

SUPERCHARGE YOUR WRITING PROGRESS

Introduction

One of the things that trips up many writers is how to make solid, consistent progress over the long term.

You might have had some weeks when you managed to get lots of writing done, and writing sessions where you focused well. But it can be really difficult to keep this up for months on end.

In *Supercharge Your Writing Progress*, we're going to be looking at the big picture: how to keep moving forward with your writing, and how to reach your goals.

We'll cover what you can do when you're feeling a distinct lack of motivation, how planning ahead will help you, and how to build "writing boosts" into your calendar.

Anyone can have a great session or a great week – but true writing success comes over months or even years of writing.

If that sounds a bit daunting, here's a good way to look at it: writing can be a far more enjoyable, and far more meaningful, part of your life when you're making the progress that you want to make.

This guide isn't going to be about writing thousands upon thousands of words every week, or publishing three novels a year, or putting out a blog post every single day. I don't believe that "more" or "faster" is the best goal for most writers.

Instead, we're going to focus on your own goals, and how you can enjoy not only reaching them but also the journey along the way.

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In this guide, we'll be covering:

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#1: What Does “Success” Mean for You?

Different writers have very different ideas about what “success” looks like in their writing life.

For one writer, success might mean making a living from writing novels.

For another, success might mean a well-paying freelance career.

For another, success might mean hitting the New York Times bestseller list.

It might not be about the money, of course. Your definition of success might be simply completing a large project, or gaining an academic qualification, or winning a literary prize.

You definitely don’t need to plan out your entire writing career right now. You don’t need to decide on what will constitute success in 10 or 20 years’ time.

However, it’s helpful to have a clear idea of what would look like a successful writing year for you. What would you like to accomplish during the next 12 months? Or if you want to look further ahead, where would you like to be in 3 years from now with your writing?

Depending on the timeframe, and how much time you have for writing, your goal might be to:

- Draft a full-length novel
- Write 10 short stories and submit them to competitions
- Publish a weekly post on your blog
- Finish and self-publish an book
- Take on enough freelance work to quit your day job
- Rewrite and edit your novel’s draft and find an agent to represent it

What matters is having a clear idea of what you’re aiming for. If your only goal is to “write something”, then it can be difficult to make any real progress.

You also want a goal that you can take concrete steps towards. If your goal is to “make a million dollars from writing” but you don’t really have any idea how exactly you could do that, then you need to break it down into smaller steps.

Many writers’ goals revolve around finishing and publishing their work. That might mean self-publishing (in book form or on a website) or seeking traditional publication.

In this guide, we’re going to concentrate on the type of progress that involves seeing projects through to the end and then publishing them in some form.

#2: Focusing on One Project at a Time

One of the biggest struggles I see writers having is trying to tackle too many different projects at one. I'm definitely guilty of this one, too.

If you have all day, every day, to write whatever you like, then it might well make sense to work on a novel *and* a blog *and* a non-fiction book *and* your ideas for a TV script.

But if (like most writers) you have other responsibilities, like a job, or studying, or kids, or household chores, or caring duties, or quite possibly several of those – then you really need to pick *one* project to focus on.

That doesn't mean you need to work on that project to the exclusion of all else. It does mean that, when you only have enough time for your novel OR your blog in a given day or week, one of them needs to win out.

Deciding Which Project to Focus On

Sometimes, it's obvious which writing project needs to be a priority at any given time. You might have a deadline for one (whether external or self-imposed), or you might need to focus on it because it's the only project that's bringing in money.

You may also find that one particular project is much more engaging for you than others. This is the project that you think about before you go to sleep at night, the project you daydream about when you're doing the dishes, the project that you couldn't bear to let go, because life would feel thinner and greyer without it.

If you have a project like that, go with your gut. Make it your focus, and fit any other writing around it.

But you might also be in a situation where you don't know which project you want to focus on. Maybe there are two competing for your time and energy.

