



RWR

ROMANCE WRITERS REPORT

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Writing In No Time

Time is Money: How Financial Management Tools Can Help You Manage Your Time

Time Management For Writers

Struggle with Time Management? Here's What the Experts Say—With Tips We Can Use Right Now

A Writer's Voice, part 2—Or, One Path to Finding Yours!

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Contributors

Kris Bock

Kris Bock writes romance, mystery, and suspense. In the Accidental Billionaire Cowboys series, a Texas ranching family wins a fortune in the lottery. Who wouldn't want to be a billionaire? Turns out winning the lottery causes as many problems as it solves. Her Furrever Friends Sweet Romance series features the employees and customers at a cat café. Watch as they fall in love with each other and shelter cats. Kris writes a series with her brother, scriptwriter Douglas J Eboch, who wrote the original screenplay for the movie Sweet Home Alabama. The Felony Melanie series follows the crazy antics of Melanie, Jake, and their friends a decade before the events of the movie. Kris also has over 100 books for children published under the names Chris Eboch and M. M. Eboch. She is a popular writing teacher and developmental editor.

Diane Kelly

Diane Kelly is a retired CPA/tax attorney, who writes contemporary romances, romantic comedies, and humorous mysteries with romantic subplots. Diane is a hybrid author, with both self-published and traditionally published titles. Diane served as treasurer and president of RWA. Find her online at: <https://www.dianekelly.com/>

Lynn Gale

Lynn Gale has been dabbling in writing romance for years. Now that she's retired, she's written four children's picture books (Big J and the Hockey Stick, Big J and the Birthday Party, Norah and the Great Outdoors, and Big J and the Fire Station) as well as a collection of poetry L'opacité. Her first romance novella A Heart Creek Christmas was published in the anthology A Cowboy This Christmas followed by A Heart Creek Second Chance. A Heart Creek Reunion will be released in October. Lynn is the president of the Calgary Chapter of RWA, CaRWA and spends her time between north central Alberta and Vancouver Island.

Ann Kellett

Ann has 30+ years of full-time, award-winning writing and editing experience, and is hard at work on her first romantic suspense novel.

Janet W. Butler

Janet W. Butler splits her days between writing, editorial consulting—and music. Winner of the RWA Golden Heart Award, she is the creator of 12 Weeks to Your First (or Next) Novel, a compilation of lessons and tips from her popular workshop series. When she's not singing or at the piano, she's writing more books...proudly represented by RWA member Terrie Wolf at AKA Literary Management.

Message from the President

BY JACKI RENÉE



As the calendar year winds down, many of us will find these last months busy both personally and professionally. I'm setting small, attainable goals to help me maintain forward momentum in my writing and personal journeys. Balancing time management with self-care is challenging, but it's a skill I know I can master to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Whether you're participating in a writing challenge or pushing forward with your latest manuscript, I encourage you to be creative with your time and your self-care.

I know firsthand how easy it is to let writing take a backseat to other demands. However, I've learned that prioritizing those demands and integrating them with writing time allows me to remain productive. For example, I am "Auntie Uber" for grandnieces and grandnephews, each with different school dismissal schedules at different sites. When I'm on a deadline, I arrive at the first school 15–20 minutes early, find a shaded area to park, and use the time to brainstorm a scene, character, or story development. Sometimes, I use a notepad. Other times, I record myself talking it out on my phone. In the long run, this creative use of time helps me meet my deadlines. Even short blocks of writing time throughout a demanding day make a

difference in productivity.

Alongside our writing and other obligations, we need to prioritize self-care by making space for ourselves. For me, this has opened a new avenue in my writing process. Three years ago, I made the conscious decision to dedicate time to self-care, setting non-negotiable blocks of time for it. I began by writing weekly love letters to myself, which I posted on social media. Then, I started a "Get Up and Move" campaign, exercising every Saturday with a small, positive group of people of varying ages and fitness levels. This eventually led me to participate in a walk-run challenge, where I walked 365 miles in a year. I urge you to identify what self-care means to you and carve out time to take care of yourself.

