



# **Stop Aspiring. Start Writing.**



**By Becca Phengvath  
with  
Robin Writers LLC**



**Robin Writers**

Stop Aspiring. Start Writing.

By Becca Phengvath  
Founder of Robin Writers LLC

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## A note from Becca



Hello, my fellow writer!

Looks like you may be ready to start something new in your writing adventures, and I'm glad this ebook has found its way to you.

Here, you will find some strategies that helped me along the way in my career that allowed me to overcome procrastination, self-doubt, goal setting challenges, and more. This all translates into how you can work towards a fulfilling freelance career,

land a full-time writing job, write a book, and any other writing you put your mind to.

...or at least how to just *start* (sometimes the hardest part).

I've polled my social media following a couple times and learned that it's likely that you, my dearest reader, enjoy reading fiction. And what do you know—I love writing fiction! So I challenged myself to write a short fiction piece inspired by a concept in each section. Hopefully they help illustrate the message in each section of this ebook, or at least provide a temporary escape from the chaos of life.

Enjoy and happy writing!

Sincerely,

Becca

P.S. Once you finish reading, I have a link to a survey at the very end of this ebook so you can let me know your honest thoughts about it. I'd really appreciate your feedback so I know what to do in the future for you!



# Introduction



It's not always easy to just *start* everything you want to do. Like running a marathon. Or writing a book. Or finally folding the mountain of laundry that's been sitting on your bedroom floor for a week (and no, I obviously don't know that from experience).

But starting is how anything is accomplished in the first place.

So, knowing that, why is it so hard to just *start* some things, even if it's something we're excited about or are determined to accomplish?

Because it's not easy when you know how much work is in front of you or how hard the process might be or if there are too many unknowns that intimidate you.

Maybe you want to start freelance writing, but the thought of learning how to run your own business (because that's essentially what it is) is enough to opt for the more comfortable option: putting it off until "the right time"...

Yet there's something in you that wants it so bad.

Let's talk about how to finally just get started on your goals as a writer and finally feel accomplished.

## **Short fiction**

Please enjoy a short creative piece inspired by this ebook's theme!

## Start

That book she's wanted to write.

That workout she's wanted to try.

That business she's wanted to start.

The blog she's wanted to publish.

...but hasn't yet.

Yet.

She keeps thinking about these things. Things that she believes would make a positive impact to her life. Things that excite her. But somehow, the timing hasn't been "just right".

"At the start of the new year."

"When I make a little more money."

"When I'm not so busy."

"Once I get this new job."

"Monday."

She kids herself. The new year comes, she receives a raise, she has a free Friday night, she gets hired, Monday comes...

But the timing still isn't "just right".

Until she makes it right. Eventually, the desire to *do* rather than *fantasize* overcomes her. Finally, she takes advantage of a free Friday night.

And she just *does*.

She drafts the first page of her book.

She does twenty jumping jacks.

She brainstorms business names.

She starts research for her first blog post.

But most importantly of all...

...*she just **starts***.

Baby steps.

Why do you want this?



Whether you want to start freelancing, write a book, get a full-time copywriting job, start a blog...we all have to start somewhere. But something you'll want to really nail down before you take action on your goal is to be honest with yourself and determine your "why".

I want to challenge you with this one. Really think about your purpose and the deeper meaning behind why you want to accomplish your goal. And I'd encourage you to think deeper than simply making money. We all have to make a living, but when there's a deeper purpose to your work than solely making money, beautiful things can happen.

So besides the goal of making money, what else is there? Do you want to:

- Help people?
- Have the freedom to express yourself creatively?
- Learn about a particular topic?
- Be a part of solving a greater world or societal problem?
- Serve as an educational resource to others?

Dig deep and determine your purpose because with writing, the money doesn't always come right away and if you don't have a "why", it'll be very easy to give up. I truly believe that having a deeper purpose to your work helps you through the inevitable ups and downs that often comes with writing.

I think of it kind of like exercising. When you do it just because you believe you should, it's hard to be motivated, right? But when you decide you want to do it because you want to sign up for a 5K race, or join a competition, lose weight, be more physically fit for your kids...THAT'S where everything changes for the better.

Suddenly, when you clock out of work and decide whether to go home or go to the gym first, you have a purpose. When you close your laptop for the day and decide whether to go sit on the couch or go for a run outside, you don't have to think so hard. This is all about purpose. Having a "why" gives you a clear purpose for working out.

Besides, why would we want to do something that we don't know why we're doing it? That's why kids may push back on something you ask them to do, right? Take a nap, clean your room, do your homework, take a shower, and on and on. When they don't care about these tasks and don't understand why they're important, why would they want to do them? That's when we do our best to explain why something is important so they understand the purpose.

Determining why you want to accomplish your writing goal is very similar!

## Short fiction

For this piece, I thought about when my friends and I started working in high school and college and how we learned that working isn't just something we had to do just because, there was a reason why—and everyone had their own “why”, whether it was to save up to buy a car, contribute to a college fund, or win over the heart of a crush...



## First Chair Clarinet

I walked through the door on my first day and I already felt a wave of dread wash over me. The registers were glaring at me, the shelves taunted me, and every book was plotting against me. I was surrounded.

The manager greeted me and we started by setting up the Valentine's Day display with stupid little hearts and romance books that had the stereotypical half naked jacked man on the cover embracing a pretty woman with long flowy hair. How does anyone read these? When we closed the store, I couldn't have run out of there faster.

I was still a kid, right? I had school and homework and friends and a *life*, you know? I didn't have time to work. There were more important things to do, but of course my parents wanted to "teach me responsibility" or some crap like that. I got good grades! I did my homework! Is that not showing them how responsible I was?

Ugh.

I arrived at school the next day and I just couldn't escape Valentine's Day whether I was at work or at school...there was a smiling, bright-eyed student council member set up at the front door with roses for sale, \$3 a piece.

Dumb.

My first class was band, the only class I actually liked. I took my usual seat next to Amanda after assembling my saxophone. She was so talented. Probably the most talented musician in the room. And she was nice, too. I considered her a friend and a saxophone mentor, obviously. She also had pretty eyes and a contagious laugh so I always tried to crack corny jokes in hopes I could hear it again...

