

MODULE #1: DECIDING WHAT TO FOCUS ON AND WHY

IN THIS MODULE:

This week, we'll be taking a look at your potential writing projects and clarifying what you want to focus on. You may well already have a clear idea about what you want to work on, and that's fine: we'll also be looking at your goals and what motivates you.

Welcome to On Track! Over the next six weeks, we're all going to be working on our writing projects alongside one another. The first two weeks should get us set up for success, then during the next four weeks, we'll be setting and (hopefully!) reaching our weekly targets.

If you've not already joined our Facebook group, head on over here:

[facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019)

It's a private group, so only fellow course members will see your posts there.

What Project Should You Focus On?

You may well have one clear priority with your writing: perhaps you're working on a novel, and nothing else, for instance.

But in my experience working with writers, I know that many people work on multiple projects at once. (I'm definitely no exception!) Perhaps you've started a blog, but you're also working on some short stories for competitions – and there's that novel idea you've been mulling over for months now...

If you've got a couple of minutes right now, I'd suggest jotting down all the projects you have on the go – whether they're "almost finished" or "just ideas". Whenever I do this, I find I'm working on rather more than I realised!

I don't think there's anything wrong with working on multiple projects at the same time, so long as you're moving them towards completion rather than constantly starting new ones.

For the purposes of On Track, though, I want you to focus on *one* project.

There's no "right" way to decide which one. You might want to think about:

- **Whether one project is particularly interesting or engaging for you.** I believe that writing should, above all, be something that you enjoy and find fulfilling. It's fine to pick a project just because you love it – not because it'll be your most profitable or "worthy" project in some way.
- **Whether one project could be finished within four to eight weeks** – if you have a lot of projects on your plate, it can be helpful to get one nearly-finished cleared completely (even if it's not necessarily your most interesting piece).
- **Whether one project would especially benefit from steady, consistent work.** Novels, non-fiction books and blogs are all good options here – particularly if you've lost momentum.

If you really can't decide, feel free to flip a coin or roll a dice to choose. If you decide part way through the course that you'd rather focus on a different project instead, that's fine! On Track is *your* course and you're free to use it however suits you best.

What if You Don't Have a Project Yet?

You might have joined On Track because you want to write ... but you don't know *what* you want to write, or you don't have anything underway.

That's fine too!

If you have an idea that's at a very early stage, you can still work on that. You might choose to outline a novel during the course, for instance, or you might want to spend an hour a week working on ideas and plans for a new blog.

You may want to spend a bit of time, though, deciding whether this is an idea you want to take forward.

Evaluating New Ideas

If you're unsure about committing to a new idea, here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- **“Does this tie in with my goals and motivations?”** (*We're coming onto those in a moment.*) Or are you thinking of doing it because you feel like you “should” – or because a friend is doing something similar?
- **“Is this achievable for me, at this stage in my life and writing journey?”** If you've just had your first child, for instance, and you've never written fiction before, trying to write a trilogy of novels in the next two years is probably going to be a bit much.
- **“Does this idea excite me?”** Is it something you keep thinking about when you're doing the dishes / having a shower / trying to get to sleep?

Ultimately, you can't be *sure* if a particular idea is going to pan out, or if it's going to work exactly as you expected. My novel *Lycopolis* was originally intended to be a standalone work, for instance, but when I decided to self-publish, I made it the first in a trilogy.

If you have a particular idea that looks promising, you might want to commit the six weeks of On Track to exploring it, before deciding whether or not you want to keep going.

Feel free, of course, to share your ideas with us in the Facebook group if you'd like any input from others:

[facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019)

Don't worry if you don't have any ideas yet: next week, when we look at potential goals you might want to set yourself, we'll cover what to do if you don't have a particular project in mind.

What Do You Want to Achieve?

This is a question I'd like you to think about in the context of your larger writing journey – not just the next six weeks.

What are you hoping to achieve as a writer?

Maybe you want to be a novelist, and for you, that means having your books published by a large mainstream publishing company.

Or maybe you want to be a novelist and you're happy – in fact, you'd prefer – to publish your books yourself. You'll take on more work and risk, but you'll also reap the rewards with a much higher royalty rate.

Perhaps fiction isn't your thing at all: you want to have a large blog that you can make a very good living from.

Or maybe you want to write plays, poems, memoir or something else entirely: you might have your eye on a particular prize or a particular type of acclaim.

I'm not suggesting that you need to know, right now, where you want to be with your writing in 10 or 20 years. But it's helpful to have an idea of what you want to achieve over the next 1 – 3 years.

Feel free to explore this with the help of our Facebook group – come on by and let us know what sort of success you're hoping for:

[facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019)

What Motivates You?

Achievement is about the externals – accomplishments that others can also see, like “my book is in major bookstores” or “my essay was printed in a major academic journal” or “I make \$50,000/year from my blog”.

But motivation can be a lot more internal. And that's fine.

Maybe you're motivated simply by the joy of writing. I think most writers are, at least to some degree, and this is something we'll look at in detail during Module 5.

You might be motivated by other things, too, like:

- **Making money:** certainly when I'm freelancing, that's a big part of what drives me! If this is your main motivation, please don't feel that it's somehow less "pure" than other motivations.
- **Wanting to create a really *good* finished piece:** even if the writing process itself is hard and frustrating at times, you're happy to stick with it because you know you're producing your best possible work.
- **Daydreaming about the future.** Perhaps you love to imagine your book on your local's bookstore shelves, or you picture positive reviews of your book, or thousands of readers for your blog.

It's helpful to think about your motivation at this stage so you've got something to fall back on when the words aren't coming easily or when you're very tempted to skip a planned writing session.

How the Assignments Work

For the first two weeks, you'll have a short, specific assignment to carry out. During the next four weeks, your only assignment is to reach the writing target you've set yourself (we'll be setting these in week two).

ASSIGNMENT

Your assignment this week is in three parts. You don't have to complete them all, and you don't need to share your answers with the group, though you're encouraged to do so.

#1: Write down the *one* project you're going to focus on during the course.

#2: Write down a sentence, or some bullet points, about what you want to achieve with your writing. E.g. do you want to freelance full-time? Write and publish novels? Keep your writing as a hobby so you have freedom to do exactly what you want?

#3: Write down your motivations for writing. There might be several – e.g. you might primarily be motivated by enjoyment, but you also quite like the idea of making some money!

Once you've completed as many of these as you want, come and "check in" on Facebook and you'll get your reward stamp for Week 1. If you're willing to, please share your answers with us.

[facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019/learning_content/?filter=361835307934401](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019/learning_content/?filter=361835307934401)

If you prefer not to use Facebook, you can email me (ali@aliventures.com) with "Module #1 check in" or similar in the subject line.

What's Coming Up Next Week:

Well done on reaching the end of this week's module. Remember, if you have questions at any point, please do ask in our Facebook group. If it's something you'd prefer to discuss privately, you can email me at ali@aliventures.com.

Here's what to expect in Module 2 next week:

MODULE 2:

Next week, from Monday 21st January, we'll be setting your goals for the rest of the On Track course. As part of this, we'll take a look at times when your writing plans *haven't* worked out in the past ... and what you can do differently this time.

We'll cover ways to set writing goals that work for you (even if you have a very busy, or highly variable, schedule) plus procrastination-busting tips for making the most of your writing time.