Since stepping into the role of president, I've allowed my responsibilities to encroach on my self-care, which, in turn, has impacted my writing. As we enter the last months of 2024, I reviewed my author business plan, updated my SWOT analysis, and used SMART elements to set goals to get myself back on track to finish the year strong, both personally and professionally.

My message to you is: No matter what's on your plate, be proactive with your time management. Integrate writing with other obligations creatively, without sacrificing self-care. Regardless of where you are on your journey, now is the perfect time to set yourself up for a strong finish to the year.

Jacki Renée
2024/2025 RWA President

News & Updates

BITE-SIZED INFO ON THE INDUSTRY

PUBLISHING

Agents, Authors Question HarperCollins AI Deal

Publishers Weekly

In a significant move, HarperCollins has become the first Big Five publisher to strike a licensing deal to provide access to select nonfiction books for AI training purposes. And so far, authors and agents appear to be approaching the deal with caution and skepticism—if also with a measure of hope.

Multiple sources have now confirmed to PW the broad strokes of the deal, which has been widely reported, including at Bloomberg, which asserts that the deal is with Microsoft, per an anonymous source. In a statement, Harper representatives confirmed only that the agreement with an undisclosed company will “allow limited use of select nonfiction backlist titles” for use in training AI models “to improve model quality and performance.”

The deal is for a three-year period, and authors must opt in, per PW’s source. For those authors who do opt in, the deal provides for a \$5,000 fee per book, split evenly between the author and the publisher at \$2,500 each; payments will be not counted against author royalties. Crucially, agents confirmed that the deal is effectively a one-off, implemented via contract addenda, and does not seek to establish a new AI licensing right.

[Read More.](#)

De León, Everett, Safadi, Tuffaha, Yáng Win 2024 National Book Awards

Publishers Weekly

This year’s 75th National Book Awards ceremony, held on November 20 at Cipriani Wall Street in New York, opened not with words but with music. To kick off proceedings, bandleader Jon Batiste took the stage, playfully tooted into a melodica, then sat at the Steinway and stretched Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony beautifully past recognition, adding “250 years of music” to it—stylings listeners might associate more with Stevie Wonder, or John Luther Adams—as the assembled guests from across the book business tapped utensil to plate, providing percussion.

[Read More.](#)

Florida Moves to Dismiss Publisher Lawsuit Over Book Bans

Publishers Weekly

Attorneys for the state of Florida have asked a federal judge to toss a closely watched book banning lawsuit filed by six major publishers, the Authors Guild, students, parents, and several bestselling authors. In a 25-page brief, filed on November 15, the state argues that the plaintiffs lack standing to bring the suit, which challenges two provisions of the state’s newly enacted state law, HB 1069. Critics say that the law is fueling a surge in unconstitutional book bans in school libraries.

[Read More.](#)

FutureBook 2024: AI rise, 'colossal' Budget impact and inaugural Freelancer Award

The Bookseller

The Bookseller's FutureBook conference heard of the unstoppable rise of AI, the growth of audio and the post-Baillie Gifford era for literary festivals, as well as the "colossal impact" of the recent Budget on bookshops.

Hundreds of delegates gathered for the day-long conference at County Hall, Waterloo on Monday (25th November), as well as many watching online.

[Read more.](#)



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Member Benefit

Publisher Alley is a web-based sales reporting tool that includes all of the sales and inventory data from Baker & Taylor. Baker & Taylor is the world's largest book distributor! We work with publishers to provide their book products to all markets. Publisher Alley allows authors to see what titles libraries are buying on a daily basis. Publisher Alley is the BEST tool available for analyzing sales on your titles and competitive titles by subject area, sales level, publication date, price point, reviews, author affiliations, interdisciplinary identifiers and sales channel. Full bibliographic data, including cover images and table of contents is available for all titles.

Book sales data serves several needs:

- Easily produce market research for book proposals, based on sales of comparable titles. Approach the right publishers for each project.
- Evaluate the potential of projects for self-publication: learn what sells in which markets, and at what price points.
- Locate expert authors as sources for newspaper or magazine stories, or identify trends related to world events.

