

Creating and Reaching Your Goals Transcript

This is a transcript of the audio seminar, edited slightly for easy reading!

You can find the audio version at www.writershuddle.com/seminars/jan2013

Hi, I'm Ali Luke, and this is the January seminar for Writers' Huddle: Creating and Reaching Your Writing Goals.

Happy New Year! I hope you've maybe had a chance this year to think about what you want to do with your writing, what you're hoping to achieve in 2013, and maybe even plan some specific steps that will help to get you there.

Why Set Goals at All?

I'm a big fan of having goals and so are a lot of writers who I know – because without a sense of where you're going with your writing, it can be quite hard to stay motivated to do it.

Rather than just waking up in the morning and thinking "*Shall I write today? What shall I write today?*" you've got a specific target that you're aiming for, or a specific project that you're working on, and that doesn't necessarily make it easy but it does help you to focus on where you're going and on how you're going to get there.

Three Stages in the Writing Life

There are several different stages you might be at, and your goals will obviously depend on where you are as a writer, and what you're hoping to achieve.

#1: New to Writing or Haven't Written for a Long Time

The first situation you might be in is that you're very new to writing. You've been interested in the idea of writing for a long time but you've never quite managed to make it a regular habit, or you've never completed a short story or an article or a fairly small project like that.

Or, it could be that you did a lot of writing in the past – maybe when you were in college or when you were in high school. This is the case for a lot of writers who I've worked with. For whatever reason, you haven't written much in the past five or ten or twenty years, or however long it might have been.

This can make it quite tough to get back into writing and regain that as a habit and also regain your confidence. So that's something we'll be coming onto a little later: lack of confidence and how to overcome it.

#2: Writing Steadily and Aiming For the Next Level

Then the second situation you could be in as a writer is that you're doing pretty well, you're writing steadily, maybe you're working on your first novel draft or you're writing a blog or writing short stories and entering competitions.

You're fairly happy with what you're doing, but you want to take a step up this year and reach the next level of writing for you. If you've been writing just for yourself or for an online audience or something like that, your next step might be to get something published. It might be that if you've already been published, or self-published that you want to create a bigger project or move on in some other way. Whatever your exact goal, you've got a good basis to build on, but you want to go further

#3: Working on a Major Project

And then the third situation you might be in is that you're working towards a big project and you really want to finish it.

It's quite common for writers to have several projects on the go at once – maybe you've started a bunch of different novels, or you've started several blogs over the past couple of years, or you're working on short stories or

you've got quite a lot going on, but **this year you want to finish something.** You want to be able to draw a line under it and say that thing is done. Maybe for your project that means that it's published, maybe it just means that you've got it to a state where you're happy with it – whatever it might mean, you want to complete that project.

So, those are the different situations, and obviously not everything I say will necessarily apply directly to your situation as it is right now. You may want to think through perhaps where you might in the future, or even think about where you've come from in the past and what you've already achieved.

Setting Goals: Focusing on Completion

I'm not going to go through the theory of goal setting. I'm sure at times in the past, whether it's at school or at work, whether it's in your personal life or your professional career, you have set goals and you've perhaps been through a particular framework for goals, like the SMART framework, so setting goals that are Specific and Measurable and so on.

When it comes to writing, the key thing for me with goals is to focus on completion – so unless you're in the situation where you're just trying to establish the writing habit, then you really want to be focusing on finishing something.

That could be a short story or it could be an article: something that's quite finite – it's not necessarily small, but it's self-contained, and you can say to yourself, *okay, that's done.*

It's absolutely fine to have a goal like “write something every day” or “write from a writing prompt once a week” or something like that, that's a great way to get into a habit, but longer-term, it's really good to have a goal that you're focused on finishing something. For me, certainly, that's more motivating. **You know that you're going to have actually achieved something visible and clear and concrete in your writing.**

Obviously it's great if what you want to do this year is just get into a good writing habit, and I know for some people in the Huddle, that will be their main goal – and that's absolutely fine. **But even then, you might still want to consider if there's one small project you can complete this year** – whether that's just you want to write a short story or write an article, or write perhaps a few poems, whatever that might be, even if that's just a small thing, it's still something that at the end of the year you can look back and there's something very specific that you've achieved.