Jeremy, first chair clarinet, walked over to us right before class started and handed Amanda a rose. She was of course so sweet about it and they smiled at each other and she giggled at how she wasn't expecting any roses this year and blah blah blah.

It was at that moment that I knew what I had to do.

My first paycheck came that Friday and I took \$36 from it. Nearly four hours of working was worth this, damn it.

The next day at school, I waltzed into school and purchased a dozen roses. Half pink and half red—I didn't want to come off *too* strong...stronger than I already was, I suppose.

Time for band class. Everyone stared at my bundle of roses as we all set up our instruments. I held my saxophone with one hand and the roses in the other as I stumbled up through the sea of chairs and music stands to the saxophone section. Amanda lit up when she saw me. Score.

I handed her the roses and she turned just as red as their petals. She smiled and gave me a hug. A *hug*. She told me it was the sweetest thing anyone's done for her. I made sure to check for Jeremy in my peripheral vision and he was totally witnessing the whole scene.

Wasn't gonna let myself get beat out by a first chair clarinet.

Work that afternoon wasn't so bad.

## Setting goals



Once you've determined your "why" (which of course can always change throughout the course of your writerly life), the next step is to set your goals. Going at a goal all willy nilly without a plan will definitely make the start of accomplishing your goal a tad difficult.

For example, when I was writing my first novel, I would think about writing and push it off simply because I lacked parameters to my writing sessions. It wasn't until I determined a certain amount of words to write per writing session or set a certain time limit on how long I would write that I finally started making progress. When I simply sat down to write without a plan, I completely lost focus and wasn't productive.

Essentially, I didn't sit down to write the whole book each time, I sat down to just write 500 words or write for one hour. Breaking up my bigger goal (write a book) into a smaller goal (write 500 words) helped immensely. All of a sudden, 50,000 words felt way more attainable..

Let's say you want to start freelance writing. You won't want to sit down and say to yourself, "Okay, let's start freelancing today," and try putting together some [writing samples](#), [create an online portfolio](#), make five different social media accounts, open a business bank account, [build an entire online presence](#), and start [pitching to prospects](#) in one sitting. My mind is spinning just thinking about it.

No. There are much...smarter...ways to go about it all.

## Be SMART about your goals



You can also approach your goal setting using the [SMART method](#). This stands for:

**Specific**  
**Measurable**  
**Attainable**  
**Relevant**  
**Time-based**

Be **specific** about your goal. Don't say, "I want to get more clients". Instead, say, "I want to acquire two more clients."

Make your goal **measurable**. Don't say, "I want to get two more clients as soon as possible." Say, "I want to get two more clients by the end of the month."

Make your goals **attainable**. Are there only two more days left of the month? Is it even possible to gain two more clients by then? If you feel that it's too much in a short amount of time, maybe

aim to reach your goal by the end of the following month or however long it may realistically take for you to achieve two more clients.

Make your goals **relevant**. Does acquiring two more clients make sense to your long-term goals? Are you looking to grow your freelance business or are you actually happy with where you are? Do you need more work or income?

Make your goals **time-based**. Similar to making your goals attainable, make sure you always allow the right amount of time to accomplish what you set out to do. Adjust if needed!

So, for example, if you're trying to start freelance writing, don't try to do it all in one sitting! Break your big goal into smaller, SMART goals.

### Write it down



Writing down all of your small goals will really help you stay focused. If necessary, break those small goals into even smaller goals. For example, “build an online presence” is a pretty hefty goal, so maybe start with just setting up a Twitter account and gaining some followers there first. Or research blogging platforms you may want to use to start a blog. Think small. The smaller you make the goals, the less intimidating they will seem and the easier they will be to accomplish.

This whole writing down your goals thing isn't just something I think is a great idea, though. Science tells us it actually works! According to [a study](#) conducted by Dominican University of California (among many other studies), when you write down your goals, you are far more likely to complete them than if you were to just think about them.

In the study's [Goal Research Summary](#), there were five participant groups, each of which had slightly different instructions.

Group 1: Only thought about their goals

Group 2: Wrote their goals down

Group 3: Wrote down their goals and formed action commitments

Group 4: Sent their written goals and action commitments to a friend

Group 5: Wrote down their goals, created action commitments, AND sent weekly progress reports to a friend

You can guess which groups had more participants who achieved their goals—and it was a significant difference.

This method of writing down a goal works for two reasons: your goal is easily accessible wherever you write it down and biologically, you are more likely to remember your goal this way. Neuropsychologists have even concluded that this is the “[generation effect](#)”, or the ability to have better memory for something we make ourselves (writing our goal) versus something we just read.

### **If you’re thinking about freelance writing**

If you’re looking to begin freelance writing, my suggestion is to start by accomplishing these smaller goals:

1. Define your “why”.
2. Choose your [niche](#).
3. Create a portfolio of [writing samples](#) and build a [simple website](#) to display them and showcase more information about you.
4. Choose one or two social media platforms you’d like to start on.
5. Create your first piece of content.

If you’re truly starting from scratch, I highly recommend that you begin creating your own content first before trying to get hired right away. [My foundation to content writing](#) began with my own blogs where I experimented with different styles and niches, and it really afforded me the freedom to try different things on my own terms.

My blogs were like my playground in the early days—and it’s kind of the same today. Having your own platform allows you to constantly experiment with different ideas to test what works for you and what may work for your future clients as well. And that way, when you do start talking to prospects, you’ll have a jackpot of [writing samples](#) ready to show them simply by sharing the link to your website.

## Short fiction

This one was inspired by my grandparents' neighbor when they lived in North Carolina. They were always so annoyed by them and how dirty their yard was with junk spread out everywhere. I decided to make the main character more likable (hopefully my grandparents would have gotten along with him regardless of his lawn) and see if someone could help him out. 😊

## Phillies

I lurched back and nearly fell on my rear end, but my porch railing caught me. Turns out trying to kick the godforsaken junk in your yard won't make it go away.

I hobbled up the stairs as my toe pulsed. I'd been meaning to get rid of that old shelving unit. And the whole sea of junk that covered my yard. Tomorrow.