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Announcing the 2024 Golden Heart & Diamond Heart Finalists!

THE GOLDEN HEART®

The Golden Heart Award for Excellence in Pre-published Romance Writing

We are thrilled to announce the Finalists for the prestigious Golden Heart Award, celebrating exceptional talent in romance writing! This year's contenders have captivated our judges with their passion, creativity, and storytelling prowess.

Join us in congratulating the finalists in the following categories:

Contemporary Romance

Connected Singles by Sophie Clarkin
The Hidden Day - Bridget by McLean Hyde
The Plus One Pact by Suzy Langevin

Historical Romance

A Fearless Will by Lea Hollis
A Scandal Changes Everything by Josie Johns

Love Across Genres

A Truer Calling by Catherine Ellbogen
Death in Miniature by Pamuela Ruth Meyer

Congratulations to all of the Golden Heart finalists!



THE DIAMOND HEART®

The Diamond Heart Award for Excellence in Published Romance Writing

We are delighted to announce the Finalists for the Diamond Heart Award, recognizing excellence in romance writing across multiple genres. This prestigious honor celebrates authors whose works have dazzled readers with their exceptional storytelling, emotional depth, and unforgettable characters. Join us in celebrating the finalists in the following categories:

Contemporary Romance

Coming Home to Magnolia Bay by Babette de Jongh
Faking a Fairy Tale by Teri Wilson
Royal Caleva: Gabriel by Nancy Herkness

Historical Romance

Devil in Our Hearts by Lizzie Jenks
Highland Beast by Heather McCollum
Painting the Duke by Georgina North

Romantic Suspense

Cliffhaven by A.M. Grimm
Lost in the Dark by Gail Chianese
Not My Shadow by Elaine Levine

Speculative Romance

Curses, Cats, and Crime: A Love Story by Fenley Grant
Her Highlander Choice by Fenley Grant
His Orc Charioteer Bride by K. R. Treadway
The Viking Who Fell Through Time by Maureen Castell

Congratulations to all of the Diamond Heart finalists!

Save the Date!

Join us for the **award ceremony** on **January 11, 2025 at 5:00 PM ET**. More details will follow soon, but mark your calendars - you won't want to miss this special event.

Writing In No Time

BY CHRIS EBOCH

So many things demand our time—job, spouse, children, volunteer work, housework. It's tempting to say, I'll write during vacation, or when the kids are back in school, or when the kids leave home, or when I retire

Yet if you want to be a writer, you must find time to write.

Becoming a writer requires commitment. If you don't take your work seriously, your family and friends certainly won't either. Let them know how important writing is to you. Insist that writing time is your time, and you must not be disturbed. Carve out a few hours each week. Then close the door and ignore your phone and e-mail, or take your laptop to the library.

Finding even a few hours may seem hopeless when you have young children. Louise Spiegler, author of the upper middle grade novels *The Amethyst Road* and *The Jewel and the Key*, says, "It is impossible for me to write with my kids awake and active. I either tried to get both kids to nap at the same time or I spent my non-existent savings on two hours of babysitting."

Try trading babysitting with other writing parents. Or start a play group/writers group: the kids play, the parents write or critique.