Splitting Big Goals into Smaller Ones

Goals come in different sizes, and it may be that you've set some goals that are quite manageable ones – finish a short story, for instance – but it may also be that you've got some bigger goals. These might be ones that you haven't necessarily written down or committed yourself to, but they're ones that are in the back of your mind.

A couple of common big goals for writers are things like *making a living from writing* or *having a novel published*. Those are very big, long-term goals: they're not something you would expect to achieve in six months, or a year, or even two years. They're something that you're planning for over five or ten or twenty years. They're almost writing career goals, rather than goals specific to a particular project.

With big goals like this, it's really important to split them into smaller goals and targets – so break them into steps that you can take. You're not going to go from *making no money* from your writing to *making a living* overnight, and you're not going to go from *not having anything published* to *having a novel published* in a short space of time. It's difficult to stay motivated with these goals when it seems like the end point is a very long way away.

To solve that problem, to make it easier to keep up your motivation, and also easier to work steadily towards that goal anyway, it's good to break it down.

Let's say your goal is to *make a living from writing*:

1. It might be that, if you're quite new to writing, **your first step is just to have something published**, whether or not you get paid for it. That might be on a blog, or it might be in a small local newspaper.

The key thing is that you've written something, and someone, somewhere has said *"that's worthy of publication"* and they've published it, in whatever form that might be.

2. And then, **perhaps your next goal is to get something published and be paid for it**. Maybe it's a magazine article, maybe it's a short story, maybe you're being paid to write for a website or a blog ... again, it doesn't necessarily matter what form this takes.

Being paid for your writing is a wonderful validation of you as a writer, and of your work. It means that not only does someone think that's worthy of publication, they're willing to put money on the line to pay for it.

3. After that, you might want to think about steps like **making your first £500 or \$500 from writing**, or you might have a particular monthly goal, so you want to be in a position where you're earning a certain amount per month through your writing work.

All of these are steps on the way towards reaching your goal and making a living through your writing.

Deadlines: Do They Help You?

Some writers really thrive on deadlines and other writers feel that deadlines just create too much guilt and pressure and make them unhappy. It's really up to you on how you work things in terms of deadlines with your goals.

When you're setting a goal, it is a good idea to have some sort of time frame – so to think, *okay, what do I want to achieve by June of this year?* or *what do I*

want to achieve by the end of this year? But you need to be realistic with yourself about what you're likely to be able to do.

I've found that with big projects like novels or ebooks or something quite major, I often have a slightly rosy view of how long it's going to take me. I know from experience that I can't write an entire novel in six months or even in a year – and that often my bigger goals take me a lot longer than I'm perhaps expecting them to.

That's not necessarily a problem if you don't mind missing your self-imposed deadline, but if you're making yourself feel guilty, or if you're starting to find writing more of a chore than something you enjoy, you might want to perhaps consider a different approach.

Rather than setting yourself a deadline of *I want to finish my novel by this date*, you might set yourself a goal more like *I'm going to work on my novel for an hour every day, or for two hours every weekend, or whatever might be appropriate for you.*

That way, you still have a time focus to your efforts, so that you do stay on track, but you're not pressuring yourself to have necessarily achieved a particular milestone by an arbitrary date.

As I say, some people find that deadlines work really well for them. Some people find that it's very motivating to have a deadline – perhaps particularly if that's a deadline for a competition or something like NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month), which I know quite a few Huddlers took part in during November. By all means see what works for you, and experiment with your own goals a bit to decide whether or not you want to give yourself a deadline for achieving a particular goal or target.

Problems That Can Get in the Way of Your Goals

We've talked a bit about goals, and I hope this has given you a chance to perhaps think through your existing goals, or think about potential goals that you might want to set yourself over the next month or the next six months or

perhaps over the whole of this year. I think that it's important we do talk about some of the problems that can get into the way of reaching your goals.

Obviously I don't want to be negative or be on a massive downer here – but it's easy to get very excited about the process of setting goals, and then to be disappointed when sadly things don't work out as well as you'd hoped.

Some problems are quite common ones that come up for a lot of writers, so they're not unique to you, it doesn't mean that you're rubbish at achieving your goals – which I know is how I used to feel sometimes when I wasn't making much progress with writing.

They're just issues that are inevitably part of being a writer. They're things that you can, to an extent, predict and plan for, and find ways to work around.

Problem #1: Lack of Time

Problem number one is a lack of time – and not just time, but also energy.

