives you the tools you need,” he explains.

But just in case participants start to lose momentum, there’s a similar program called Camp NaNoWriMo in April and July, and a “Now What?” program in January and February for those who want to continue working on their manuscript and find themselves in need of regular positive reinforcement and community.

Even veteran writers struggle to reward themselves for a completed project, says Pryor. “I’m sitting here staring at a whole bookcase full of research materials for my next book, and I don’t know where it’s going, how long it’s going to take, or what to do next. It’s agony.”

She knows to reward herself with something special after each step of the process. “You’ve got to pick something really reinforcing,” she says. “Tickets to the movies, something you don’t usually allow yourself.”

Hake, in Lakewood, Washington, knows exactly what rewards prove most reinforcing in her writing career. She reserves the chocolate-covered donut for book reviews. If she’s feeling vulnerable about sending poetry to a publication and completes the task, she toasts to her courage that evening with a glass of wine.

“And if I’ve written a set number of poems or articles in a month, I buy myself a new book,” she says. “If I read in public, but only if I read, do I get to purchase another reader’s book that evening and have them sign it. In other words, when something is emotionally or psychologically difficult, draining, or unbalancing, I self-care.”

Contributing editor Melissa Hart is the author of two memoirs and the middle-grade novel Avenging the Owl. Her preferred rewards are long runs and good chocolate. Website: melissahart.com.
Invest in yourself

Put your money where your career is.

By Ryan G. Van Cleave
Do you really need that Mont Blanc pen? Or the newest iPad? What about another degree in writing? Maybe a fresh copy of Stephen King’s *On Writing*?

Some writers buy it all. Others refuse to spend a cent. No matter whether you’ve already spent a fortune or not, there are times when it’s wise to invest in your writing future. Need some tips on what to try? Here are six great options that can offer a first-rate return on your investment.
Bring in the big guns

Janet Ruth Heller’s picture book How the Moon Regained Her Shape wasn’t taking off. The interviews weren’t coming in. The sales weren’t there. The publisher seemed out of options. So Heller hired a freelance book publicity company. “Immediately, I began to receive dozens of requests for interviews from radio stations, television stations, podcasts, magazines, online media, and newspapers,” she says. The publicity firm also offered helpful advice on how to make the most of each of those interviews.

Bringing in the fresh perspective of a new publishing pro might be all you need to supercharge the life of a published book.

**Ballpark cost:** $2,000-$4,000 a month (often a three-month minimum commitment).

Create your own writing retreat

Kelly Hayes-Raitt received five writing residencies in a three-year period, but “I found the application process time-consuming and expensive, and not all residencies had the flexibility I needed,” she says. So she created her own. How? Housesitting.

“In exchange for caring for someone’s pet and home, I live for free in a new setting that refreshes my writing imagination. In fact, I’m writing to you now from Ajijic, Mexico, where I’m living in a four-story home that’s built into the side of a hill and has panoramic views of Lake Chapala from every patio. It’s a fabulous writing retreat, and I get encouragement from ChaCha, the pit/lab rescue dog I pamper!” she tells me via email.

She also notes that housesitting has enabled her to research stories she otherwise couldn’t afford. “I was able to attend the 70th commemoration of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, even though both cities’ hotels, hostels, and vacation rentals were booked solid.”

All that housesitting paid off – literally. “Housesitting has been such a gift to my writing that I’ve recently published How to Become a House-sitter: Insider Tips from the HouseSit Diva, written, of course, while I was housesitting,” she adds.

**Ballpark cost:** Free – or, if you need help getting started, $12.99 for How to Become a House-sitter.

Go big – big screen, that is

“My current computer screen is large enough to hold three Word documents at once,” says Sarasota author and psychologist Karen Koenig. “Rather than wasting time opening and closing files for different versions of a chapter or an article, there they all are right in front of me. And a large monitor seems a must for any writer who is co-authoring.”

Koenig’s right. I’ve got a 27-inch screen at home, along with two 23-inch screens, all attached to the same computer. Having that kind of digital real estate? It’s awesome. I’m working on this article on the big screen right now. There’s Monday Night Football on another (go Bears!). And the last screen has Gmail running so I can cut and paste quotations from sources I’ve emailed for this article without having to constantly maximize and minimize screens.