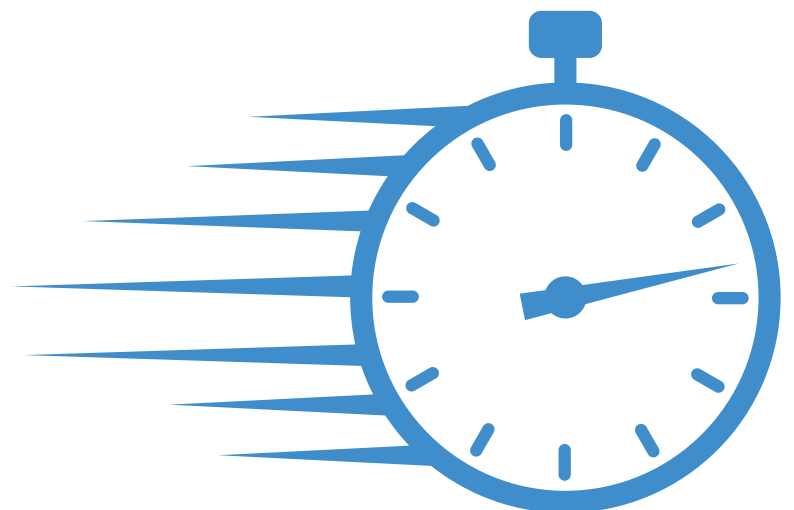
Molly Blaisdell, author of *Rembrandt and the Boy Who Drew Dogs: A story about Rembrandt van Rijn*, and mother of 4, found another creative way to

keep her kids busy. "I kept all the special toys in my office. When I wanted to work on a scene, I'd pull down that box and say, 'This is quiet time for special toys.' It would always be good for about half an hour and sometime would go for two hours."

Involve older children in your writing activities. Brainstorm story ideas together. Have them draw pictures for your manuscripts. You'll get more done, and they'll learn to respect your work. Plus, your time together is research. Claudia Harrington likes driving the carpool for her daughter in middle school, because "the ride home is *great* for eavesdropping."

No Use for a Muse

When your writing time is limited, you can't afford to waste a moment. After having a baby, Michele Corriel, author of *Fairview Felines; A Newspaper Mystery* says, "I still managed to get up before my daughter and cram in even half an hour. The



problem with a shorter amount of time is you really have to 'switch' it on."

Successful writers agree: no waiting for the right mood. Spiegler says, "As soon as the kids were asleep or safely dropped off, I would sit down and start working—no waiting for inspiration."

The most productive writers work anywhere and everywhere. Jean Daigenau says, "I take advantage of the few minutes of downtime I have at school or home—while I'm eating lunch or supervising the homework group at our after-school latchkey program or soaking in the bathtub."

If you can't do serious writing in five-minute bursts, use the time in other ways. Daigenau suggests, "Get it written on the computer and then use those few minutes here and there to revise."

Christine Liu Perkins, author of *The Tombs of Mawangdui* comments, "When I'm constantly being interrupted, chauffeuring, or sitting in waiting rooms, I brainstorm and prewrite. Wherever I am, I focus on a specific problem for that short session. What points do I want to include in this article? What happens next in the story?"

Compromise

The best organized life can sometimes just get too full. Spiegler, who also teaches college now, cautions against buying into the super-woman myth. "It is almost impossible for me to work at a demanding job and take care of kids and write regularly. The only way I can write is to be teaching something familiar that I can spend less prep time on."

You can't do it all, so decide what's most important. Then look for areas to cut back.

Reduce your work hours, or cut commute time with a job closer to home. Commute by bus and write as you ride. Arrange car pools or play dates for your kids. Dictate into a tape recorder as you walk for exercise. Let the housework slide, and make quick meals. Cut back on email, web surfing or TV.

Put your family to work as well. Train your kids to do housework and cook one dinner per week—they'll learn important skills while you get free time!

Don't let volunteer work take over your life either. Blaisdell comments, "When my volunteer schedule burgeoned to 80 hour weeks before conferences, it occurred to me that I could be doing a lot more writing. Volunteering was a part of paying my dues, but not my lifelong occupation. My time was best spent writing."

How about your time? Where does writing fit in your life?

Decide, and make a commitment to your work. Then repeat this mantra: I am a writer, and writers write.

Sidebar: When the Worst Happens

When a real crisis intrudes—sick kids, ailing parents, a job change or divorce—you may need to take time off from writing. Just don't let it drag on forever. Plan how you'll handle the crisis, and schedule a time to return to writing. In the meantime, read writing magazines or books for a few minutes each week to keep your focus.