A young guy always ran by in a Philadelphia Phillies hat every day. He always looked real focused so I would usually just wave and he would holler, "Hello!". If I happened to be getting the mail or pushing the garbage around the yard, I would tell him to excuse the junk and that I'd start cleaning it all up "tomorrow". But one day he actually stopped to talk.

"You make any progress lately?" He asked.

I wasn't expecting his question. The kid was gonna really hold me to it. "Well, here and there, you know?" I kinda lied, embarrassed.

"Why don't you try just a few minutes every day?"

Every day? Well that wasn't in the plan. I had a lot of...retirement things to do.

"It's kinda like my running, ya know?"

I didn't know. Haven't run in...I couldn't even remember.

"I'm a marathon runner. When I'm training, I'm not thinking about running 26 miles every time I go out. I split that bigger goal up into chunks. I gradually add miles to my runs every week to prepare. So for you, maybe spend like twenty or thirty minutes every day until it's done. Don't think about it as tackling it all in one day."

"Oh when I have the time, I'm gonna tackle this whole mess, don't you worry, young man," I chuckled. I really was.

"You could do it," he said, and smiled.

"Tomorrow." I winked. "Hopefully those Phils win today, huh?" He agreed, we said our goodbyes, and he jogged off down the road.

I sat back in my chair and looked around the yard. What a disgrace. If Jane ever saw this heap of trash, she would have left me in an instant.

It was 7:00 am. Who was I kidding...I definitely didn't have anything planned. Ah, retirement.



The yard just glared at me. There were old car parts, furniture, my grandchildren's old kid toys, broken garden tools, and even some old clothes I was meaning to donate. You name it, I probably had it in my yard.

Maybe the kid was right. Twenty minutes. I supposed I had a spare twenty minutes.

I rolled up my trash can and eyed up one corner of the yard with some old CDs and kitchen tools Jane used to cook with all the time. The CDs definitely didn't work now and there was no way I was gonna touch my food with those rotting wooden spoons and rusty pots. Sorry, my love.

After twenty minutes, I saw a whole patch of grass for the first time in about two years.

For the next couple weeks, I made it a point to spend my twenty minutes cleaning up a small section of the yard when the kid jogged by. He gave me a thumbs up as he passed; each morning he looked more and more focused. Musta had a race coming up.

Then it was my final day of cleaning. It honestly looked like a different house. The yard almost looked bigger! It was all dirt, of course, since the ground hadn't seen the light of day for an entire two years; the grass knew it wasn't worth trying to grow under all that crap.

I approached the final junk pile with a garbage bag and started poking through it. One of the first items I found was none other than a baseball I caught at a Phillies game. Couldn't remember the year it was for the life of me, but it was definitely a Phillies game. Now *this* was not junk.

As expected, the jogger kid came jogging around the corner. This time, he took the little do-dads out of his ears and stopped in front of my house. He put his hands on his hips and smiled at me.

"You were right, kid." I smiled back at him. He told me how happy he was and of course, he was sporting his usual Phillies hat. I looked down at the ball and gave it to him. He was ecstatic.

"You really don't have to," he urged. I insisted. He thanked me up and down. "I'm actually going to the game this weekend. Should be a good one."

"You know, I haven't been to a Phillies game in years and years, you know that?"

"With how well they're playing this year, the stadium is packed! Like the old days. You should totally buy a ticket!"

"Ah...do you have to use the world wide web to buy one nowadays?"

"Yes sir," he smiled, knowing where this was going.

I smiled back at him. "Tomorrow."

# Being organized



I also really love planning my weekly and monthly goals based on how I broke down my big goals.

I write everything on a big whiteboard calendar so I know what to accomplish every week and even every day. I can visually see my deadlines and tasks throughout the month and it really helps me stay on track.

I'm also a big believer in lists. If you're not the whiteboard type, I highly recommend creating little to-do lists for each smaller goal. There are numerous reasons [why creating a list for what you want to accomplish for the day is beneficial](#), including how it increases your productivity, improves your motivation, reduces your anxiety, and makes you feel accomplished (we all know the satisfaction of crossing a task off of a list, right?).

For example, if you want to create an online portfolio, you may want to:

1. Research the types of different [writing samples](#) you'll want to create.
2. Research what website platforms to use (like Wix, WordPress, or Squarespace).
3. Decide on what writing samples you'll write (blog posts, social media posts, a press release, a feature article, etc.).
4. Tackle each writing sample separately (maybe have a separate to-do list for each depending on if you need to conduct research or interview people).
5. Find someone to proofread or edit your writing samples (this could be a friend or family member—just have another pair of eyes on your work for feedback).
6. [Create your online portfolio](#) (these are not difficult and are designed to be user-friendly, I promise!).
7. Publish your writing samples to your portfolio.
8. Share your online portfolio to any social media accounts you have for your writing, or even personal accounts, just to get the word out there about your aspirations.

Now, your to-do list for one day won't include all seven of these items. Day one may only consist of items one through three. You see how everything can be broken down more in order to take yourself step by step to accomplishing the bigger goal at hand?

If you don't know what your little goals are to accomplish your big goal, talk to other people who have accomplished what you're after or research online what other people have done! I've also just started on something new once I knew the first couple steps and learned along the way what the next step was.

Here are some sample small goals that can work your way up to a bigger goal from my experience:

### *Writing a book:*

1. Create a rough outline for the book or at least write the general idea of the storyline and main characters.
2. Write the rough draft straight through without worrying if it sounds good.
3. Take at least one week away from your draft.
4. Read the first draft and make notes on where you want to revise.
5. Make revisions.
6. Repeat 4-5 for the second draft.
7. Repeat 4-5 for the third draft if needed.
8. Choose one or two critique partners (fellow writers) to read and provide the initial feedback.
9. Make revisions as needed.
10. Choose at least ten beta readers to read and provide feedback. Create specific questions you'd like them to address for each section or chapter of the book.
11. Make revisions as needed until you feel comfortable with the story as it is.
12. Hire a professional editor for what you believe your book needs now, whether it's copyediting, line editing, content editing, character or plot editing, etc.
13. Pitch your book to literary agents to publish traditionally or self publish your book.

