



## On Track #6: All the Resources You Need

*I'll repeat this at the end, but there's an optional feedback survey for you to complete at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/R733GPX> – you'll probably want to read the lesson first though!*

This is the last lesson of *On Track*, so we'll be concentrating on setting you up for writing success in the future – both immediate (the project you're currently working on) and long-term. We're going to focus on the resources which you need – internal and external.

**Internal resources are the ones which come from within you.** They're qualities like your knowledge and skills.

**External resources are all the people and things which can help you on your journey.** Books, blogs, writing courses, companions and allies.

Both are important – crucial. And, even if you feel like you don't have many resources right now, I'm willing to bet that you already have more than you think ... and you can easily build others.

### Internal Resources: Your Personal Strengths

It's often easy to see other people's strengths and miss our own. I'm in awe of people who can paint, for instance – but I tend to take my writing ability for granted. It often takes someone else reminding me that I'm a good writer for me to really see it.

I'm guessing you do the same. You've got plenty of strengths already – you just might not be able to see them.

Perhaps you have expertise in a particular area. That might be from a course you've studied, a job you've had, from a volunteering position, or simply from life – practical skills like cooking, parenting or handiwork.

Don't take this expertise for granted. It's a great pool to dip into for your writing, whether you're working on fiction or non-fiction. Something which seems mundane or simple to you might be absolutely fascinating to your readers.

As well as your subject-specific expertise, you've got other attributes. They're often called "soft skills" or "transferable skills" – ones which you can use in multiple areas of your life. They're things like being meticulous and hard-working, or being great at inspiring and leading a team.

When it comes to these qualities, it's tempting to think they're just a matter of personality. Some people are just *born* hard-working and focused. Some people are *naturally* great at writing. Right?

Nope. Wrong. You don't get an easy get-out like that. **You can develop your ability to work hard, focus, and write well.** I've seen this in my own writing life: I've worked at my writing for years, and I find it much easier to focus now. I'm also a more fluent writer.

So, what internal resources – skills and qualities – should you cultivate? And how?

### #1: Tenacity

This is the ability to persevere, to stick with something even when it gets hard. You know as well as I do that writing isn't always easy. There are times when you just can't seem to get a piece right, and times when you feel like giving up.

**To develop this, make writing commitments and stick to them.** What will you do *this week*? Write it down.

### #2: Focus

It's awfully easy to find excuses not to start writing, or excuses to break off mid-way. Learning to focus means dismissing that internal voice which says "How about another coffee?" or "Why don't you just check your email?"

**Don't try to focus by will-power alone. Instead, find tools that help.** Set a timer and write for half an hour, without getting distracted. Switch off your internet connection. Find a quiet cafe where you can write. You'll find that you can already focus pretty well, given the right conditions.

### #3: Voice

You can be a technically good writer – knowing all the rules of grammar, for instance – without making much of a connection with your audience. *Voice* is important because it's what makes your writing unique.

**To develop your writing voice, start writing from the heart.** (The final chapter of *Seven Pillars of Great Writing* will help with this.) Write about topics which you care about. Create characters who are uncomfortable close to who you want to be – or who you fear becoming. No, it's not easy. That's why you need...

## #4: Courage

Writing isn't physically hazardous – but it can be incredibly scary. You need courage to write what's really on your mind. You need courage to tell the people in your life that your writing is important to you. And above all, you need courage to show your work to other people – either in a workshop, or by publishing it.

I'm not very brave. The first time I read my writing out in front of a workshop group, I was shaking. But I've found that courage builds up gradually. Ask yourself "what's the worst that can realistically happen?" Chances are, it's not really that bad. So **take the plunge – next time, it'll be easier.**

All of this might sound tough – and I'm not going to lie and say that building up your writing strength is easy. But it's an awful lot easier if you don't try to do it alone...

## External Resources: Getting Help

I used to think that asking for help was a sign of weakness. I wanted to do everything on my own, make my own way in the world. I'd read the "thanks" sections in books and scoff – *I didn't need a bunch of friends cheering me along in order to write.* (Not that I actually wrote much, but still...)