Time is Money: How Financial Management Tools Can Help You Manage Your Time

BY DIANE KELLY, CPA

As a former accountant, I am familiar with financial management techniques. However, it wasn't until years into my writing career that I had an epiphany - money management and time management have a lot in common, and the same principles apply to both.

How did this epiphany come about? I used to knock out other items on my to-do list each day before beginning work on my novel-in-progress. My philosophy was that getting these pending items out of the way would allow me to relax and focus better on my work without having tasks hanging over me or worrying what urgent matters might be waiting in my in-box. Unfortunately, by the time I'd finished the other items each day, my mental focus and energy had waned. I'd given my best hours to marketing matters, volunteer roles, or laundry rather than my story, and my low word counts reflected my decision. I felt unproductive and frustrated. That's when I realized the financial management tool of "pay yourself first" could just as easily apply to my time as my money. Pay yourself first means setting aside money in savings before paying your other expenses. Savings is treated as a highest priority payment, on par with absolute necessities like your mortgage, rent, groceries, or utility bills, rather than a lower-priority expense such as new clothing, dinner at a restaurant, or even paying down the accumulated debt on a credit card.

Once I had this epiphany, rather than doling out my valuable early morning time to tasks that didn't necessarily require me to be fresh and fully focused, I began reserving my morning time for my writing, no matter what else might be on the day's to-do list. I waited until I either hit a target word count or until 1:00 in the afternoon, whichever came first, before turning to my e-mail inbox, promotional projects, volunteer matters, or household chores, items that required less intense concentration and that I could competently handle later in the day. By paying myself first, my productivity skyrocketed and my stress level was reduced.



These other money management tools can help you better handle your time, too:

1. Create a time budget. Allocate your time between the items you need to take care of, but be sure to allocate your highest quality time to your writing. You'll get many more words on the page if you spend your best hours on your stories.
2. Set goals, but be realistic. Establish a target word count and/or time allotment for the day, week, and month, but be sure to factor in unexpected time losses, such as a health issue, an unscheduled work meeting called at the last minute, or a friend or family member in crisis.
3. Keep a daily record of your time expenditures. The record will enable you to see where you regularly get off track and waste time. You can then reorganize your days or weeks to use your time more efficiently.
4. Distinguish between needs and wants. You *need* to write your book, but you *want* to peruse premade book covers online to see what's new. Make sure your needs are met first, and only then address your wants.
5. Don't let your expenses exceed your income/ use credit wisely. You have only so much time in a day, week, or month. Don't take on more non-writing tasks than you can reasonably complete with your discretionary personal time. You don't want to go into "time debt" by dipping into your writing time to do other things. Once you do, it's very difficult to get that time back. If you find yourself carrying a debt balance, see if there's a task you can delegate to a family member or a more efficient way you can finish your other duties. Maybe even drop an activity altogether if it requires too much of your time.
6. Pay your bills on time. Don't fool yourself into thinking you'll catch up on lost writing time later if you allow yourself to get derailed. It's unlikely. Be very judicious with any activity you allow to cut into your writing time. Put your phone on silent during your work hours and post a do-not-disturb sign on the door. Let people know you are unavailable during your daily work hours.
7. Apply the 50-30-20 rule. Put 50% of your time towards your needs. You need writing time. Put 30% towards your wants. You want to promote your work, network with other writers, learn new techniques or technologies, and/or volunteer with writers' organizations. Put the last 20% toward savings, meaning save it for personal activities such as friends, family, a hobby, or a book club.
8. Maintain an emergency fund. A writer I recently met said she keeps the three weeks prior to any book deadline completely open in case she isn't on target to finish the book on time. I've decided to follow her smart example. Likewise, keep an occasional weekend "booked" for yourself in case you need to make up lost writing time.
9. Separate your emotions from your finances and maintain an investor's mindset. A savvy investor knows that their money could be entirely lost, and that there is no guaranteed rate of return on most investments. No investments are completely risk free. If you happen to waste a day's or week's writing time on scenes or chapters that simply don't work out, don't let it upset you. Some projects might not pay off, while others will pay off more than expected. Focus on your work as a whole. Writing is a long-term investment and, with proper management, your investment is sure to grow over time.