### *Starting a blog:*

1. Research what website building platform may be best for you, like WordPress or Wix.
2. Create an account.
3. Create your domain name/web address (you can have a custom domain if you pay or you can use a free domain from the website builder). Whatever website builder you choose should walk you through how to do this.
4. Choose a theme/style for your website based on the templates the web builder provides.
5. Create a homepage, blog page, about page, and contact page at the minimum.
6. For the homepage, create content around what the blog is about and how it will be of value to your audience.
7. For the blog page, choose whether you would like your blog posts to appear as tiles that your reader will click to and then be redirected to the full post, or choose to have the posts appear in their entirety down the page. I prefer the tiles so it's easier to browse the posts.
8. For the about page, write a little bit about yourself and why you want to have the blog.
9. For the contact page, have a contact form at minimum if you'd like people to contact you. If you don't want people to contact you at all, don't have a contact page.
10. [If you don't already know your niche](#), think about what you could talk about all the time without getting bored. This could be video games, sneakers, TV shows, cooking, fitness, etc. Literally whatever you enjoy!

11. Research what people are talking about in your niche and create a blog post that gives your point of view or helps your audience solve a problem.
12. Create your first draft.
13. Revise and edit until you're satisfied.
14. Add imagery or video to complement your post.
15. Add any SEO features that may be available with your website package, if any.
16. Publish your blog post or schedule for when it will be published.
17. Once it's published, share the post on social media for more reach.
18. Continue to create blog posts! Don't be afraid to experiment with different niches and styles to find what works best for you.

### *Becoming a freelancer:*

1. Make a website. These steps are pretty much the same as the blog steps above.
2. Create at least one social media account.
3. Choose your niche and create your portfolio (see steps above).
4. Create an email address that you'll only use for your freelancing.
5. Create and publish valuable content every day for your audience to help improve brand awareness and find networking opportunities.
6. You may choose to cold email prospects for work. Personalize each email.
7. You may consider using a freelance platform like Fiverr or UpWork.
8. Write a template for a contract if you choose to freelance independently. Use this for every client so you're all on the same page with the work that needs to be done.
9. Consider creating a business bank account to track and organize finances if you plan on making this a significant source of income.
10. Consider becoming a sole proprietorship or LLC to have the right legal protections if that may fit your situation.

See the bonus content at the end of the ebook for more information about becoming a freelancer!

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Creating a plan after breaking down your bigger goal is essential. Suddenly, it doesn't all sound so scary because you've got a solid, organized plan now. Creating deadlines for yourself, to-do lists, calendars, etc. keeps you on track and most productive.

### **Next-level organization**

Ok, so once you have your goals and lists established and start seeing some action, you'll want to take your organization to the next level.



Let's say your goal is to start freelancing. So once your initial goals are completed like creating an online portfolio, creating social media accounts, or building a profile on a freelance platform like UpWork or Fiverr, you need a system to keep everything organized. Once you start getting clients, there has to be a way to track proposals, projects, deadlines, payments, and anything else that helps you keep everything straight.

There are programs some people like to use for this, but I go old school with a good ol' Excel spreadsheet. For my former full-time job at a marketing agency, I simply made a column for client name, task, deadline, and notes. That's it. I color coded based on if a task was upcoming, in progress, submitted, or urgent. This way, everything was in one place and the color coding helped keep me organized on priorities and status of projects to prevent myself from getting too overwhelmed. It is a lifesaver for sure.

At least for me, if I don't know what needs to be accomplished each day or what the top priority is, I am very unproductive. I have no sense of direction for the day and often, I don't realize how much needs to be accomplished and I may fall behind.

Whatever organization method you choose—whether that is an old school spreadsheet, organizing program (Like [Monday](#) or [Zoho](#)), tracking tasks in a notebook, etc.—you'll thank yourself once you start racking up those gigs (because you will, right?!).

## Short fiction

I definitely forgot my homework one time in elementary school and completely lost my shit. There was no way / could have forgotten homework!! Even as a young child, I was very hard on myself and took my school assignments seriously. This story is inspired by the tornado of emotion I put myself through on that fateful day when I forgot my homework and the teacher wrote my name on the chalkboard...gasp!



## Times Tables

*E*

Oh no. *My* name starts with “E”.

*L*

Pshhh, no way.

*L*

No. No. No.

*E*

What the....But I did ALL my homework. She’ll write an “N” next. Ellen definitely didn’t do all *her* homework.

Mrs. Anders put the marker down to reveal my fate. My name got written on the board. I had to stay inside for recess. This isn’t real.

I stomp up to Mrs. Anders. “I didn’t miss any homework!”

She says, “You didn’t do your times tables, honey.”

I frown. I *did* do my times tables. I rush to my desk and tear it apart. I start to cry. I’ve never missed one homework assignment ever. This can’t be happening. I’m not in trouble. I did my times tables!

The worksheet isn’t in my desk so I run to my backpack in the classroom cubbies and take everything out of it. I look through my homework folder, my side pockets, my front zipper, and nothin’. But I remember doin’ them. My palms feel sweaty. I cry more. I don’t wanna be in trouble. How embarrassing! And Mommy and Daddy will be so mad!

I cry throughout my whole time inside for recess. I wanna go home. I don’t wanna deal with the rest of the day. We don’t even have Art in the afternoon. As soon as I get home, I’m gonna make a chocolate milk and lock myself in my room.

The rest of the day takes forever and my eyes hurt from cryin’ so much. When it’s finally time to leave, I check my homework folder a hundred times to make sure I have everything in it. I pack it in my backpack and put on my coat to leave. After zipperin’ my coat, I feel somethin’ crumpled up in my pocket...

My times tables!!!

I had Girl Scouts yesterday and didn't have a chance to do my math homework at night, so I rushed to do them in the morning. I finished them just in time to leave for the bus, but didn't have time to put them in my backpack so I smooshed the worksheet in my pocket and ran out the door! I was so happy I made the bus that I forgot all about my pocket.

I smooth out the worksheet and look at all my work. Every single times table was done. I *did* do them.

On my way to Mrs. Anders' desk, I started to cry again. I handed her the worksheet and she smiled. "It's okay, Elle. Just don't forget tomorrow, that's all," she said. I told myself I won't forget tomorrow. Never again.

The next day, I hand in all my homework. I promise I did. I checked a ZILLION times again that it was all done and in my homework folder and it was. I hand my homework in to Mrs. Anders and, instead of doing the morning activity at my desk, I watch her as she checks everyone's homework.