More recently, **I've realised that getting help is an incredibly smart and strong thing to do.** Turning to other people – either directly or by reading their books or blogs – is a great shortcut. It lets you learn from others who've trodden the path that you're on.

You already have some resources, whether you know it or not. Perhaps you've got writing books on your shelves. You have *Seven Pillars of Great Writing* which came with this course. You've got friends and family (they might not be writers themselves, but they can still be supportive). There are local classes or online courses that you can join.

Here are some of the resources that you want to gather around yourself, or create in your life.

## #1: Time

Whether or not it feels like it, we all have the same amount of time – twenty four hours in every day, seven days in every week. You don't need to set aside whole days for your writing, or even whole mornings – but you do need to find some regular time each week.

One easy way to find more time is to plan ahead. **Block out a weekend afternoon or a weekday evening for writing – and refuse to let anything else creep into that time.**

Allow time for *learning* about writing, too. That might mean setting aside a weekend each year for a writing conference (I love [Winchester Writers' Conference](#) in the UK) or simply spending the last twenty minutes of the day reading a writing book. You might want to join a local writing group, find a mentor or buddy for regular meetings, or even take a postgraduate creative writing course. Because having time for writing isn't enough – you also need...

## #2: Information

As you write more and more, you'll find that some things get easier – for instance, you'll typically find that you write faster. But unless you're making deliberate efforts to learn and improve, you could end up constantly repeating the same mistakes.

You can find tons of good information for free. **Start with reading great writing by other people, and look for *how* they achieve certain effects** (like suspense in a novel, or the draw-you-in hook in a non-fiction piece).

Find great websites or blogs to follow – I've suggested a couple in the Assignment, below. Consider buying a book that addresses a particular area which you're struggling with. You'll find information on everything from basic grammar to writing a novel or planning a blog.

## #3: Supporters

Last week, we looked at finding companions for your writing journey. **Your supporters aren't necessarily writers themselves – they might be friends and family who take care of chores or kids while you're writing.**

Ideally, though, some of your "resources" will be other writers. Maybe they're friends from a local writing group, people you meet on Twitter, or other bloggers. They'll read your work (and you'll read theirs – learning from them too). They'll encourage you when you're feeling low, and help you when you're struggling with a particular writing problem.

Chances are, you've already got many of these resources. You probably have more time than you think. You have tons of information at your fingertips – like *7 Pillars of Great Writing* which came with this course, which you can turn to any time you get stuck.

And you have support. Even if there's not a single person in your life who's encouraging you, you're welcome to email me. Any time. ☺

## Assignment

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

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

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

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

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

## Coming Up on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup>

On Thursday, I'll be sending round the very last group update. As usual, if you've got any writing tips to share, or any successes to celebrate, drop me an email – [ali@aliventures.com](mailto:ali@aliventures.com)

There'll be a Q&A as usual, so if you've got any questions that remain unanswered, let me have them! This is your final chance...

I'll also be sharing with you some news about my Staff Blogging Course rewrite.

## Coming Up on Monday 28<sup>th</sup>

Next Monday, I'll send you a link so you can download a handy package with *all* the course materials in it – that way, you'll have them for easy reference in the future.

I'll also be sending round a list of Twitter usernames. If you're not on Twitter, but would like to stay in touch, let me know and I'll put your email address in the list instead.

## Important: Your Feedback Needed!

I've created a survey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/R733GPX> so that you can let me know what you thought about On Track.

It's entirely optional (you don't have to fill it in at all!) and every question is optional too – so you can just fill in one or two questions if you want.

This is the first time I've run On Track, but I'm hoping to run it again in the future: your feedback will help me make it even better for next time. Please be ruthlessly honest – it's really helpful to me to know what *didn't* work so well for you.

*(I know I mentioned last week that I'd be asking what you'd like in future ecourses – I'm going to do that separately, on the Aliventures blog, so that you don't get overwhelmed with questions!)*