Here are some ways to decide which project is going to be your priority:

- **Which project could you finish soonest?** If you can get a project *done* in the next couple of months, then it's often a good idea to make that one your priority – even if it's not your favourite. That way, you'll have more time and energy to focus on the others.
- **Which project will move you closer to your main goal?** If your most important goal for the year is “make enough money writing to quit my miserable day job” then it makes sense to prioritise freelance work (which tends to pay pretty reliably) over writing your novel (which could become a runaway bestseller... but that's much more of a gamble).
- **Which project fits into your life best right now?** Perhaps you're torn between writing short stories and working on a full-length novel. If your writing time is very limited, it might make sense to concentrate on short stories so that you can get some pieces completed.
- **Which project will teach you the most, or help you with the next project?** Maybe doing some freelance blogging would be a great way to get some experience before launching your own blog, for instance.

You might also find that it's helpful to write down a list of your projects, so you can see what you're currently working on (or thinking about working on). There might be more than you realised.

As well as choosing a single project to focus on, you might want to pick one or two other projects that you'll have on the backburner. It can be helpful if these are a change of pace from your main project.

So, you might be working on drafting a novel as your main project, but you might also be writing occasional magazine articles too. This means you can switch things up a bit if you're struggling with the energy and motivation for your core project.

Splitting Your Time Between Your Writing Projects

I recommend planning your time on a weekly basis (for help with that, see *Supercharge Your Writing Week*). That way, you can figure out where your main project, and any backburner project(s), can fit in.

Ideally, your main project should have the bulk of your writing time. So, if you can write for an hour on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings, then you might allocate Monday and Wednesday to your main project, and use Thursday for another project.

If it's tricky to achieve this on a weekly basis, it's fine to plan things out over the course of a month. So, you might focus on your main project for three weeks, then take a week off and spend some time on another writing project.

Another way to split your time is to divide it up day by day: this works well if you write full time. So, you might spend your morning and most of the afternoon on your main project, but take an hour's lunch break or an hour in the evening for a side project.

Paring Down Your List of Writing Projects

Perhaps your list of writing projects is something like this:

- Finish editing novel #1
- Finish draft of novel #2
- Write weekly posts for main blog
- Write weekly posts for new blog
- Take on new freelance clients
- Outline a children's chapter book

... and you're exhausted just looking at it!

Some writers (and I know I'm one of them) will always have more ideas than they have time. This means you may need to make some hard choices about which projects deserve to have space on that list.

Go through your projects and ask yourself:

Is this a project that I still want to work on? If it's a novel you started a decade ago and it's still not finished, then maybe you've mentally moved on a bit from that idea. It might be time to let it go.

Is this a project that I feel I "should" do rather than one I want to do?

Sometimes, our decisions do need to be driven by practical considerations –

like making enough money to put food on the table – but if you have a long string of projects that are “shoulds” rather than things you want to do, it’s worth seeing if you can ditch some of them.

Could this project wait for six months? You may have some projects that you’d like to tackle – but you know that now isn’t quite the right time. Could one (or more) of your projects wait on hold until you finish some other things, or until life isn’t quite so busy?

Could someone else help with this project, particularly with any non-writing aspects of it? Perhaps you’re working on a big project like a freelance writing business, and you’re spending a lot of time on things like administration, emails, and sending invoices. You could potentially hire a virtual assistant to help out.

I’m definitely not suggesting that you should give up on projects that are important to you. But it’s important to know it’s okay to let a project go. When you’re a writer, nothing is ever wasted: every word you write helps you learn something. That 30,000 word partial draft that you decide to abandon, finally, may have been a crucial step in your development as a novelist.

Similarly, it’s fine to let a project wait. You don’t have to do everything at once. Even if there’s a competition deadline, or a great offer on a course, or something else that makes you feel pressured to take on yet another project *right now* ... those opportunities will almost certainly come around again.

#3: Keeping Up Your Motivation and Enthusiasm

How do you stay motivated and enthusiastic for the long haul of writing? Perhaps you have a tendency to start strong, only to run out of energy after a few weeks. Or maybe you feel really motivated every Monday ... only to find yourself losing enthusiasm by the end of Tuesday.