**Ballpark cost:** $199 for an LG 32-inch Full HD Monitor; $30 for a USB to VGA video graphics adapter card (to add additional monitors).
**Give it away**

“I created a free sample of my writing,” says ghostwriter and executive recruiter John Paul Engel, “and I sent it to everyone I know. Two days later, I was invited to speak at a conference, and the following day, the managing director of the largest consulting firm in Japan said he wanted to come and meet me. I met him for three hours in the hotel lobby and it turned into a client relationship worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.”

Again and again, writers are told not to write for free. But sometimes offering a freebie is a great way to prove to someone that you’re well worth the professional writing rate you’ll eventually be asking for.

**Ballpark costs:** Just your time.

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**Find your freedom**

Ever stop working on your thriller to research the most effective garroting techniques for your assassin character…only to find yourself in a 50-minute digital wormhole that lands you knee-deep in a BuzzFeed quiz entitled “What Would Be Your Fate in The Hunger Games?” This after the cute panda baby YouTube marathon, liking two weeks’ worth of Facebook posts by your co-workers, and (ironically) reading the Gawker article “Scientists Confirm the Internet Is a Huge Waste of Time.”

Get Freedom – the world-famous internet, social media, and app blocker. Freedom users report getting back more than two productive hours PER DAY thanks to this program. That’s probably why it’s used at Google, Microsoft, Uber, Princeton, Harvard, and MIT.

**Ballpark costs:** Free to test, $6.99/month, $2.42/month (yearly package), or $129 for forever. Watch for the 40 percent off coupons…

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**Stand tall**

Far too often, writers neglect their health. Not so for former newspaper journalist and new novelist Kate Heartfield, who admits, “I work at home and never get enough exercise. So my treadmill desk is a boon. I find that when I’m working on a difficult plot problem, I sit, because the treadmill is too distracting. But the treadmill is great when I’m proofreading, blogging, or responding to emails.”

Getting healthy at the same time you write? It’s like olives and white chocolate. Sounds a bit crazy, but honestly, it’s a delicious pairing. Trust me.

**Ballpark costs:** $600 for the TrekDesk Treadmill Desk

Don’t feel that you have to do all of these right now. Pick one. Give it a shot. Assess its value. If it makes your life easier or gives you value, you’re golden. If not, move along.

But listen – if you run across an unexpected gem, shoot me a note about it. It’s about time I invested a bit more into my own writing career!

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Clearing the hurdles

BY MIKE DUNPHY
Overcome the 15 stumbling blocks that threaten writing careers.
SHAKESPEARE IS DEAD.

Shakespeare may have ruined more writers than any other writer. In his centuries atop the literary pantheon, the Bard has defined “good” writing as long, intricate flourishes of language that seem drawn from the celestial spheres. As such, it’s extremely common for new writers to ape his style, language, and voice.

Trouble is, Shakespeare is dead, very dead, and his voice seems as out of place in today’s modern media as a chamber pot in the bedroom. Instead, today’s writers speak with the voice of today—raw, short, punchy, and conversational. One of my editors said it best: “Tell me the story as if you were telling it to a friend over coffee.” In other words, if you would never say something in real life, don’t write it that way.

BEAUTY IS IN THE BONES.

The beauty of writing is anything but skin deep. Fine words and phrases can indeed add a rosy blush to the veneer of a text, but the true art is in the structure—something newer writers often spend little time building, preferring instead to stare at the screen and let inspiration storm down from the heavens.

As an instructor in article writing, travel writing, and creative nonfiction at the Gotham Writers Workshop in New York City, I break a lot of hearts. Students arrive in my class bright in spirit, flush in inspiration, and steeped in the highest ideals of the craft. Sadly, it doesn’t take long for the nitty-gritty of even achieving a part-time career writing for professional publications to wilt their passion, be it investment of time; the restrictions of formats, voice, and word count; or the often-paltry paychecks.

Ultimately, it’s the determination to press on regardless that assures success, rather than any pure writing talent. But knowing what hurdles lie ahead can go a long way to leaping them gracefully, starting with these 15 most common that trip up my students.
At the macro level, structure concerns the logical and smooth unrolling of the narrative from paragraph to paragraph, while the micro encompasses the way sentence forms play off of and enhance each other. For example, if the first sentence is a conditional one, follow with a simple and short declarative. Then perhaps follow that with a rhetorical question. With repetition, energy flickers out of boredom; with variety, sparks fly from the friction.