Sometimes you might find that you *do* have an hour when you could be writing, but you're just too tired to write, or you just don't feel like writing and you're just completely uninspired.

It's important that we face up to this as a problem. You can't necessarily manufacture extra time for your writing. All of us have different lifestyles: it may be that you're currently in a place in life where you do have a reasonable amount of time when you could write, and perhaps it's a case of being a bit more motivated. But you might also be in a situation where you're genuinely very busy, your time is very full, and it is hard to carve out even a few minutes for writing.

That doesn't have to stop you, by any means, but it does mean that you need to think through **what goals might be realistic ones in terms not only of physically how much time you have but also how much energy you have, and how much attention you're going to be able to give to your writing.**

It might not be realistic for you to write a novel in the next year – but it might be a perfectly reasonable goal for you to write, say, three or four short stories in the next year. It's just a case of deciding what's going to be right for you, and not feeling too pressured by other writers.

I know that for me it's very easy to look at what other writers are doing and think, *wow, they're so productive or they clearly work much harder than me or they're much better at managing their time than I am*, and perhaps forget that they have different lifestyles.

I may have demands on my time that they don't have. It may well be the case that they *are* working harder than me, but perhaps that's not necessarily a sacrifice that I want to make.

Don't be too swayed by other people's goals here. Think about how much time you have, how much energy you have, what your other priorities are.

Of course your writing is important, and of course your writing should have time and space within your life, but that doesn't need to be at the expense of your health or your sanity or your family or your job or anything else. It may be that you do need to set some slightly smaller writing goals, if time has been a big issue for you in the past.

Problem #2: Lack of Support

The second problem that comes up quite often is a lack of support. Even if you have all the time in the world to write, **it can be very hard to make progress if you don't have much feedback or encouragement or support from other writers.**

I've been quite lucky in my own writing life. My mum is a writer: she's currently taking a writing Masters course, and she's been extremely supportive of my writing since my early teens, when I began taking myself seriously as a writer. I've also been involved in academic courses to do with literature and to do with writing, so I've always been surrounded by people who have an interest in writing and who value writing.

Of course, I know that's not the case for a lot of writers – and some of the writers I know have had to struggle with issues like a spouse who thinks their writing is an indulgence or just a hobby or even something silly – and who can be quite negative, perhaps, about that.

Some writers simply feel quite isolated, and feel that although perhaps their family try to be supportive, they don't really get what it is to be a writer.

If this is an issue for you, it's really important that you find other writers who you can engage with, interact with, get support from – because it will make a huge difference.

That might mean joining a local writers circle, or it might mean taking part in an organised writing course – not just for the skills that you'll gain from that course, but also to be with other writers.

It might be that you want to use the [Huddle forums](#). Obviously, we're all writers within the Huddle, writers with a wealth of different experiences and backgrounds – and very supportive writers who will be there to encourage and help you.

When it comes to the support that you're looking for, there are two kinds of support.

One is what I'd call practical support. It might be help with a specific writing problem – perhaps you're struggling with part of your novel and you want to get some other writers to critique it. That's an incredibly valuable form of support that writers can provide for you.

It might even be something like a technical problem, so perhaps you're a blogger or you're starting a blog, and you're struggling to use WordPress, say. You just need some other writers who've been through the same thing to be able to explain something to you, so you can get past this technological hurdle and get on with the actual writing.

Then the other kind of support that you'll find is the emotional type of support. That's not necessarily that you're looking for advice on something – you might just be looking for someone to offer some encouraging words. Maybe you just want someone to say “well done,” or someone who will acknowledge you as a writer.

In some cases, it might be that you actually need someone to just give you a gentle nudge – or even a gentle kick! – toward your goals. I know that for many writers, accountability is a very helpful force.

Accountability is when, perhaps, you post on Facebook or in the Huddle what your writing goal is, and then you keep people updated on that goal. Your

fellow writers and your friends can support you in that and cheer you along – and perhaps give you a gentle nudge in the right direction, ask “*have you done your writing this week?*” or “*how’s the book coming along?*” or something. For some writers, that can be really motivating.

Problem #3: Lack of Confidence

Then the third problem that you might be facing is a lack of confidence. **Of all the problems that come up when we’re reaching toward our goals, this is probably the toughest one.**

Perhaps it’s just intrinsic to being a writer that we’re not necessarily the most confident of people. We tend to be quite introspective, we tend to be quite thoughtful. We spend a lot of time alone with our words, and might not receive much feedback, or maybe we feel it’s a long way to go to reach our goals.