Even when life is busy, most writers find that they can carve out some time for a project that they’re really excited about. But when you’re feeling sick of writing, or when your project just doesn’t call to you in the same way it once

did, it can be all too easy to end up skipping writing for a few days, a few weeks, a few months ... and your progress will grind to a halt.

I don't think there's any magic way to stay motivated and enthusiastic all the time. But there are plenty of things you can try that should help:

Focus on What Excites You About Your Project

Hopefully, you've chosen to work on a project that you're reasonably enthusiastic about. But any project can lose its shine after weeks of plodding away ... and sometimes, you might need to concentrate on a project that isn't particularly thrilling, either because it's a requirement for a course you're taking, or because it's paying work.

In pretty much any writing project, though, you can find *something* that's exciting. Perhaps it's the scene you're really looking forward to writing in your novel, or the relationship that's budding between two of your characters. Maybe it's the opportunity to reach thousands of people with your writing on your blog. Or it could be a small piece of the project – like the chance to try out a new article structure for the freelance piece you're working on.

Track Your Progress on Your Project

One of the best ways to stay motivated is to make progress – and to see that you're making progress. This can be easier on some writing projects than others, especially if you're reaching for a goal that currently feels a very long way off.

Tracking your progress could mean:

- **Keeping track of your daily or weekly wordcount**, either on paper or in a spreadsheet or app.
- **Creating a checklist of key milestones for your project** – like chapters written, drafts completed, and so on.
- **Keeping a record of what you achieve with your writing each month.** I've been doing this (rather sporadically) since 2008, and when I look

back now, I can see how some of my earliest achievements – like “first paid blog post” – gradually built into a full-time writing career.

- **Sharing your progress with friends or fellow writers.** Some writers find it really helpful to share how they’re getting on with someone else, or even to share their progress publicly, such as on Facebook. This can be great for accountability and for pushing you to sit down and write even when you’re not feeling especially enthusiastic.

Build Your Support Team

I’ve never heard of a writer who succeeded entirely on their own. Look at the acknowledgments page in any book and you’ll see a list of people who’ve helped that book come into being – not just those who’ve had a direct role, such as editors and agents, but also the family and friends who were cheerleaders along the way.

Hopefully, you have family members and friends who are enthusiastic supporters of your writing. If so, make the most of these people! Let them know how much their encouragement means to you. Tell them how you’re getting on. If they’re in a position to offer practical support, let them: if your sister offers to take your kids to the park so you can write on a weekend morning, or if your partner offers to do the chores so you have a free evening, then take them up on it.

You may not have anyone around you who’s supportive of your writing, though. You might even be in the really tough position of finding that your loved ones are distinctly *unsupportive* of your efforts. Perhaps your partner thinks you’re wasting your time, or your parents think you should have a “real job” instead of pursuing a freelance career. Even if they’re not directly unsupportive, your non-writing friends and family may simply not “get” what it is to be a writer.

If that’s the case, do what you can to build a strong support team around you. That might mean joining a writers’ group locally or virtually. There are thousands of forums, Facebook groups, Twitter hashtags, and other virtual communities devoted to all sorts of writing.

Make Writing Time Something to Look Forward To

Finally, another great way to keep up your motivation and enthusiasm is to make your writing time something you look forward to – not just yet another chore you need to cram into your day.

You might want to think about a couple of things:

The Time of Day (or Point in the Week) When You Write

What time of day do you normally do your writing? Does it work well for you?

Some writers like to write first thing in the morning – and they find this helps get their day off to a great start. If you love to write from 6am - 7am, go for it! But if this is making you feel rushed and pressured, then you might want to try a different time.

Other writers like to set aside time to write in the evening, when they've got chores done, kids to bed, and their day job out of the way. They find that this is a great time to really relax into writing. But others find that they're too tired in the evening to really enjoy writing.

There's definitely no "right" time of day for your writing session: what matters is finding something that works well for you, and that feels more like a treat than a chore.