3. **IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.**

Just as selfies have become an unfortunate touchstone of photography, “selfie writing” has achieved the same in composition with many new writers. Here – particularly in first-person formats like memoirs, blog posts, op-eds, and personal essays – the author becomes so much the focus of the article that the topic, angle, and overall main point get regulated to the backdrop and often disappear altogether.

Even when it’s about you, an article should never really be *about* you. The author is merely a conduit for the experience and meaning, not the sum of it. In other words, the reader should not be looking into the writers’ eyes, but through them. Generally, unless the author’s presence is fundamental to the movement and meaning of the narrative, keep well out of it.

4. **SPELLING COUNTS.**

Want to watch an editor explode in a plume of black fury? Submit a draft that confuses “its” and “it’s.” Better yet, misspell the name of the person or place you are writing about, and for pure spite, toss in a handful of ironic quotes, random capitalization, and typos. Combine them all and earn top billing on the editorial blacklist.

It’s not the errors alone that makes them cardinal sins but the implication that the writer lacks attention, care, professionalism, and even respect. Indeed, some editors value clean writing so much that they’ll sometimes hire writers based on that alone, even if rejecting the pitch. So refresh the rules of grammar and punctuation, and don’t let your clauses dangle.

5. **THERE’S NO “ONE AND DONE.”**

It’s wonderful to imagine your editor immediately succumbing to orgiastic throes of ecstasy upon the mere sight of your draft, but chances are, the reality will most likely hover between silent relief and enraged indig- nation. Indeed, Allen Ginsberg’s credo, “first thought, best thought,” rarely satisfies the precision of media writing.

In most cases, articles grow through many drafts from seed to fruition. For some newer writers, writing an article over and over again demands far more work and time than anticipated and certainly lacks fun. If there’s any “one and done” with your editors, it’s only because six have come before.

6. **THICKEN YOUR SKIN.**

There’s a reason I always wait an hour to respond to an editor’s critique of my draft, particularly if less than favorable: the heat of indignation never makes for measured language and good diplomacy. But I understand the sensitivity. As an act of creation, an article is imbued with the spirit of the writer, and therefore any attack on the work becomes an attack the author.

But of course, it’s not really an attack, and the tears and anguish of new writers are misplaced. Instead, see your writing as an inanimate product churned out by a publishing machine and not a living, breathing baby sprung from your rib. It’ll soften the blow. Take a breath, reset your feet, and swing back with a new draft that knocks them out.
GOOD THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES.

An article is a remarkably small piece of real estate, with the vast majority of articles coming in at less than 1,000 words, and often less than 500. As a result, new writers must temper their lust for New Yorker-length features and learn how to “write short,” especially as few editors will give a writer 1,000 words until they’ve seen a 100.

The same goes for the scope of an article. Don’t try to cover the entirety of climate change in a single article, as it will be impossible to do so with any depth or quality in a small space. Instead, look for an individual thread and pull, perhaps with a new boat that picks up plastic or an app that increases energy efficiency at home. Keep it simple; keep it small; and both reader and writer can comfortably and adequately get their heads and arms around a topic.

PLAY YOUR ACE CARD FIRST.

Audiences may be captive in the cinema but are anything but in digital media, where attention is perhaps the number one premium. Just consider how long you give an article before deciding whether to stay with it or swipe left. For most, it’s about two paragraphs, or in media speak: the “lead” and “nutgraf.”

So it’s senseless to save that final twist, snazzy quote, or delicious tidbit until the end of the story, as most readers will never get there. Instead, play your ace card first to sink your hooks into the reader. For inspiration, follow the example of Franz Kafka, who began his famed “The Metamorphosis” with the main character transformed into a monstrous vermin.

DON’T BE THE SAGE ON THE STAGE; BE THE GUIDE ON THE SIDE.

From atop the pedestal of writing, it’s easy for authors to see themselves as enlightened gurus, dispensing wisdom to the uneducated masses, setting up an uneasy relationship between teacher and student. For some new writers, the paradigm can inspire trepidation as well. Indeed, one student told me just last week, “My life is boring. There’s nothing I can write about.”