Time Management For Writers

BY LYNN GALE

In my old life as a payroll supervisor, time management was not only integral but essential to our team's success. Deadlines were frequent and non-negotiable and bound by legislation provincially, federally, and in some cases internationally. I managed to eke out the odd poem or story in my free time, but writing was an extra.

In my new life as a writer with time to write, time management has been as elusive as a word that rhymes with orange or yesterday's leftover brownie. The desire to write is there, the ideas are (usually) there, but is my butt in my desk chair? No. It's off doing other things that crop up and take precedence over my words.

How does a writer who used to excel at time and project management get herself into this situation? And more to the point, how does she get herself out of this situation?

Step 1: Determine WHAT the problem is.

- I don't have enough time to write.

Step 2: Determine WHY the problem exists.

- Because I am not prioritizing writing in my day and life.

Step 3: Determine HOW this can be rectified.

- Here I pause and decide to seek professional advice.

As a member of Calgary Romance Writers of America, I was given the opportunity to work with a wonderful mentor over the past year and

a half. I texted her and asked how she manages her time with her writing.

Bestselling author and mentor **Katie O'Connor** (<https://katieohwrites.com>) says:

"Writing is a passion for me. Because it feeds my heart and soul, I give it priority. My family and my health are the only things that come before writing. I treat it as a full-time job. I work 6-8 hours a day. I write at least five, usually seven, days a week. Yes, I've been known to write on Christmas Day. When The Muse calls, I answer. Of course, not all of my workday is writing. Research, editing, formatting, graphics creation, and promotion are just a few things that fill my desk time. The two biggest time drains I have reduced to accommodate my career are social media, and television. What I have increased is reading. I read every day without fail. This fuels my creativity and sparks ideas the may or may not come to life."

I also have the blessing of having a romance author living in my own town. I reached out to get her take on time management.

NY Times Bestselling Author **Patricia Johns** (<https://patriciajohns.com>) shares:

"As an author who writes several books a year, time management is my secret to getting it all done. I live by my agenda. I use a physical, paper agenda, and everything I need to do in a day gets written down. I work my way through it. It's as simple as that! My

day is not done until everything has been checked off. I know how much I need to write on my current manuscript each day in order to meet my deadline, and I will build a cushion into that, just in case I get sick with a cold, or a family emergency comes up. But I guard my time! I won't use my work time to do favors or run errands. If I don't prioritize my work time, no one else will. That's a unique problem that you have working from home--people think you must be free to do things for them. My time is not free. It is already spoken for, and I don't bend on that."

Ah. The solution lies therein.

Step 3a. Determine How This Can Be Rectified

- Move my writing up to be a higher priority in my life.

Step 4: Proposed Time Management Plan

I decided to start with a paper calendar planner, index cards, an index card holder, a pencil, and an eraser.

#1: Using one index card for each project, make a list of all current and future projects.

#2: Determine how much time those projects need to be completed. Assign a due date if one doesn't exist and work backwards to determine a start date, making sure you add in buffer room. If it's already past when the project started, determine a check in date where you ascertain how it's going and if you need more time to finish.

#3: If any projects have deadlines attached to them (i.e. appointments already made for editing), indicate deadline dates on the upper right-hand corner of the card.

#4: Sort the projects by deadline and or due

dates. If any cards have more than one date, use the earliest date. Anything with a hard deadline or due date, mark with red.

#5: Assign each project a letter: A for the first one, B for the second, and so on.

#6: On the paper calendar, find each date and jot down the project letter on that day.

#7: Fill in the calendar with important dates for non-writing things (i.e. dentist appointments, food shopping, vacations, etc.)

#8: Where any items in #6 overlap with a project deadline, change the project deadline on the paper calendar to the day or week before.

#9: Look over your calendar and mark a W in the days you know to have to write to meet existing deadlines or due dates.

#10: If you have blank days, decide if you want to leave them free or use them for writing. Assign a W if you want to write. Then don't schedule anything else on a W day.