One key thing to keep in mind here is that just because something worked for you in the past doesn't necessarily mean it'll still work well for you. I used to write fiction in the early mornings when I was first building my freelancing career: now that I write full time and have kids, I find it easier to relax and enjoy my fiction writing in the evenings.

How Your Writing Session Could Be More Enjoyable

Are there any routines or rituals that you could add into your writing time to make it something that you enjoy more?

That might mean having your favourite coffee/tea/hot chocolate/etc when you write. (Some writers also find that having a glass of wine helps them relax and write, though personally I find it kills my focus.)

It could also mean re-thinking the location where you write. Perhaps you normally write at the kitchen table, but your chair isn't comfortable, and you find it difficult to focus with family member wandering past, or with a sinkful of dirty dishes in sight.

If you feel like you're in the right place to write, then you might want to find ways to make it a more inspiring writing environment. That could mean putting up some favourite quotes, lighting a scented candle, putting on music that energises you ... or whatever works best for you.

Tip: For more help with choosing and organizing an inspiring writing space, check out [Supercharge Your Writing Environment](#).

#4: Planning Ahead With Your Writing

One incredibly powerful way to make more progress is to do more planning.

Of course, you don't want to get so bogged down in planning that you never do any actual writing ... but in most cases, spending a little bit of extra time planning ahead can help you create or save a *lot* of time later on.

There are two different types of planning that can help you:

- **Planning out your writing itself (often called "outlining").** This can mean things like writing a chapter by chapter plan for your novel, creating an outline for an article or blog post, and so on.
- **Planning ahead for *when* you're going to write.** That might simply mean blocking out time on your calendar to write, but it can also mean planning for things like deadlines for specific projects. This type of planning is one that writers don't often think about ... but it can make a huge difference.

The first type of planning is important, and even if you like to write in an exploratory way, you'll usually find that you need to do some kind of outlining at some point.

The second type of planning, though, is what I want to focus on in this chapter.

Planning Ahead for Longer Writing Sessions

Generally speaking, the longer you want your writing session to be, the further ahead you have to plan it.

If you never have more than 15 minutes to write, it's probably not because it's impossible for you to create that time in your life. It's because you're not planning it out far enough ahead.

On a day by day basis, most of us can find 15 minutes or so. At 4pm, you could decide that you'll spend 15 minutes in the evening writing, and you could probably make it work just fine.

Spending two hours writing, on the other hand, requires more upfront planning. You can't just decide at 6pm to spend two hours writing if you want to be in bed at 10pm, you won't have the kids to bed until 7.30pm at the earliest, and you then have at least an hour's worth of chores to do. The timings just don't add up.

But – on the bright side, you can manage full *days* of writing if you plan them far enough ahead. If I told you to look ahead six months in your calendar, choose a Saturday on which you'd write all day, and block it out, you could probably do that quite easily. If you have kids, you could arrange childcare well ahead of time. If you normally have other responsibilities on a Saturday, you could arrange cover for those.

Today, here are two simple things you could do to make a lot more writing time in your life during the next month:

- **Plan out three hours each week when you'll write** (they don't have to be in a single block). Don't sacrifice sleep or exercise or anything else important for these. Can you rope in some help if necessary to free up that time – e.g. could you get your partner to do the chores one evening so you can focus on writing?
- **Choose a weekend morning or afternoon in about three weeks' time when you want to write.** Three weeks is far enough ahead that you can arrange other things around it – e.g. you could arrange to do the weekly food shop on a weeknight, or you could get someone lined up to provide childcare.

By getting your writing sessions on your calendar well ahead of time, you can open up possibilities that wouldn't seem to exist otherwise. You can turn down commitments for those times, and you can get other people involved to help out if necessary.

Setting Yourself Deadlines

Another great way to plan ahead is with deadlines for your writing. When life is busy, a deadline can be a helpful way to focus on what you want to achieve.

Some writers find that setting their own deadlines works fine: they choose a date to be done with a project, and they feel motivated to work towards it.