A better approach is not to consider what you know but what you don’t know. It’s in the gaps of your knowledge that the best ideas for articles can often be found. Plus, chances are that if you want to know something, many others will, too. The approach also marks a subtle but powerful shift in tone, knocking the writer off the pedestal and onto terra firma with the audience. Now, hand in hand, the two can travel together.

YOU SCHMOOZE, YOU DON’T LOSE.

It was the ukulele that got me one of my biggest gigs ever, not talent. After an hour’s jam session with a lead editor at a major publishing company, assignments began to flow. The fact is, people want to work with people they like, and the same goes for editors. Therefore, nurturing relationships is a key to success, be it swapping cards and handshakes at media meet-ups or sharing articles on Twitter.

Just remember never to ask for work directly. Instead, play to vanity by getting them to talk about themselves, by pumping them with one question after another, each presenting a platform for the person to publicly polish their reputation.
their ego. Chances are, by the end of the conversation, they’ll have a good impression of you. Then wait three days, email how great it was to meet them, and take it from there.

**11 FOCUS ON THE NOW AND SOON-TO-BE NOW.**

There’s a reason major digital publications pump out vast quantities of content daily. The hope is that at least one post can tap into the pulse of the “now” and go viral. Increased traffic means more advertising, increased advertising means more money. The farther you can stay ahead of the curve and “break” the story, the greater the chance of it taking off.

So ditch history and keep your narrative eye on the horizon, whether scanning the digital oracles of Twitter, Reddit, press releases, and whatnot, or, better yet, stepping personally into the undiscovered country yourself in participation or solidarity.

**12 SO WHAT? HERE’S WHAT.**

A college professor of mine often used to write on our essays, “So what?” In other words, he explained, “Why should the reader care what you have to say about this topic?” What is your Ayahuasca adventure in Peru to Joe the Plumber in Toledo? That question is equally important for new writers, and the answer fundamental to the presentation of the story. All too often, however, the question draws a blank. The answer doesn’t need to be complicated and is often achieved with actionable instruction or appeals to the universal themes that unite us all (or most of us), from romantic relationships and raising children to career success and spiritual enlightenment. Without the link to the reader, the article has less use than a napkin.

**13 CLOSE YOUR EYES.**

As a test, I sometimes instruct my students to free write a paragraph or two describing a well-known place, like Times Square (a few blocks from the Gotham classrooms). Afterward, I ask them how much of the description is based purely on the visual. Usually, the answer hovers around 90 percent.

Sadly, the other senses (sixth included) often get short shrift, robbing writers of key tools in the art of description and power of emotion. Don’t forget, it’s a song that can make us cry, or an aroma that can tap the deepest veins of memory and emotion. Next time, try describing Times Square with your eyes closed and watch it spring to three-dimensional life.

**14 THE WRITER IS THE CAUSE; THE READER IS THE EFFECT.**

In a society that relishes and cultivates instant gratification, language has come to focus far more on the product (“now with more flavor!”), not the process. So, too, do the summary judgments of many new writers, who regularly exalt the glory of something without providing any supporting evidence.

Don’t describe the chandeliers as “funky” or the coffee “fabulous,” but describe them in a way that plants the desired impression in the reader’s mind, as if they’d thought of it themselves. Not only does that create a stronger bond with the reader, it makes the effect ring with greater vitality, authenticity, and resonance.

**15 DROP THE IDIOM CRUTCH.**

Is it really “raining cats and dogs,” or more like porcupines and aardvarks? Few new writers actually give it any thought, as the idioms in the English language have become so ingrained in the collective consciousness that many have become merely pre-fab props to slip in sentences for linguistic support.

But rarely are they actually true, or at least they are dulled over the decades, if not centuries, of use, robbing them of energy, impact, and vitality. It also robs the writer of the opportunity to show off their descriptive powers. Instead of describing the room “as hot as hell,” try “as steamy as a Finnish sauna in a Baltic winter.”

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After 20 years on the road as a Peace Corps volunteer, teacher, and journalist, Mike Dunphy has returned to his home state of Vermont, where he serves as the managing editor of The Bridge newspaper in Montpelier. He also continues to teach online classes in article writing, travel writing, and creative nonfiction for Gotham Writers Workshop in New York City, as well as contributing articles to a variety of national and regional publications.
The homepage of *Mystery Weekly*’s website features the black and white image of a man in a fedora, cigarette clenched between his lips, checking the pulse of a blond woman in an evening gown lying apparently lifeless on the ground. It’s a suitable introduction to this 3-year-old online and print publication that showcases mystery fiction from cozy to noir, from supernatural to historical, hardboiled to humorous.