Finally, she's done and walks up to the board. My heart starts to race again even though I *knew* I was fine. I really was. My pencil almost slid out of my hand cuz my palms started to sweat.

*E*

Uh uh.

*L*

Please, no.

*L*

I felt tears in my eyes again.

*E*

Write and "N" next. Write an "N" next.

*N*

"Oh, thank GOD!" I yell out. I forgot to say it to myself. The whole class stares at me. I wipe my eyes and put my head down on my desk in my arms. I take deep breaths. Everything is fine. Everything is fine.

Sorry, Ellen. It's cold outside today anyway.

## Establishing your day-to-day system



Now you know your big goals, you know what you have to accomplish for the day, so what's the next step to ensure that you actually execute on your goals and to-do lists?

What works for me is [block scheduling](#). This is when you dedicate each part of the day for a specific activity so you never have to think about what to do as the day goes on since it's already decided for you. BBC writer Tiffanie Wen [discusses the concept of Parkinson's Law](#), in which we usually take as much time that is allotted to us to complete a task. If we don't have an end time for completion, we may take more time to finish it.

Block scheduling tackles that problem by allotting a certain amount of time per day to a specific task!

For example, you may decide that 7 am to 8 am is for working out. And then 8 am to 9 am is getting dressed and breakfast. And then 9 am to 1 pm is client work. 1 pm to 2 pm is lunch. Then 2 pm to 6 pm is networking, your social media, building your brand, and other work.

Maybe setting specific times is too rigid for you. Instead, just tell yourself to work on “x” before breakfast, “y” before lunch, and “z” before dinner. Keep it simple.

You could also do this with days of the week. Do client work on Mondays and Wednesdays only, schedule interviews/meetings on Tuesdays, work on your own brand on Thursdays, and have Fridays reserved for other items that rolled over from the week. This also allows you to have a single focus for every day without having to think about it.

Whatever works for you, I think getting into a set schedule works so you don't have to put effort into one extra thing—the general schedule is already in stone and there's never a question of where your attention should be. And since it's kinda like making an appointment with yourself based on your blocks, you won't want to cancel on yourself!

## Short fiction

I had to reserve a block of time every morning to just get words on the page when I was writing my novel in 2018—otherwise, I'd probably still be writing it. I wanted to incorporate that concept into a short fiction, and this is it!

## Oatmeal

It all came flooding back: I never thought I'd be so pissed off at a bowl of oatmeal before, but there I was, every morning.

I returned my attention to the book in my hand and cracked it open. I flipped to the back cover where the author's headshot and bio were and I confirmed that yes, it was definitely written by my former freshman year roommate, Jack. Hm. Well this was going to be interesting to see him after not being in contact for about four years.

The college's roommate match program failed us as bad as a terrible dating website. Now I had to face him for the annual student and alumni literary event and of course, he was the visiting speaker since he actually got something published.

You have to understand that every single morning at about 6 am, Jack clanged the spoon around in his oatmeal bowl to mix whatever stupid ingredients he put in it. And he insisted on doing it in front of the microwave that sat about three feet away from my head.

*Ting, ting, ting*

Every bite he took, he clanged the spoon against the side of the bowl and swished it around in his mouth. It sent shivers through my whole body. I grunted as I tossed to face the wall hoping he would notice that I woke up...but no, he never "noticed".

*Ting, ting, ting.*

And then he'd chug an entire water bottle, gulping loud enough for our neighbors to hear, crunching the plastic bottle down as it emptied. He'd finish and release a big "ahhhhh" at the last drop.

Every morning.

My blood boiled.

Jack insisted that he had some kind of meeting every morning at 6:30 am. I'm not sure what kind of weird club he was in that would meet before the sun rose, but this became my sad reality.

Well, the time finally came where I needed a job. My summer savings were quickly draining my bank account, so I hopped on the first on-campus job I could find and it happened to be the library.

I arrived for my first day at work around 7 am and there *he* was, at a table all on his own. I didn't let him see me but I kept glancing over and nobody ever joined him. I worked three mornings in a row that week and each morning, he was still sitting alone.

I worked two mornings the following week and it was the same story. Weirdo.

One morning, I couldn't take it anymore

*Ting, ting.*

"What are you doing?!" I did my best 6 am growl.

"Making oatmeal. Want some?"

Is he dumb? "No, man! You're so loud! And you don't even have a morning meeting like you said...what do you even do?!"

"Oh I still have my meeting."

*Ting, ting, ting.*

"No you don't! I see you sitting alone at the library every morning I work!"

"Ah, got a job now, huh?"

He was so annoying. "Can you just sleep in like everyone else?"

*Ting, ting.*

"Got stuff to do," he mumbled through his oatmeal.

"We're freshmen, no you don't, mannnn." I rolled over to face the wall. "You don't even have a meeting."

He chuckled.

This guy. Nut job, seriously. "Dude, whatever. Just shut up with the oatmeal, god."

\*\*\*

I returned my thoughts to the present. Forcing a smile hurt as he entered the library. Listening to his stupid speech made me want to gag. Somehow I just couldn't shake the memories from our time as roommates.



With my luck, I had the pleasure of giving each alumni and student a little gift bag on their way out. So of course, I had no choice but to face Jack. He walked up to the table with a smart ass smile. He wore a fancy peacoat with a thick scarf that was probably way overpriced.

"Hey, congrats, man," I said, trying to play it cool and get it over with.

He slapped a sly smile on his face and removed a copy from his bag. He signed it and handed it to me. "Enjoy," he said.

I thanked him for the book and he walked out.

When I got back to my room later that night, I opened the book and inside the front cover he wrote:

*Thanks for the help. And those early morning "meetings" were for just me—for writing this book.*

Help? Okay...

I flipped to the first page of Jack's book and I shit you not, the first sentence was:

Mark did everything he could to make as much noise as he could preparing his bowl of oatmeal every morning to wake up his annoying roommate, and it worked.

Whatever, man.

No judgment



You have to promise yourself one thing throughout this entire process of reaching your writing goal: you won't judge yourself.