Others find that this type of deadline doesn't feel "real" enough, and they need something external instead. If that's the case for you, here are some useful things to try:

- **Look for a writing competition that relates to your project** and that has a deadline that's realistic but that will push you to get on with the writing. There are tons of short story competitions out there, and quite a few for poetry. You'll also often find competitions for the first 1 - 3 chapters of a novel.
- **If you're working on a project that you're going to self-publish**, then set a deadline and let people know about it. This works well if you already have a blog, an email newsletter, or a Facebook group where you can tell people what to expect and when.
- **Join in with other writers who are also trying to complete something by a deadline.** If you want to do some really focused writing and you have a fair amount of time available, NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month, each November) is a great time to do this: writers all around the world try to write a 50,000 word novel in a month.
- **Line up an editor or beta reader who you'll be sending your writing to.** When someone else is waiting for your writing, you'll feel more motivated to get it done on time.
- **Take a writing class or course that involves assignments and deadlines**, if you can find something that ties in well with the type of writing you want to do.

#5: When You're Struggling to Make Progress

There are some struggles that writers often have when it comes to making good, consistent progress over time. Here are a few that you might be having problems with ... and some solutions for them.

#1: Writing Well For a Week or Two ... Then Getting Busy

You might find that you can manage to make good progress for a week or two, but that you then end up skipping writing sessions.

This can happen for a number of reasons, including:

- **You lost enthusiasm.** Maybe you felt keen to write every evening for 30 minutes when you got started, but after a week or two, that initial burst of enthusiasm and motivation had faded.
- **Something went wrong.** This often isn't anything dramatic: even a small hiccup can throw your writing off-course. Perhaps you were writing every Tuesday and Thursday evening for an hour ... but then you slept badly and you got an early night on the Tuesday, and you ran out of milk on the Thursday and had to go out unexpectedly.
- **Your plan wasn't sustainable.** Maybe you were able to write for two hours a day for a week ... but it all fell apart the following week because you were exhausted, plus you needed to catch up on all the laundry and emails and other tasks you didn't do the previous week.

One of the simplest ways to solve this problem is to plan for at least 50% more writing time than you actually intend to use.

For instance, if you want to write on Tuesday and Thursday evenings for an hour, block out an hour every Saturday morning in case you end up missing one of those sessions. If all goes smoothly, you can use the extra time for a writing boost: if things don't go so well, you aren't going to lose momentum altogether.

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Another solution is to have a “minimum” and an “ideal” target. Maybe your minimum target is to write for 5 minutes every morning and your ideal target is to write for 30 minutes. That way, even on busy weeks, you can still hit your minimum goal and keep up the progress.

#2: Not Managing to Use Writing Time Effectively

Something I’ve noticed in my own life is that the more time I have in which to write, the harder it is to actually focus!

Back when I was a university student and frankly had not too many obligations, it could take me all week to get round to writing 1,000 words of my novel.

These days, when my fiction writing time is very limited, I can usually write 1,000 words in an hour.

If you find that you keep putting off writing, or that you sit down to write but then procrastinate a lot, it can help to:

- **Set yourself a deadline** – ideally, find a competition deadline, or promise to send your finished piece to someone else. This can help create a sense of urgency and make writing more of a priority for you.
- **Set yourself a goal for your writing session:** how many words do you want to write? How many chapters do you want to edit?
- **Track your progress:** write down what you’ve achieved during each writing session.
- **Try out different techniques for better focus when you’re writing.** Take a look at [Supercharge Your Writing Session](#) for lots of help with these.

#3: Starting Lots of Projects ... and Never Finishing Anything

Do you start new projects with lots of enthusiasm, only to find yourself giving up after a few weeks or months?

I've known would-be novelists who would start a novel, write 10,000 words or so, then give up and move onto the next project. Their writing was great, and they'd got the hang of *starting* ... but they struggled to see things through.

Similarly, I've seen plenty of bloggers launch their blog with great enthusiasm, write a bunch of posts, then simply stop.

The initial surge of enthusiasm you feel for your project won't last forever. You'll get to a point where that idea that seemed so great suddenly seems trite or overdone, or where those big goals that excited you so much at the start now suddenly seem an incredibly long way off.

