

# MODULE #2: MOVING ON AND SETTING YOUR GOALS

## IN THIS MODULE:

This week, we'll be looking at what *hasn't* worked out for you in the past. We'll be setting some goals that will actually work for you, even if you're very busy. Finally, we'll go through some tips for making the most of the writing time that you do have.

Sometimes, it's easy to get caught up in the stories we tell ourselves about our writing habits.

When I was a teenage writer, one of my stories was "I never finish anything". To an extent, it was true: I often started projects (writing and otherwise) with great enthusiasm, but didn't see them through.

**But sometimes, these things can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.** If you tell yourself, "Oh, I never finish anything", it's easy to abandon yet another novel. Or if you repeatedly think "I never manage to stick to a writing schedule" or "I can't focus when I'm writing at home" ... it's not going to suddenly change!

There's obviously some truth in the stories you tell yourself based on past experience – and it's worth looking at the *why* behind them, rather than just accepting that they happen. For instance:

- *Why* do you start projects enthusiastically, but not follow through? Maybe you don't stop to assess before beginning. Maybe there's an upside, too: you like to try lots of things and discard the ones that don't work for you.
- *Why* can't you stick to a writing schedule? Maybe you're too ambitious when you set the schedule, or maybe you like to have the freedom to write when the mood strikes. Perhaps you're trying to write at a time of day that doesn't work for you – e.g. you're exhausted after work.

- *Why* can't you focus when you're writing at home? Are there specific things that distract you – family members? Your wi-fi connection? Household chores?

**I'm willing to bet that, in the past, things haven't always gone as smoothly with your writing as you'd have liked.** (I don't think I've ever met a writer who found it smooth sailing all the way!) You might well feel frustrated – with your circumstances, or with yourself – and I know it can sometimes be hard to believe that things *can* be different.

**In the rest of this module, we're going to be looking at how to set realistic writing goals that take into account the other things going on in your life – before moving on to look at making the most of your writing time.**

## How to Set Writing Goals That Will Work for You

I know that when I set goals, I'm always rather tempted to focus on an outcome that I'm keen to achieve, in a timeframe that I'd like – “I want to finish my novel this year, and post every week on my blog.”

That's not an unreasonable thing to do, by any means, but it doesn't take into account the reality of life.

**When you're setting goals, start by thinking about how much time you – realistically – have available for your writing.**

If you work full time, and commute, you might have very little time on weekdays: maybe you can realistically devote a weekend afternoon to your writing.

If you have very young children, there's a good chance that both time and energy are in short supply for you! Maybe you can only write for 10 – 15 minutes while they're napping.

Even if you have more flexible commitments – perhaps you're retired, or studying, or working part-time – your time is finite, and your days are already full with lots of things.

You can't really set goals until you know how much time you can *realistically* devote to your writing in a normal week. You want to be working towards targets that are attainable, without you sacrificing sleep or sanity!

This may mean accepting (perhaps quite reluctantly) that you won't be able to make such fast progress as you'd hoped. But if you look at how your efforts add up across six months or a year, you'll see how much you can accomplish. Just 1,000 words a week (about an hour or two of writing) is 52,000 words a year – a short novel.

## Working With a Varied Schedule

Some people in On Track will have a consistent schedule (e.g. working 9am – 5pm, five days a week, with one fixed evening activity each week).

Others will have a much more unpredictable or varied schedule (e.g. a day job that sometimes requires very long hours; small children who may wake up at inconvenient times).

**If your schedule varies unpredictably, one way to approach target-setting is to have both a “minimum” and an “ideal” target.**

For instance:

- Minimum target: 500 words/week
- Ideal target: 2,000 words/week

On bad weeks, you can be quite justifiably proud about achieving your minimum target. On good weeks, you can shoot higher and aim for your ideal target.

## Making the Most of Your Writing Time

However much – or little – writing time you have, you want to make the most of it. I know how easy it is to set aside an hour to write, only to end up frittering most of it away – tidying your desk, making a cup of tea, popping onto Facebook ...