We all have to start somewhere. I can say with full confidence that my first blog posts years ago on my first blog ever were not good. I didn't have an audience in mind so I was just writing to the void about anything I wanted. My writing was wordy, I didn't have headlines or lists that made the posts more readable, I didn't link to previous relevant blog posts so readers would stay on my site...I could go on.

BUT

I had to start somewhere—we all do.

When you hear the old saying that you're your worst critic, it's true. We're hard on ourselves because we don't want to look weak or unskilled or have people look down on us because we're just not there yet. But these insecurities and the self-talk that involves convincing yourself that nobody will notice you because either everyone else is trying to do the same thing as you (like being a freelancer) or that there's more experienced people out there than you, so who's to say people will want to know what you have to say?

That's what holds you back.

I'm very aware how there are other writers out there just like me who have a larger audience, who make more money, who have bigger platforms, who have more years of experience than me...but that doesn't stop me. I don't judge myself because I know I have something to offer and I believe in myself.

You just have to believe in yourself, don't care about other people's opinions, and stay focused on your "why". I'm telling you, your "why" will truly carry you throughout all of the setbacks and frustration and self-doubt and temptations to quit.

It's way easier said than done, but the moment you set yourself free from self-judgment, you have a wide open world of possibilities for you. It is then where you will allow yourself to try different things, take risks, put yourself out there, meet new people, ask questions, and experience true progress. If you're constantly holding yourself back out of fear of what others may think, you can only get so far.

If you're struggling to [be free of self-judgment](#), try thinking about the source of your judgment and practice self-love. That heightened sense of self-awareness and self-respect is so helpful in this journey!

## The dreaded first draft



I first learned about not judging myself for my writing when it came to writing my first novel. I would write a page or so, re-read it, edit it, and write more. I'd return to my draft, re-read everything, edit, and try to write more. Eventually, it got to be too much to try to perfect everything I had already written before moving forward and I started to give up. This is because I was hard core judging my writing.

Some common thoughts that constantly ran through my head:

- *How could I possibly write more if what I've already done isn't PERFECT?*
- *How could I write my next sentence perfectly??*
- *This is going to be PUBLISHED—I can't just write whatever, it has to be amazing.*

Yeah, this mindset didn't work. What worked is when I started to purposefully write like crap.

I'm serious.

There's a reason editing exists: it gives you the opportunity to return to your writing and make it better.

The first draft doesn't have to be good. It doesn't even have to be fair. It just has to be written.

Get those ideas out of your head and on that paper. If you don't know the right words for a scene or a paragraph or a section of a blog post or whatever, just write "talk about X here" and move on. You'll figure it out later—the important thing is that the idea is in writing.

As soon as I fully embraced writing badly, you bet I completed that manuscript. And it felt amazing. But I wasn't going to get there unless I set aside my self-judgment.

This also relates to the idea of this whole ebook. I just had to *start*. No over-thinking, no procrastination, no perfection expected...just start and go from there.

## Short fiction

I've been enjoying writing some pieces from a child's perspective, and I decided to try out an older kid with this one. I wanted to see what might happen to a kid who didn't judge himself too harshly and didn't let any self doubt get in the way of what he wanted...for a couple minutes at least.

## Carla Martinez

There I was, putting one foot in front of the other, like a *man*. Right, left, right, left.

And there *she* was, looking...like she was definitely way too out of my league to ever consider going to the eighth grade dance with me.

I could take it.

Right, left, right, left.

“Do you wanna go to the dance with me?!” I blurt out. My god, what was I doing? Sweat started to drip down my temples.

The lights went out except the one right above her locker. She didn’t seem to notice, so I pretended it didn’t happen. Gotta act natural.

She twirled around and her smooth, wavy brown hair swept against my arm. Her eyes sparkled under the light. Her lipgloss glistened. She gave me a huge smile and started jumping up and down and clapped her hands.

“Oh, of COURSE, Georgie!” she squealed. Nobody called me Georgie. Whatever. “Oh, I thought you’d NEVER ask!” she squealed again, except this time, loud enough for the whole school to notice and everyone in the halls looked at us.

But who cares, right? Carla Martinez actually said yes...to ME.

She did a 360-degree twirl at her locker as she squealed again and then jumped into my arms. This seemed slightly out of character for her, but I was trying to keep cool as she squealed again into my chest and her hair covered my shoulder. Her sweet perfume swirled around my head.

I didn’t know what to do with my hands. Put them around her waist? On her shoulders? On her back? I settled for the middle of her back.

Then I saw Jared McDonald among the crowd of students staring at our scene. I knew he had an eye on her. I wondered how he felt to be beat out by someone like me. Hah.

Carla took me by the hand and started skipping away toward the back of the school. The crowd of students parted down the middle and everyone started cheering for us. I didn’t know what to do other than kinda half skip, half jog next to her. She led me out the back door and we were met by the band blasting music and the school choir singing to us...

*Carla and George, goin' to the dance*  
*Carla and George, gonna get a chance*  
*Carla and George, take a second glance*  
*Carla and George, it's true romance*

"Uhhh...this is...um, unexpected," I stuttered.

"Oh, GEORGIE *RUSSEL*, but this is so EXCITING!" Carla shrieked, and hugged me as if I was about to run away. Which I considered.

Then she leaned back out of the hug but kept her arms around my neck. She looked straight into my eyes.

"This is all you've ever wanted, isn't it?"

I didn't think she even knew I existed. The band and choir continued blaring. I could barely hear my own thoughts.

"I mean, I've always thought you were—"

She placed two fingers to my lips before I could finish and kept her eyes locked into mine. Her other hand rested on the back of my neck. My heart started racing. She was inches from my face. Carla Martinez's fingers were touching my lips. Oh my god.

"What are you looking at?" she asked, as if it was weird that I was looking back at her. Wasn't she making all the moves here?

"Um..."

"Helloooooo, are you ok?" she asked again.

"What are you talking about?"

"Helloooo??" she asked again.

I shook my head and snapped back to my unfortunate reality. She waved her hand in front of my face. We stood in front of her locker. Some kids in the hallway stared and definitely failed to hold in their laughs as they walked by.

"OH! Uhhh, wow, sorry....I was, um, just thinking about that science project Mr. Somerson just assigned. Crazy, huh? Ha...ha." Oh my god, I looked like an absolute fool.