Publisher Charles F. Carter and Editor Kerry Carter, married 25 years, work from home on the magazine. He also writes mystery fiction, and she adores reading the genre.

“We don’t have a home office per se,” Kerry says. “I read and edit stories on my laptop, in waiting rooms, at horse shows, in the car, on the couch… After I choose the stories for our next issue, Chuck handles the business development and website, designs the covers, and builds the issues using Adobe InDesign.”

**Tone, editorial content**

Despite the image on the magazine’s homepage, the Carters would prefer to see fewer stories involving stalkers and serial killers or tales about murdering coworkers and family members. “Also, any story that begins with a detective sitting in his office when a dame walks in would be a hard sell,” Kerry explains.

She also has an aversion to stories about terminal illness, abuse, graphic sex, and animal cruelty. “Since our magazine is now available in libraries and schools through Flipster, we want to keep our content appropriate for the largest possible audience,” she explains.

The Carters read submissions all year long, making detailed notes for writers who request feedback. They promote their authors widely, publishing excerpts and links to *Mystery Weekly*’s stories via email, the journal’s website, and social media.

One such author is writer and illustrator Nik Morton, whose story “The Very First Detective: The Killing Stone” will be published in the magazine’s Sherlock Holmes special issue, October 2018.

“It’s a prehistoric Holmes and Watson pastiche featuring Olmes and Otsun (Otsun is Olmes’s sidekick as well as being the clan’s medicine man),” Kerry explains. “Aside from being well-written, it has a unique setting, which makes it especially entertaining. We don’t get many submissions that cross genres, so any mysteries with fantasy,
western, or speculative treatments definitely earn extra points."

**Contributors**
The Carters feature emerging writers alongside well-established authors like Morton, journalist and mystery writer Joseph D’Agnese, and author R.S. Morgan. The latter has a story titled “The Sugar Witch” in the November 2017 issue of *Mystery Weekly*. It begins:

“I want to kill my sugar daddy,” the witch said to me.

We were in bed. Mellissa’s cheek was on my chest. Her unsmiling eyes were locked on my eyes. Her lethal pillow talk hadn’t surprised me. On our previous date, she had pressed her glistening lips against my ear and whispered, “I wish Angelo was dead.” Yet wishing her sugar daddy was dead was one desire. Killing him was another. I should have removed her cheek from my chest and rolled out of bed and walked out the door.

Instead, I asked, “Why?”

When reading submissions, Kerry looks for an element of mystery or crime in the story. “Just being ‘kind of mysterious’ isn’t usually enough,” she explains. “We also love a great opening that makes you want to keep reading, plus a unique voice, realistic dialogue, humor, and a satisfying ending with a surprise or twist.”

**Advice for potential contributors**
The Carters include brief excerpts of stories on the website, and they advise potential contributors to buy and read at least one full issue. Those on a budget can get a free trial subscription on Kindle Newsstand or ask to read it for free on Flipster at the local library.

Kerry values the overall entertainment value of a story higher than the strength of the writing itself. Still, she says, mechanical errors and continuity issues can ruin a story, too. “Poor grammar makes the story harder to read and understand, and continuity problems can really irritate mystery readers,” she explains. “Have a few friends, or a writing group, read your story before submitting, and ask questions to make sure they understood it. And if possible, have a professional editor look over your story for common mistakes.

“The best advice I can offer is to not be boring,” she concludes. “There’s that old saying that one should ‘write what you know,’ and that’s good advice for someone with interesting hobbies or life experiences. But stories that take place in mundane places like the home or office can be harder to make compelling. So we’d much rather you research something that’s interesting that you know nothing about. This is my litmus test: I ask myself if it’s something the reader would tell their friends to read. If the answer is yes, I’ll probably accept it.”

Contributing editor Melissa Hart is the author of *Avenging the Owl* (Sky Pony, 2016) and a consultant for Creator & Collector Services. Web: melissahart.com.
Chanticleer Authors Conference

Struggling with the business side of being an author? This industry-focused conference in the Pacific Northwest is here to help.