So confidence is an issue that, I think, has come up at some point for every writer I’ve ever known. Certainly it’s one that I know I’ve faced – and continue to face in my writing life.

The first thing I want to say is **don’t feel that you’re the only person who struggles with a lack of confidence.** It may be that you see other writers, perhaps on blogs or they’re authors, or they’re on Facebook or Twitter, and they seem to be confident. They’re putting themselves out there, and they’re publishing their work, or they’re being published ... and you might think that they’ve got tons of confidence, and that’s why they’re successful.

But the truth, almost certainly, is that they’re not completely confident. There’ll be times when they feel anxious or they feel that what they’re doing isn’t good enough. It’s just that they keep doing it despite that. They’re writing anyway, they’re putting things out there for an audience, and over time they’re becoming more confident – or they’re finding that even when there’s a lack of confidence, that doesn’t have to stop them.

If you’re struggling with not feeling very confident about your writing, often the very best thing you can do is to take some action anyway. So even if you think you’re not ready to write a novel, perhaps, then just writing the first

paragraph or writing about the lives of your characters, may be enough to ease you into it. I know that I often find that once I'm writing, once I've got words flowing through my fingers and onto paper, confidence becomes a bit less of an issue and I'm focused on the writing itself, not on how I might feel about the writing.

Something else that can help – and I know this has helped me not just with my writing but with plenty of situations in life – is to ask yourself *what's the worst that can happen?*

Perhaps you start a blog and you're worried that people will leave negative comments on your posts, or you're worried your posts just won't be good enough somehow. The worst, realistically, that's likely to happen is you *might* get some of those negative comments, you might get some negative feedback. But it's not going to mean that you have to give up your blog completely, or it's not going to physically hurt you. It's not going to ruin your chances of ever being published.

Sometimes, we have quite nebulous fears going on in our heads, and when you take those fears and really think – actually, what's the worst case scenario, and what's the likely scenario, then those fears can fade when you bring them into the light.

I have every sympathy with you if you're struggling with a lack of confidence. I know it can be a really tough thing, but it's not something that will just magically get better on its own.

The way that you become more confident is to continually take that next step as a writer. That might be to just write for a few minutes every day, or it might be to challenge yourself to step outside your comfort zone and maybe send off your very first article to a magazine or your very first short story to a competition. Yes, you face rejection – all writers get rejected – but you can get beyond that, you can get over that, and it will get easier.

Of course, if you are feeling unconfident, and you just want to be able to share that with some other writers, or just get some support from other people, please feel free to post in the Huddle forums. I know that even posting in the forums can be a hurdle –some people in the Huddle have said that to me, that

it's taken time to pluck up the courage to write their first forum post. But it's a very supportive community, so please do feel free to tell us what you're going through, so that we can help you and support you.

Writers' Huddle Resources to Help You

That leads me on to the Writers' Huddle in general, and the resources that we've got that you may well know about but might not have used to the full, which could help you towards your goals.

Of course, I don't know exactly what your goals will be, so I don't know which of the resources will necessarily be the perfect ones just for you. I'm going to cover some of the most general resources that will apply to quite a lot of writers – but please do take a look through the Huddle, spend a bit of time browsing around, because there's quite a lot of material in there now.

It's been a whole year since the Huddle began, and the community has grown in that time. We've had loads of great forum posts, and I've also added lots and lots of teaching resources to the site.

On Track Ecourse (Seven Modules)

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One place you might want to begin, if you're working on a big goal, is with the On Track ecourse. We went through this as a group in the Huddle at the end of spring and start of summer last year, so if you joined the Huddle after that, you may not necessarily have seen the ecourse, or you may not have gone through it yourself. It may be the case that when we first launched the ecourse, you were busy, or you may want to go through it again, perhaps with a different project in mind.

On Track is split into seven modules, and I suggest doing one of those modules per week. It's designed for anyone who's got a big project on the go, which they really want to make some progress with.

Your project could be a novel, it could be a blog, it could be a series of short stories, it could be a poetry collection – whatever you might be working on.

By going through the course, you'll hopefully get a bit of motivation, you'll get some practical tips to help you with each stage of your project and to help you go further with it.