"Yeah..." she said and walked past me.

She headed towards the front of the school where Jared McDonald walked up to her and put his arm around her. She leaned right into him. He must have cracked a good joke since she threw her head back and laughed. He rubbed her shoulder and then walked her outside, her arm linked in his. Ugh.

Well, I never wanted to see *her* again. I absolutely could not, under any circumstance, show my face to her ever again. Like, ever. Some kids were still staring, giggling. Maybe I'll transfer schools. Or convince my mom to homeschool me.

I was deep in thought about my future when Mr. Somerson walked up to me with a sheet of paper.

"Don't worry, kid. I got you," he smiled, winked, and showed me the paper. It had the lab partner assignments for the science project.

George Russell and Carla Martinez



## Taking a break and avoiding burnout

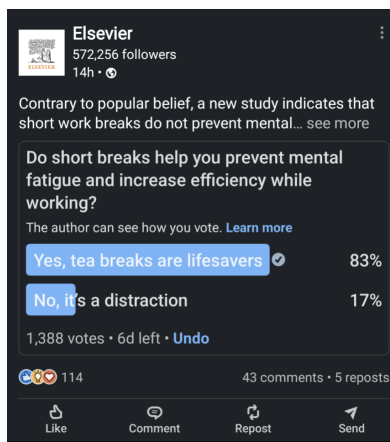


Look, we all get burned out eventually, even the hardest workers out there. It's not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of how hard you're actually working! Which means you deserve a break.

When you cannot even fathom to look at your work anymore or push through one more assignment, that's a great sign that you need to step away. Even if it's for five minutes, twenty minutes, the rest of the afternoon, or even the rest of the week! Whatever makes most sense for you, do it. You'll be more productive in the long term if you allow your mind and body to relax.

There's even research to back this up! [A study](#) concluded that ten-minute “micro breaks” improves a person’s wellbeing and for more mentally draining or difficult tasks, longer breaks are likely to be more beneficial.

I also found [this poll below](#) on LinkedIn that revealed what people think about taking short breaks, and I'm happy to see these results:



Now, I understand how some may consider taking a break a distraction or a break in their workflow, and that makes sense. If you function better throughout the day by powering through, go for it. What I am mostly wanting to make clear is that when you start feeling fatigued or like it's starting to become harder to push through your work, that's when a break may benefit you. Having that level of awareness to recognize your body's signals helps so much to maintain good mental health and positive productivity.

But in order to avoid getting to the point of burnout in the first place, some strategies I like to practice include:

- **Set a timer** to work for a certain amount of time so you know how much longer you have until a break. You may find that, for example, you're most productive if you work for 45 minutes and then take a five minute break. Experiment with what works best for you!
- **Take a lunch break.** I know some people like to work straight through lunch, but see if prioritizing your lunch break allows you to return to your work feeling refreshed. Even a half hour lunch can really set the mood for the rest of the day.

- **Don't over-commit yourself.** If you keep receiving assignments and bringing on new clients and you feel like you need another several hours to your day to make a dent in your work, you may have committed yourself to too much. Work on finding a balance of what you can handle so you can provide quality work. There's no use in working yourself crazy to the point of losing steam and compromising the quality of your work. Clients may even appreciate it if you request to wait on certain assignments to assure that you only provide your best work. Quality over quantity! If you feel like you need more assignments to keep up with the bills, then you could consider raising your rates.
- **Give yourself a vacation.** Around December, I've seen several freelancers announce that they are taking the month off. If you can build your business to make that work, go for it! If not, even a long weekend or a week off could truly make a difference!

I also [asked Twitter](#) how to avoid burnout (so, thank you if you participated!!!), and these are some of the responses from your fellow writers:

- Celebrate the little wins
- Schedule quarterly, three-day breaks
- Be more self-aware of when you're starting to feel burned out
- Recognize where your limits are
- Don't over-commit yourself
- Set time aside for family/friends
- Switch to an unrelated task or activity
- Sleep
- Take short breaks in between work sessions
- Pick up hobbies
- Rest daily, weekly, quarterly, and yearly

If you love writing and want to crush your goals, work assignments, and personal projects, you don't want to ruin it by getting burned out. You got this!

## Short fiction

Here is one example of a short piece I wrote from a child's perspective. I also wanted to challenge myself here by only using dialogue without dialogue tags and really rely on language to show who the speaker is. I'm curious what you think! Enjoy.

## Ousside

"Now tell Miss Kelsey you're sorry."

"But *Mommmm*."

"Go ahead. Now, please."

"Ugh. I sowwy, Miss. Kelsey."

"Thank you, baby. And what won't we do again?"

"I dunno."

"Yes you do, Carson."

"Ugh. Sneak...ousside...to da, da...playgwound."

"And why won't we sneak outside to the playground?"

"*Mommmmm!* Ughhh. I jus wanna have some time to *mahself*. We go tuh art den, den go tuh gym, den, den we go tuh music and I never don't have no time to *mahself!*"

"But you can't just run off by yourself, right?"

"But *Mommmmm*, I see Miss Robin and, and Miss Jane and Mistuh...Mistuh Kevin all walkin' 'wound all by demselves! What's a kid gotta do 'wound here tuh get some peace and quiet?!"

"They're adults, Carson. You're too little to be running off by yourself. When you're bigger one day, you can walk around by yourself, okay? Now tell Miss Kelsey you won't do it again."

"I not gonna do it again...but, but, we, we gotta have more recess, OK? Ousside time. It's da best timma da day."

"I'll see what we can do with our class schedule, I promise, Carson. Now, don't forget that you're the leader for Show and Tell tomorrow, okay? What are you gonna bring for our class?"

"...Dat twee."

"The tree?"

"Yah!"

“What do you want to teach the class about the tree?”

“I dunno. We just go ousside and see da twee.”

“Baby, I think we can find something at home, don’t you think?”

“Nope. I want da twee.”

“You just want to go outside.”

“Yep.”

# BONUS CONTENT

So you're ready to just *start* now—and with that, I wanted to share a couple tips I learned along the way that may help you as far as what may work well for content creation and operating as an entrepreneur (if you're a freelancer, for example).