In 2015, staff at Chanticleer Authors Conference paused the annual Awards Banquet and took participants outside to gaze at the moon. “A supermoon was going on, and everyone left their tables and walked outside to see it,” explains director Kiffer Brown. “Our conference hotel is right on the lake. People were sending up lanterns into the sky, and there was this brilliant, beautiful moon. It was very special.”

The 5-year-old conference on Bellingham Bay on the northwest coast of Washington teaches authors about marketing, book publicity, and publishing. While emerging writers are welcome, they won’t find workshops on how to write a sentence or start a book. Instead, they’ll learn how to promote their work in a myriad of ways — through in-person events, word-of-mouth, and a great deal of social media outreach. Many of the attendees are authors who’ve published and won awards, and they need to know how to get their books into the hands of more readers.

“We’re more about the business side of writing,” Brown explains. “If we do bring in people to talk about craft, it’s at a very high level.”

Participants soak up industry information in a beautiful location. Bellingham sits between Vancouver, B.C., and Seattle, and the hotel in which the conference is located has a view of the Pacific Ocean and the Cascade Mountains. Participants are only a ferry ride away from Victoria, B.C. — a city famed for its Victorian architecture and lush gardens.

What you’ll learn
Over three full days, attendees enjoy a wealth of classes. “We talk about everything from editing to book covers to getting blurbs to social media platforms, plus how to do book launches and create and sustain book buzz,” Brown says. “The book is an author’s intellectual property, but that should just be the beginning. We explore how to get your book streamed as a digital series like Stranger Things, how to merchandise with stuffed animals if you’ve written...”
a children’s book or with cookware if you’ve written a cookbook.”

In 2017, Nicole Evelina talked with authors about how to use the image-heavy social network Pinterest to develop their stories and their writing career. Terry Persun taught a session titled “Befriending the Giant (Amazon),” and Michele Renee taught “Storytelling through Video Games: An interactive new way to reach audiences.”

Other workshops focus on improving dialogue, deepening characterization, and how to write an effective sex scene. Master Class sessions on Sunday allow for more in-depth writing practice over seven hours. The awards banquet and an ongoing book fair give participants the opportunity to socialize and network informally and to meet best-selling authors face-to-face.

**Featured presenters**

*New York Times* best-seller Robert Dugoni is a regular at Chanticleer Authors Conference. Writer and psychotherapist Margie Lawson will present in 2018, as will Kathy L. Murphy – founder of The Pulpwood Queen & Timber Guys Book Club.

In 2017, the conference welcomed novelist and playwright C.C. Humphreys, author and PR manager Fox Deatry, and film producer Diane Sillan Isaacs. Brown expects many presenters to return in 2018. Check the website for an updated list of both presenters and educational sessions.

**Advice for first-timers**

Brown advises people attending Chanticleer Authors Conference to be prepared to network. “We have authors across the board, from indie publishing to small presses to the big five publishers,” she says. “Introduce yourself to other authors so that you can review each other’s work and promote each other. We call it ‘playing together.’”

Potential attendees may want to enter one of Chanticleer’s many writing contests as well. Judges award the winner of the Overall Chanticleer Best Book Award Annual Grand Prize a check for $1,000.

Lest emerging writers feel put off by the focus on promoting published work, Brown assures them that participants in the conference get so close that they feel like family. “We use #ChanticleerFamily on social media,” she says. “The authors attending here are so supportive. That’s the culture we try to foster at this conference; a rising tide lifts all boats.”

Contributing editor Melissa Hart is the author of the middle-grade novel *Avenging the Owl* (Sky Pony, 2016) and an editor/consultant at Creator & Collector Services. Web: melissahart.com.
Moving parts

When it comes to getting published, there are many spinning cogs. Here are some of the resources you’ll need to take your work from inside your brain to in front of the eyes of readers.

The following listings are a sampling of what the industry has to offer. For a complete guide, visit writermag.com.

Information in this section is provided to The Writer by the individual markets and events; for more information, contact those entities directly.

Subscribers to The Writer have online access to information on publishers, publications, conferences, contests and agents. Go to writermag.com and click on Writing Resources.