All of that is online, on the Writers' Huddle website, under the "On Track" tab at the top of your screen. You can just click on a module, work through it at your own pace. Obviously, if you want to go faster than one module per week, you can; if you want to go more slowly, you can, it's completely up to you.

There's a special [On Track forum](#) within the Writers' Huddle forums where you can tell us about how you're getting on and potentially make contact with other people who are also going through the On Track course.

Seminars

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Then, one of the key resources in the Huddle is the seminars. Some of these obviously cover quite specific topics, so we've covered things like using email marketing, or creating characters, or writing short stories – these give you specific knowledge or confidence in a particular area. There are a few, though, which are a bit more general and which you may find particularly applicable to you if you're in the process of setting goals or if you're thinking about where you want to go with your writing this year.

The very first Huddle seminar is on *Controlling Your Love/Hate Relationship With Writing*. That was almost a year ago now, in February 2012. That seminar goes through why it's normal to have this love/hate relationship with our work, how to get through three really important stages in the writing process, and some practical tips on ways to get your writing done, even when it's hard.

If you're struggling with confidence or with motivation or with feeling inspired, that's probably a good seminar to listen to or to go back to if you perhaps listened to it when it first came out.

Another seminar that you may well find helpful is the one from September of last year, which was *Getting Into a Great Writing Routine*. Habit and routine are often really key parts of achieving a goal. If you're in the habit of writing for 30 minutes at the start of the day, every day, then it's much easier to make progress than if writing is something you try to squeeze in when you find the time, but it's a bit hit and miss as to whether you write in one particular week or not.

That seminar goes through the fact that there's no perfect writing routine – there's no one routine that works for everyone. It helps you think about where you write, when in the day you write, and ways to stay motivated and stay enthusiastic about your writing. **It's designed to give you some practical and also some motivational ideas about building a good writing routine for you.**

As I said, there are lots of other seminars on specific topics. If you go to the seminars page, which is the Seminars tab in Writers' Huddle, then you can scroll down, you can see what interests you. You may want to go down towards the very bottom of the page, in case there's anything you've missed or anything you want to refresh yourself on, if you went through that seminar quite some time ago.

You may find that perhaps a particular seminar will help you with the goal that you're currently working on. If there's something specific that you'd like me to address in a seminar that we've not already covered, please do pop a post in the [Suggestions forum](#) and let me know what that topic is and what you'd like to know more about.

The Huddle Forums

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The final key resource within the Huddle is the forums, where you'll find a fantastic, supportive community of writers. **It's a very friendly environment, where we all want to help one another, perhaps by sharing useful tips and advice, perhaps just by being encouraging, perhaps by sharing our own experiences and so on.**

If you haven't checked out the forums yet, or if you haven't been into them recently, do come by and let us know how you're getting on with your writing, or let us know what your goals are for your writing.

Because those forums are only accessible for member of Writers' Huddle, they're a private safe space where you can feel free to tell us about things like a lack of confidence, or maybe a lack of support in your life, or whatever challenge you might be facing. It might be that there are some things you wouldn't want to put on Facebook or on Twitter, or mention in public, but you can come into the forums and tell us about those and we'll be there to support and encourage you.

Commit to a Writing Goal for This Year

To finish off, then, I'd like you to think of one writing goal that you want to achieve this year. It can be something small; it can be something as simple as *writing every Saturday for half an hour*. It can be something really big, like finishing the draft of your first novel.

It's up to you to choose what that goal is, but **what's important is that you do decide on a goal, you decide on something that you think is realistic and**

achievable for you, but that you're going to feel great about having accomplished.

It's also important that you write that goal down, that you really make a commitment to it. You could write it in your journal, or on an index card or Post-it note and put it somewhere visible. You might want to come into the forums and write your goal there, and there's a forum post where some Huddlers have been sharing their goals for this year:

[New Year's \(Writing\) Resolutions](#)

Whatever your goal is, make a commitment to it, and also spend a little bit of time thinking about things that might have made it hard for you to reach your writing goals in the past. If your biggest struggle has been a lack of time, then think about how you're going to find the time this year. If your struggle has been a lack of support, think about the sources of support that might be available to you.

My hope is that everybody in the Huddle will achieve their goals in 2013, that we'll all grow as writers and we'll all get further along in our journey as writers, and we'll end this year feeling that we've really accomplished something good.

I wish you the very best of luck, and I hope that you achieve your writing goal in 2013.