



## On Track #3: Your Perfect Writing Routine

No two writers work in quite the same way. Some write best in the mornings, others at night. Some like to aim for a target number of words, others prefer to write for a certain length of time.

Never let fellow writers, or writing teachers, convince you that there's *one true way* to write. All that matters is that you produce work that you're happy with, at a reasonable speed.

Today, we'll be looking at different ways for you to build a routine – like setting targets, writing at your best time of day, and writing for set periods.

### Building Your Writing Muscles

At the moment, you might not be used to writing very much. Perhaps you manage three or four hours of writing most weeks – or less.

You might be happy with that, in which case, great! But chances are, you'd like to do more. Perhaps you want to finish a book, create some really strong content for your blog, or even write for a living. Whatever it is, you know you'll need to write in a more focused, sustained way.

The good news is, that's absolutely possible. **Your ability to write is a bit like a muscle – one which gets stronger the more you use it.**

I've seen this in my own writing life: as a student, I wanted desperately to be a "writer" – but most weeks, I only wrote a thousand words or so of my novel – even in the vacations, when I had plenty of time on my hands. Nowadays, I write for a living, often producing four or five thousand words in a single day.

Just like building physical muscles, your writing muscles need a good routine of regular exercise. Here are some things to try. You don't have to use any of these, but they've all worked for a good number of writers, and chances are that one of them will work for you too.

(You may also find that different routines work with different types of writing. Be flexible, and enjoy experimenting.)

## #1: Set Yourself a Time Target

This is where a lot of writers start out when trying to build a routine. They set a goal like "write for an hour". You tried this out in week one, writing for 15 minutes or so, with a timer running.

Time targets are great for:

- Getting into the writing habit (e.g. writing for 15 minutes every single morning)
- Focusing on the quality, rather than the quantity, of words produced. Even if you only write 100 words, you've still hit your target if you stuck with the writing for an hour.

What's a good time target? I'd suggest aiming for 30-45 minutes per day, to start with.

## Or ... #2: Set Yourself a Word Target

Another popular way to get into the writing habit is to set a target number of words each day (or, if you prefer, each week). I've heard 1,000 words per day recommended by a lot of writers, Stephen King amongst them – personally, I think this is too much for most people.

Word count targets are great for:

- Steady, predictable progress – if you write 500 words a day, every day, you'll know that you can finish a 15,000 word ebook in a month.
- Forwards momentum – instead of fiddling around getting the words right, or staring into space just to fill up your writing hour

What's a good word target? Try 400-500 words per day.

There's nothing stopping you from mixing word and time targets (e.g. "write for an hour and produce at least 500 words") – though if this feels too pressured, focus on just one or the other.

## #3: Find Your Best Time of Day

Are you a morning lark or a night owl? I'm definitely a morning person, and have been since my teens – I used to get up at 6am to finish off homework, rather than staying up late, because I knew I'd feel much more focused in the morning.

I know plenty of writers who, like me, do their best work in the mornings. But I know many others who work well late at night (when folks like me are struggling to string together a coherent sentence).

You probably already have a gut sense of the best time of day for you to write – the time when you find it easy to concentrate. Try shifting your writing sessions around a bit, though; you might find that you have a peak of energy at an unexpected time.

Some good times to try out are:

- First thing in the morning (you might need to set your alarm half an hour early)
- Your lunch hour – can provide a nice concentrated space of time for writing
- Straight after work when you get home (especially if you always mean to write in the evenings but never quite get round to it)
- Late at night when everyone else is in bed

## #4: Write in Short Bursts

One great way to focus on writing is to do short bursts, setting a timer for 20-45 minutes and writing flat-out. If you're pressed for time – perhaps you really can only find 20 minutes per day – then this can be a good way to start building up a writing routine.

Advantages of short writing bursts are:

- You'll learn that you don't have to have a whole afternoon free in order to write
- You can write daily, and writing will quickly become a habit
- You can write fast – you won't get tired out half-way through the session

If you're going to do short bursts, be disciplined about them. Make sure you *only* write during your writing blast – no checking emails, or even checking facts. If you suddenly remember a chore you need to do, jot down a note on a piece of paper. If you need a bit of information which you'd have to look up, write a note to yourself in the text (I use [square brackets] for these) and find it later.

## Or ... #5: Write for Longer Sessions

Alternatively, you might find short sessions too pressured or restrictive. Perhaps you write best when you can get into the flow of a piece – and that might mean having a couple of three-hour sessions each week instead of a 30 minute session each day.

The advantages of longer sessions are:

- You may well find you start to speed up after the first 30 minutes or so, once you get into your stride
- Writing can feel more like a treat and less like an extra chore to be squeezed in – it's easier to relax into your writing when you're not feeling pressed for time

I find that long writing sessions work well for extended pieces, like novel scenes, where I'm typically writing 3,000 words or so. Short sessions suit me for blog posts or ebook chapters that are split into short, discrete sections.

You might like to switch between long and short sessions, maybe writing for 30 minutes each weekday, then writing for a couple of hours every Saturday.

## Assignment:

This week, I'm hoping you're into the swing of your current project. So your assignment is a bit bigger...

On *at least three* days between now and Monday 7<sup>th</sup>:

**Write 500 words *OR* write for 45 minutes.**

(If you can do this every day, fantastic!)

See how that feels – too much, or too little? Experiment with different times of day, and different places. Keep a brief log of your writing sessions so that you can figure out what works best for you.

If you get stuck, just send me an email, or let me know on Twitter (@aliventures).

## Coming Up on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup>

On Thursday, I'll be sending round the third group update. 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)

As usual, there'll be a Q&A – so send in any questions. They can be related to this week's topic, or they can be on anything to do with writing.

## Coming Up on Monday 7<sup>th</sup>

Next Monday, we'll be looking at how to stick with your writing, week by week.

We'll dig into planning and structuring projects, so that you know how to avoid going off on long tangents. And we'll cover the difference between first drafts and final drafts, so you don't get bogged down trying to make your work *perfect* right at the start.