F = Fiction N = Nonfiction P = Poetry
C = Children’s Y = Young adult O = Other

Agents

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FNYC BJ. Robbins Literary Agency Literary and commercial fiction and general nonfiction, with a particular interest in memoir, biography, history, pop culture, sports, travel, African-American, science, and health. Contact: BJ. Robbins Literary Agency. robbinsliterary@gmail.com

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BRISTOL SHORT STORY PRIZE International short story competition open to all writers over the age of 16. Maximum 4,000 words. Stories can be

CONTESTS

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BEVEL SUMMERS PRIZE FOR THE SHORT SHORT STORY Open to short story submissions up to 1,000 words. Submit via regular mail. Deadline: Check website. Entry Fee: None. Prizes: $1,000 and feature on Shenandoah’s fall 2018 issue. All finalists are eligible for publication in Shenandoah. Contact: Shenandoah, 17 Courthouse Square, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA 24450. shenandoah@wlu.edu shenandoahliterary.org

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on any theme or subject and are welcome in any style, including graphic, verse, or genre-based. Enter via online form or regular mail. **Deadline:** May 1. **Entry Fee:** £8 per story. **Prizes:** First place: £1,000; Second place: £700; Third place: £400. 17 shortlisted writers will receive £100. All winners will be published in the anthology and will receive two paperback copies. **Contact:** Bristol Short Story Prize, Unit 5.16, Paintworks, Bath Road, Bristol BS4 3EH, UK. enquiries@bristolprize.co.uk bristolprize.co.uk

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**F SATURDAY EVENING POST GREAT AMERICAN FICTION CONTEST** In its nearly three centuries of existence, *The Saturday Evening Post* has published short fiction by a who’s who of American authors – ultimately helping to define what it means to be an American. Submit any genre of fiction between 1,500 and 5,000 words. All stories must be previously unpublished. Electronic submissions only. **Deadline:** July 1. **Entry Fee:** $10. **Prizes:** Winning story will be published in the January/February 2019 edition of *The Saturday Evening Post*, and the author will receive $500. Five runners up will each receive $100 and will also have their stories published online. **Contact:** Editorial, The Saturday Evening Post, 1100 Waterway Blvd., Indianapolis, IN 46202. 317-634-1100. editors@saturdayeveningpost.com saturdayeveningpost.com/fiction-contest

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TRADE/TECHNICAL

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RETRAS

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Gretchen Rubin

With her books, blog, and megapopular weekly podcast, Gretchen Rubin has gathered a large audience over the years. She’s also found a tremendously successful niche. In all of her work, Rubin focuses on happiness and explores how things like habits, mindsets, and human nature all affect our happiness. Within these themes, Rubin constantly expands her body of work on multiple platforms. Rubin’s reporting on happiness began with her New York Times best-selling book The Happiness Project: Or, Why I Spent a Year Trying to Sing in the Morning, Clean My Closets, Fight Right, Read Aristotle, and Generally Have More Fun, which detailed Rubin’s year-long dedication to reclaiming happiness in her life. She followed The Happiness Project with Happier at Home and Better Than Before; today, her books have sold nearly 3 million copies around the globe. Her most recent book is The Four Tendencies, in which Rubin explores four key personality types and helps readers identify which one they are – and then use that knowledge to develop better habits, become more effective, and generally improve their lives.

Why happiness?
The Happiness Project idea was going to be just for me. I realized I hadn’t spent any time thinking about if I was happy or could be happier. I got all these books from the library about happiness and realized there was rich subject matter. I wanted to write about it.

Creating fresh material
Happiness encompasses so many things. Relationships, including romance, parenting, friendship, work relationships.

It's the body, which includes energy, exercise, and diet. It's all kinds of things related to health, such as mindfulness or spiritually. It's also about time efficiency. It's sort of limitless. The more I learn, the bigger it gets. To me, all my books are about human nature. What I like is taking a huge subject that I have to distill and make accessible to other people. I like that as an intellectual challenge.

Blog writing vs. book writing
The blog is short and one idea. Sometimes I’ll put something out there because I’m trying to figure something out or I have a question. It’s one idea that I can break off from a whole book, but they are complementary.

Research
It’s a huge part of my work. Reading novels and memoirs, as well as science and traditional research. I read philosophy and essayists. I just talk to people and try to be an observer. Sometimes I find insights in unexpected places. I’m always taking notes and trying to process information, but it’s not always conventional.

