



On Track #1: Make a Great Start

I know that, like me, you probably have multiple writing projects that you want to work on. Maybe you're writing a blog – or two – along with an ebook. Perhaps you're fitting in your novel around your Master's thesis.

Pick One Project

It's so tempting to try to do a bit of everything – but that doesn't often lead to sustained momentum. So, for the duration of this course, I'm asking you to **pick one project to concentrate on**. That doesn't have to be the *only* thing you write for the next six weeks, of course, but when you tackle the assignments, I want you to be working on that key project.

In fact, before we go any further, **write it down**. Even better, send out a tweet with the #ontrack hashtag, and let us know what you're working on. Make a commitment to *this* project.

(Not sure what to pick? Go for the smallest project you have – one which you think you can finish in six weeks. Once you build up your momentum on that, it's going to be easier to tackle the next one.)

I'm going to be working on something myself, a project I've not touched in weeks – a rewrite of one of my ebooks, The Staff Blogging Course. I'm doing jury service this week, so I know I won't have much time – but I'll at least have time for today's assignment. I'll let you know on Thursday how I get on – and I'd love to hear how *you* get on, too!

In this first lesson, we'll be easing ourselves in gently. We'll look at:

- That initial resistance that *all* writers feel (it's not just you!)
- Finding the right place in your project to begin
- Blocking out time for your writing
- Two ways to make the writing process easier: prompts and timers

I'll be offering you different options to try, like "making a writing appointment". You don't have to do all of these at the same time – though you might want to combine two or more of them. If you can try some of them out this week, great! But they're not homework: they're tools for you to whenever suits you.

At the end of the lesson, I'll give you a short assignment. This is the bit I want you to try this week! It'll only take fifteen minutes, and I'll be doing it too.

Ready to get going?

Making a Start – Even When You're Feeling Stuck

It's normal to feel a certain sense of reluctance when starting a big project – or getting back into one that's lain dormant for a while.

Perhaps you've had a great idea for months, even years, but it never feels like quite the right time to write it. Or maybe you did make a start on your project, but life just got in the way, and you haven't made any progress for ages.

The thing is, you'll never feel *quite* ready to write. You'll always think that there'll be a better time – when you've got more energy, when life isn't quite so hectic, when chores have been ticked off. Writing is hard work – emotionally, mentally – and there'll always be a great excuse not to write.

So, here are some ways to jump over that first wall, and get started with your project:

#1: Find a Good Place to Start

One of the reasons we get stuck is because *we don't know where to begin*. It's hard to get going if you're not even sure that you're starting in the right place.

Like I said at the start of this lesson, if you're not even sure what project to focus on, try picking the smallest. That way, you can knock something off your list – and build up your confidence for the bigger ones.

If you have a huge project with no obvious beginning, start with whatever feels easiest. That might be a section of your ebook which doesn't require much research, or a post for your blog which is straightforward to write.

Sometimes, one particular section of a project seems especially attractive. You don't have to start at the "beginning" – if you're itching to write Chapter 3, jump in there.

Above all, don't get bogged down deciding where to begin. There's rarely one perfect place – wherever you begin, you'll end up with a complete project eventually.

#2: Make a Writing Appointment

If you're going to write, you need to carve time out of your schedule. Even if you think you have plenty of free time – maybe in the evenings, or at the weekends – make a writing appointment. Otherwise, you'll end up thinking "I'll do it tomorrow".

Block out at least an hour, ideally two. During that time, you're going to *write*.

If you're not sure you'll stick to that appointment, try:

- Getting out of your house. Take a notebook and pen, or your laptop, to a local cafe.
- Setting your writing time an hour before your favourite TV show. If you know that you really do only have an hour, you're more likely to get on with the writing!
- Telling other people – your spouse, kids, parents, Twitter followers – that you'll be writing, and that you'll need to be left in peace for an hour or two.

Really can't find an hour? Then block out just fifteen minutes – first thing in the morning works well, or straight after dinner.

#3: Give Yourself a Warm-Up

Instead of staring at the blank page, trying to force yourself to start, do a writing warm-up.

That means spending the first ten minutes of your session writing as fast as you can, from a prompt.

You could use a book of prompts, have a go at the Creative Copy Challenge

(<http://www.creativecopychallenge.com>) or just pick from one of the three below ones:

- A blue glass frog falls and breaks.
- "There's never any sunlight here."
- The worst idea I ever had was ...

You can write fiction, non-fiction, memoir, poetry ... or absolutely anything you want. The point is to get your writing muscles moving – you can delete the piece as soon as you're done.

#4: Use a Timer

Timers aren't just great for writing warm-ups. They can help you focus on your big project.

There are a bunch of timers around – I tend to use Tick Tock Timer (<http://ticktocktimer.com>), but you can find plenty of others. When I want to focus on a piece of writing, I typically set a timer for anywhere between 20 minutes and one hour, and while the timer is ticking, I *just write*.

Maybe you feel there's no real difference between setting aside an hour in which to write, and setting aside that hour with a timer ticking away. All I can say is give it a try – I've been amazed how effective this is for keeping me on track.

Summing Up

This first week is all about getting over that initial wall of resistance. It's your first few steps in getting back on track with your writing.

You can use tips #2 - #4 above (setting aside time, using prompts, using a timer) any time you get stuck. You may want to turn to #1 (finding a place to start) when you finish the current section of your project.

Assignment

Today's assignment comes in two parts. You can complete them at any time before Monday 24th.

1. If you've not already done it, *write down the name* of the project you're going to focus on. If you want, share it with the group by Tweeting it (#ontrack) or hit "reply" on this email to just share it with me.
2. Now, set a timer for 15 minutes (or more, if you can manage it) and work on your project. You don't have to show your writing to anyone. Your material can be as first-drafty as you like.

Coming Up on Thursday 20th

On Thursday, I'll be sending out the first Group Update. This will include a Q&A, so if you've got any questions at all – they don't have to be based on this lesson – email me (ali@aliventures.com).

We'd also love to hear about how you get on with the assignment! Send in any success stories, and I'll be sharing those too.

(Questions in the Q&A are anonymous, so feel free to ask whatever you want. Success stories will have your first name attached, unless you ask me to make you anonymous!)

Coming Up on Monday 24th

Your second lesson is about "setting milestones that work". This is all about avoiding that feeling of "how am I going to write a whole book?"

I'll be explaining why milestones are so important, giving you a step-by-step guide to help you break down your project into sensible chunks, and offering you some reasons to consider setting yourself a deadline.