## Creating valuable content





I wanted to expand on a blog post I published that discusses [how to create a strong foundation to your writing career](#). Check it out for the full details, but let's talk a little bit more about one tip in particular: creating valuable content. Because once you just *start* creating content, you want your audience to be receptive to it!

When "they" say that content is king, it's true. Content is EVERYTHING nowadays. If you're running a business or want to develop professionally and you're not creating content, phew...you're missing out.

First of all, you want to accomplish at least one of three things with your content. You want to:

- **Educate.** If someone can learn something from you that has a positive effect on them, they are likely to return to learn more.
- **Entertain.** When another creator or entertainer makes you smile or laugh, don't you want more of them? This is just another way to make people want to return to you.
- **Inspire.** When you make someone feel good, they will appreciate you, and you guessed it: they'll want to return!

If your content doesn't do at least one of those three things, it may just not be useful or valuable to your audience, and building a strong audience online is imperative to getting noticed. This will help you network and eventually grow your client base.

[The Forbes Agency Council](#) also has some thoughts about creating valuable content. Some strategies they suggest doing are:

- **Address common questions.** You'll spark conversation and become a source of valuable information for your audience.
- **Focus on solving your audience's problems.** When you can help your audience by solving their problems, they are more likely to return to you and spread the word about your work!
- **Talk more about ideas and less about products.** People don't like to be sold to—even if you have something great to offer! When you talk more about ideas that are interesting or helpful to your audience, though, they are more likely to appreciate your content rather than constantly being blasted by salesy content.
- **Showcase real-world solutions using case studies.** Showing living proof of your solutions is awesome leverage for people to see how others have benefited.
- **Be authentic and honest.** Nobody likes to interact with someone who appears fake or inauthentic in real life, so why would they like it online? I know the word "authentic" gets thrown around a lot and it may make you cringe, but there's a reason why everyone's talking about it. When you're honest and authentic, you become more relatable and more trustworthy—and trust is everything when it comes to building a brand and a business online.

## Show, don't tell

Don't overthink this whole content creation thing; that is certainly easy to do. Simply create what you enjoy.

I once had a one-on-one call with a fellow writer and he expressed that he doesn't want to talk about copywriting like everyone else because everyone is saying the same thing and he doesn't want to repeat [what's already being said](#). There's a way around that, but I made it clear that he doesn't have to repeat what everyone else is saying.

In fact, you don't have to talk about content writing or copywriting to show that you're good at it at all. Just do it.



For example, if you love video games, create blog posts about video games. Guess what blog posts are? Pieces of content! Your prospects will read your posts and get a feel for how skilled you are in content writing simply by reading the content you create.

In other words, you don't always have to talk about your skills for others to know how skilled you are, you just have to *do* them and they'll figure it out from there.

Don't overthink it. Create what you enjoy. Document your journey. Offer value to your audience that gives them a reason to return to you. Think about the social media accounts that you enjoy and why you return to their content.

Just create.

## Operating as an entrepreneur



Guess what? If you're a freelancer, you're an entrepreneur!!

If you're really committed to launching your freelance writing career or you eventually find your freelancing taking off, you may want to consider doing the following:

- Create a separate business bank account for your freelance earnings. This will make it easier to track how much you make and easier to report it for when tax season comes (our favorite season).
- Make your business a DBA, sole proprietorship, or LLC if that makes the most sense for you. Check out these resources to learn more about that:
  - [Sole Proprietorship vs LLC: Here's What You Need to Know](#)
  - [What is an LLC? Limited Liability Company Structure and Benefits Defined](#)
  - [Sole Proprietorship: What It Is, Pros & Cons, Examples, Differences From an LLC](#)
  - [Choose a business structure](#)

As an entrepreneur, you may want to have the right legal protections and systems in place to ensure a successful and organized operation.

A few other tips you may want to consider in order to [create a strong foundation to your writing career](#):

- Have an **email signature** with your full name and the link to [your portfolio](#), blog, LinkedIn profile, etc. Whatever shows off what you're about the best. This helps when you email prospects and they can look more into your work without you having to provide anything for them.
- [Build a strong online presence](#) so that you can become top of mind for prospects, learn from others who have more experience than you, establish yourself as an expert, and attract leads without you having to reach out to them first (inbound marketing)!
- Make sure you have [a strong portfolio](#). You always want to have fresh examples of your work so you aren't just telling your prospects what you can do, you can show them. Bonus points for making an [online portfolio](#) 😊
- When you cold email/DM a prospect, **be EXTREMELY personalized**. If you could swap out their name with someone else's and still use the same message, it's not personalized enough. Really research their business and pick out one or two things you could do for them (maintain their blog, write fresh website copy, etc.) and tell them about it and why those services are important. Better yet, do a small task for them (rewrite a page or a small section of their website, for example) and attach it to your message! That will really show your dedication to their brand and give them a glimpse of what you can do.

But at the very least, personalize everything. People can tell when you just use a standard template and that will turn them off.

To summarize





If you've made it this far, you may be taking a huge breath in and still intimidated on what the heck to do.

Don't worry.

If you step back and look at the whole picture, yeah, it's a lot. But creating a strong foundation for your writing career takes time, patience and practice.

Remember what we discussed:

- **Define your why.** Why do you want to achieve your writing goal?
- **Set your goals.** Be specific on what you want.
- **Stay organized.** How will you keep track of everything?
- **Establish a day-to-day system.** How will you be most productive?
- **Don't judge yourself.** Self-judgment can hold yourself back and we don't want that!
- **Take a break.** No burnout allowed!
- **Create valuable content.** Educate, entertain, inspire.
- **Legitimize your business.** Put the necessary protections in place if that makes most sense for you.

### One last note

One secret to just starting: you're never actually 100% ready to start something new, especially when it feels so much bigger than yourself. But trust me, everyone had to start somewhere.

Learn as you go. Learning by doing is one of the most effective ways to grow.

And now that you've come to the end of this ebook, there's only one thing left to do.

Just start.

You can do this.

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Let me know your thoughts on this ebook ↓↓↓↓

# Survey

I hope you enjoyed reading! I would love your feedback so I can continue to make relevant and valuable content for you.

Let me know what you think by following the link or QR code below:

[Tell me all of your honest thoughts](#)