I carry a notebook and will email myself notes. I also keep huge documents sorted by subject. I have quotes, which I think are said really well or profound, but don’t fit into any other category. I also think that by copying something, it helps put it into my brain.

Writing routine
It depends what stage I’m on with a book. I do blog posts just about every day, and they’re not very far ahead. So that’s constant. If I’m working on a book, I try to have three hours a day for original work during the week. There’s a little private library called the New York Society Library that’s a block from my apartment, and I’ll often go there to do writing. I’ve always loved working in libraries.

Next up?
I might write a little funny book about color, because I’m obsessed with it. It would be sort of a weird little book – not about the optics or physics of color perception, but just weird facts. I get obsessed a lot with different things, and it usually doesn’t turn into a book, but this one might.

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They say there are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into two kinds of people, and those who don’t.

I’m definitely the first kind. My great interest is human nature, and I constantly search for patterns to identify what we do and why we do it.

I’ve spent years studying happiness and habits, and it has become obvious to me that there’s no magic, one-size-fits-all answer for building a happier, healthier, more productive life. Different strategies work for different people—in fact, what works for one person may be the very opposite of what works for someone else. Some people are morning people; some are night people. Some do better when they abstain from a strong temptation; others, when they indulge in moderation. Some people love simplicity; some thrive in abundance.

To help figure out what I was missing, I posed a number of questions to readers of my website, including: “How do you feel about New Year’s resolutions?” “Do you observe traffic regulations—why or why not?” “Would you ever sign up to take a class for fun?” As readers’ responses poured in, I saw that distinct patterns were threaded through the various answers. It was almost weird—as though groups of people had agreed to answer from the same script.

For instance, about New Year’s resolutions, a subset of people gave virtually identical answers: “I’ll keep a resolution if it’s useful, but I won’t start on New Year’s Day, because January 1 is an arbitrary date.” They all used that word: “arbitrary.” I was intrigued by this specific word choice, because the arbitrariness of the January 1 date had never bothered me. Yet these people were all giving the same answer—what did they have in common?

And many people answered, “I don’t make New Year’s resolutions anymore because I never manage to keep them—I never make time for myself.”

Another group said, “I never make resolutions because I don’t like to bind myself.”

There was some meaningful design here, I knew it, but I just couldn’t quite see it.

Then finally, after months of reflection, I had my eureka moment. As I sat
at my desk in my home office, I happened to glance at my messy handwritten to-do list—and suddenly it hit me. The simple, decisive question was: “How do you respond to expectations?” I’d found it!

I’d discovered the key. I felt the same excitement that Archimedes must have felt when he stepped out of his bath. I was sitting still, but my mind was racing forward with thoughts about expectations. I grasped at that moment that we all face two kinds of expectations:

• outer expectations—expectations others place on us, like meeting a work deadline

• inner expectations—expectations we place on ourselves, like keeping a New Year’s resolution

And here was my crucial insight: Depending on a person’s response to outer and inner expectations, that person falls into one of four distinct types:

**Upholders** respond readily to both outer expectations and inner expectations

**Questioners** question all expectations; they meet an expectation only if they believe it’s justified, so in effect they respond only to inner expectations

**Obligers** respond readily to outer expectations but struggle to meet inner expectations

**Rebels** resist all expectations, outer and inner alike

It was that simple. With just one single, straightforward question, all of humanity sorted itself into these categories.

The Four Tendencies framework clarified the striking patterns of behavior I’d perceived, and I was able to make sense of what everyone else had seen—but no one else had noticed.

When I mapped the complete system on a sheet of paper, in four symmetrical overlapping circles, my framework showed the elegance of a fern frond or a nautilus shell. I truly felt that I’d uncovered a law of nature: human nature. Or maybe I’d created something more like a Muggle Sorting Hat.

The more I’ve studied the Tendencies, the more I’ve come to see their tremendous influence.

When we consider the Four Tendencies, we’re better able to understand ourselves. This self-knowledge is crucial because we can build a happy life only on the foundation of our own nature, our own interests, and our own values.

Just as important, when we consider the Four Tendencies, we’re better able to understand other people. We can live and work more effectively with others when we identify their Tendencies—as coworkers and bosses, teachers and coaches, husbands and wives, parents and children, health-care providers and patients.

Understanding the Four Tendencies gives us a richer understanding of the world.

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