#11: Sit your butt in your desk chair on those days and write.

DO NOT accept coffee dates on W dates. Laundry can wait a few hours. DO NOT get sidetracked except in the case of emergency (and needing a Starbucks is not an emergency, even if it feels like one!)

REPEAT as necessary.

It may seem simplistic and elementary, but it really works!

I now use Tasks in my digital calendar for referencing pending deadlines well ahead of time. That way, if life plays havoc with my writing schedule, I can still recover and meet deadlines (even if those deadlines are only for me personally).

Know that the best laid plans can go awry. Don't let it get out of hand if that happens, just double down and let the words flow.

Sometimes words DON'T flow (they may not know it's a W day). Use that time to research, plan a new project, or READ. Nothing stirs a creative soul as much as being inspired by a good story, or even motivated by a bad one.

Happy writing!



Want to write for the Romance Writers Report?

Submit your pitch and earn up to \$500 if your article is selected and published.

[Click here to submit your pitch!](#)

The Romance Writers Report Committee seeks articles for all levels and tracks of writing. We welcome submissions from beginner to expert authors, and aim to include a diverse array of subject matter expertise, including craft, industry, marketing, business, and more. While articles of all themes are welcome, here are some areas that will be given specific focus in upcoming issues:

- *January 2025 - Book signings (submit by November 30, 2024)*
- *February 2025 - Love Scenes (submit by December 31, 2024)*
- *March 2025 - The 5 Senses (submit by January 31, 2025)*

Struggle with Time Management? Here's What the Experts Say—With Tips We Can Use Right Now

BY ANN KELLETT

One of the great things about our craft is that all we have to do to call ourselves writers, is to write! As Nora Roberts once told the New York Times, she doesn't wait for the creative muse; "I just sit down and put my fingers on the keyboard and my butt in the chair."

For most of us, it's not that simple, of course. Sometimes our fingers freeze and our butts grow weary. The good news is that it doesn't have to be that way.

Experts from the business world have found five major psychological reasons behind poor time management and offer practical tips we can put into place right now. And if one of the categories rings true for you, rest assured that there are plenty of writing-related tips and approaches about it online and elsewhere.

Fear of Failure

Poor time management causes us to postpone or push back against our writing. We don't finish—or even start—Chapter One because we fear we won't do well or might even fail. We end up feeling safer reading books about writing and attending writing conferences than actually doing the work.

Here are ways to reframe that thinking:

Think of it as feedback, not failure. Don't think of a setback as a waste of time, but as a learning opportunity that brought you one step closer to where you want to be. It's all about shifting our mindsets from thinking, "What if I fail?" to asking, "What can I learn if things don't go as planned?"

Challenge yourself to fail. Set small, low-risk challenges that involve something new that you might—or might not—enjoy. Food from a region of the world that you've never tried, music that your grandparents might have danced to, or a book in a genre that you know little about. Whatever it is, you're likely to realize that it's better to try than to not try, and that failure is not insurmountable.



Ponder the worst-case scenario. Imagine the absolute worst outcome if things don't go the way you'd like, then come up with a plan for how you would handle it. Often, when you fully confront the worst-case scenario for your writing—which isn't likely to actually happen and probably won't leave you homeless, friendless, and unable to continue writing even if it does—the scenario feels less overwhelming and you can move forward.

Lack of Motivation

One sign of poor time management is when we focus on less-important tasks or distractions and neglect higher-priority work. Or, we juggle tasks inefficiently or avoid them altogether. If our writing work seems boring, uninteresting, or irrelevant, it's easy to put it off until later.

Here are ways to overcome a lack of motivation:

Get in the habit of micro-tasking. Break your tasks into ultra-small, manageable steps that you could possibly do in just two or three minutes: coming up with five potential names for your villain, describing your heroine's dream home or career, etc. Making progress in small spurts builds momentum that likely will reignite your motivation.