While I'd definitely encourage you to ditch a project that just isn't working for you, you're not going to make a lot of progress as a writer if you can't ever finish anything.

The best thing to do here is to pick a *small* project and see it through from start to end. Don't start doing the world-building for a massive novel trilogy – write a short story. Don't launch yet another blog – write a guest post for someone else's website.

Once you get into the habit of finishing small projects, move up to bigger ones. Be ruthless about limiting how many projects you take on at a time: keep your list to an absolute minimum. Otherwise, you'll find that it's all too easy to end up starting more and more projects, and never bringing any to completion.

#4: Getting Part Way Through a Project ... and Realising it Has to Change

A particularly frustrating problem you might face is when you get part way through a large writing project and then realise that what you've already written is going to have to change.

This happens to me a lot with novels. I'll get 20,000 words or so into the first draft – then decide that I want to cut out a character, revamp the plot, introduce something new, and so on.

This can also happen with non-fiction. Maybe you began working on a book, an article, or an essay ... only to decide part-way through that it needs a completely different focus.

While it's frustrating to have to rework something you've written, try to see this as part of the progress of your project. As you write, you're becoming clearer about your vision for your project. You're trying out different things, some of which may not work, and some of which may help nudge you towards what *will* work.

There are two key things to do here so that you don't derail your writing progress.

- **Don't push on through when you know there's a problem.** If you plotted out your novel but now the plot clearly isn't going to give you enough material for 70,000+ words, then don't try to pad out every scene to make it work. Take a step back. Be willing to redo or reimagine your initial plan.
- **Don't go back to fix everything immediately.** If you've written 20,000 words of a book and you now know that the first 10,000 are going to need to change drastically, don't go back and fix them right away. Make some notes about what you're going to want to change, and keep on writing *as if* you'd already made those changes. You won't have a clear view of your whole project until you've actually finished a draft (however rough and scrappy it is) and you may find you want to make additional changes too.

Where Next?

It can be tough to make consistent progress with writing, and most of the writers I know have times when life is just too busy, or when their energy and enthusiasm is lacking.

Don't let a bad week (or month, or year) put you off writing. These bonuses are designed to help you get back on track and stay there.

The rest of the materials in the *Supercharge Your Writing Week* pack are printables designed to help you plan out your week. Each one has a nicely coloured version, and a stripped-down black and white version in case you don't want to use much printer ink.

[Fiction Milestones \(.pdf\)](#)

Are you a fiction writer? Use this list of milestones to check off what you've already achieved. Feel free to add your own milestones to the list, too. Seeing how far you've come, and tracking your progress, can be hugely motivating.

[Non-Fiction Milestones \(.pdf\)](#)

If you're a non-fiction writer, use this version of the milestones list. It lets you record what you've accomplished – and you can add your own milestones to the list, too.

[Month by Month Planner \(.pdf\)](#)

Plan out your writing year with this single-sided planner, then stick it somewhere visible (like on the wall behind your computer). This should help you stay on track with your most important writing project each month, and it gives you space to work on other writing projects too.

Happy writing,

Ali

P.S. I'd love to hear how your writing goes – and which tips or resources from *Supercharge Your Writing Progress* helped you most. Drop me an email any time at ali@aliventures.com to let me know.

More Resources to Help You

If you want to go further with your writing, check out these resources on my website:

Supercharge Your Writing series (\$8 each)

Find the rest of the Supercharge series at aliventures.com/supercharge

Get Writing (\$20)

Get Writing is designed to let you dip into (or dig deep into) four key areas of writing: short stories, novels, blogging, and freelancing. It comes with a bunch of extra goodies, too, including checklists, prompts, and much more.

Check it out here: aliventures.com/get-writing

Self-Study Packs (\$20 each, or 6 for \$50)

The self-study packs are sets of seminars that cover specific topics, such as managing your time, self-publishing, freelancing, and more. You can choose any packs for \$20, or get the full set for just \$50.

Check them out here: aliventures.com/self-study-packs