When you're writing:

- **Find somewhere quiet to write** – somewhere you won't be disturbed by others. If you live alone, or with a partner who's out or busy, that might be fairly easy: if you have a large family in the house with you, it's trickier! If possible, though, write in a room where you can shut the door.
- **Set a clear intention for your writing session:** what exactly do you want to accomplish? Are you going to write the next scene of your novel? Spend 20 minutes tackling a writing prompt? Outline three blog posts?
- **Consider wearing headphones.** I have some cheap in-ear ones (under £10) that are fantastic for muffling external noise. With those, plus music, I can't hear anything else going on in the house! Headphones can also help dissuade others from interrupting you.
- **Turn off your internet connection.** This can make a huge difference (seriously, try it, you might be surprised). If you need to do research, then do this before actually settling down to write – or work on an outline while offline, then go back online to do your research. If you really need to stay online, you might find it helps you focus if you use an app like RescueTime to track how much time you're spending on different websites.
- **Set a timer as you write.** Some people find this too pressuring, but many writers find it helpful for staying focused. E.g. you could set a timer for 20 minutes and promise yourself that you will write until those 20 minutes are up.

If you find it particularly tough to *start* a writing session, and you focus all right once you get going, you could:

- **Remind yourself that getting started is always hard.** The sooner you start, the sooner the resistance to starting will vanish!
- **Have a specific getting-started routine** (you might prefer to think of it as a ritual) that helps you get into the writing zone. This can be almost anything you want. You might start with a few minutes' meditation, for instance, or with jotting down a short outline of what you want to write during the session.

If you've got any suggestions to share, please do add them in our Facebook group – and if you're struggling to focus during writing sessions, please do reach out for help:

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

Writing takes a lot of creative energy, and it's only natural to be tempted to put it off and to procrastinate ... so don't feel bad or embarrassed if that happens to you.

## Setting Your Weekly Target

We're now at the point in On Track where we'll be setting targets for the rest of the course. (I'll be doing this too – I could really use some group accountability as I work on my next novel!)

**It's completely up to you what target you set yourself.** It can be something tiny, like "write one sentence in my journal each week", or something huge, like "write 10,000 words of my novel each week".

I'm imagining that most people's targets will be somewhere in between!

You might want to have:

- A time-based target – e.g. “write for two hours each week”
- A words-based target – e.g. “write 1,000 words each week”
- A project-based target – e.g. “finish a short story by the end of the On Track course”

As I mentioned earlier in the module, if you want to set yourself a “minimum” and an “ideal” target, that’s fine too. That’s what I’ll be doing myself.

It’s fine to set a target that’s a bit of a stretch (though don’t go too far and make it unachievable). You get stamps on your reward card for checking in, rather than for achieving your target, so you can still get your stamp even if you don’t get as much writing done as you’d hoped in a given week.

## What if You Don’t Have a Project?

If you’re not working on a specific project, that’s fine. Think about what you’d like to try out or explore with your writing at this stage.

For instance, you might decide that you’d like to get into the habit of writing every weekday morning for 15 minutes before breakfast, or you might want to spend an hour a week trying out some writing exercises (there are loads of these online – just google “writing exercises” or “writing prompts”).

Once you’ve got a target in mind, come and share it with us in the check in topic on Facebook:

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019/learning\\_content/?filter=2317020561863742](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019/learning_content/?filter=2317020561863742)

You’re of course welcome to start working towards your target this week, but “officially” start our four weeks of target-hitting from the start of Week 3.

## 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 (the one you've just been thinking about).

### ASSIGNMENT

Your assignment this week is to set your writing target for the rest of the course.

#### **What do you want to achieve each week?**

Try to be specific: e.g. "write 1,000 words of my novel" or "spend 30 minutes working on writing prompts".

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019/learning\\_content/?filter=2317020561863742](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019/learning_content/?filter=2317020561863742)

If you prefer not to use Facebook, you can email me ([ali@aliventures.com](mailto:ali@aliventures.com)) with "Module #2 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](mailto:ali@aliventures.com).

Here's what to expect in Module 3 next week:

### MODULE 3:

Next week, from Monday 28<sup>th</sup> January, we'll be thinking about how planning works as part of the creative process. We'll take a look at big picture planning (working out a rough outline or scheme for your whole project), as well as at planning on a smaller scale (individual blog posts, scenes of a novel, etc).