Think, "It's not a chore—it's a game!" For every small goal you achieve—writing a hundred words, focusing for an hour without succumbing to distractions, or whatever it is—give yourself a small reward. Acknowledging milestones makes the writing process more engaging.

Change your environment. A lack of motivation can stem from boredom or repetition. To change things up, rearrange your writing space,

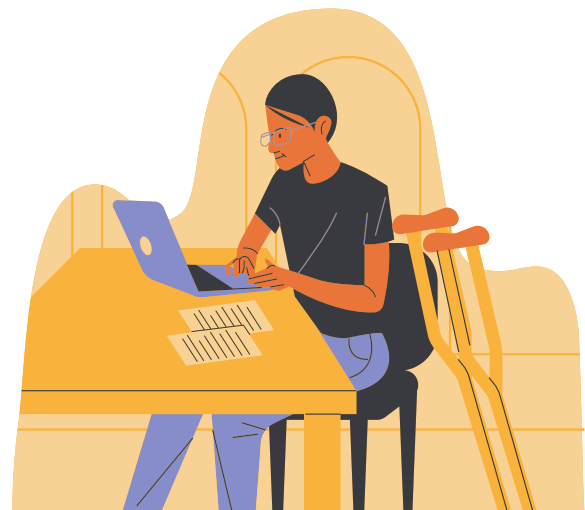
add something new like a plant or piece of art, or go someplace else entirely like a park or café to refresh your mind and recharge your writing energy.

Burnout

Too often, we let our writing goals pile up and have to scramble to achieve them, or give up altogether. This increases the pressure we're under and adds to our stress, which often shows in our writing. Physical or mental fatigue can drain creativity and make it difficult to maintain our focus and find inspiration.

To prevent burnout, consider the following tips:

Take lots of micro-breaks. Short, frequent breaks can make your workday more fun and productive. Stretching, a quick walk, listening to your favorite song, or deep-breathing exercises can mix things up to prevent mental fatigue, keeping you energized all day.



Set clear work-life boundaries. Let others know that you treat your writing as seriously as anyone treats a job, and that means no unnecessary interruptions or distractions—and then hold them to it. Then, before you start the day's work, review the last two pages of your

work in progress or go over your notes for what's next. And before you quit writing for the day, do a few small tasks like writing down ideas for the next day's work or making notes about your progress or goals in your journal or calendar. The idea is to have small rituals that mentally disconnect you from the rest of your life and also reconnect you to writing.

Learn to say “no,” even to writing-related activities.

Get comfortable with setting priorities and avoiding activities that slow your progress toward them—and keep in mind that even otherwise worthwhile things like get-togethers with fellow writers can sometimes stretch you too thin. Decide what is most important to you and set realistic limits to stay balanced. You can add activities back into your calendar once you're past the burnout stage.

Perfectionism

Sometimes we manage our time poorly because we don't know how to structure it in ways that lead to steady progress, or we are waiting for

the “perfect” time or conditions before we begin. The notion that we have to do everything perfectly from the get-go can be paralyzing.

To get out of the perfectionism trap, try these tips:

Aim for good enough. Instead of aiming for perfection, set clear criteria for what constitutes “good enough” for the day's writing. By setting the bar low—and achievable—you can avoid spending too much effort on any single task and get things done more efficiently.

Strive for imperfection. Pick up a creative hobby that is new to you—painting, sewing, scrapbooking, etc.—and relish your progress as you make mistakes along the way. This helps you get comfortable with imperfection and teaches you that things don't always need to be flawless to be beautiful or valuable.

Seek feedback early on. Instead of waiting until your work in progress is “right” for sharing with others, jump in early and boldly bare your work's imperfections. A mentor or critique group can point out where you're already on the right track and show you ways to improve other areas. This not only breaks your cycle of overthinking and guessing what's needed on your own, it teaches you valuable skills earlier than you probably could develop them on your own—and gives you new, like-minded friends.

Being Overwhelmed

It takes a while as writers to figure out how much time we need to achieve certain milestones. Along the way, however, when our work in progress seems too big or complicated, it can be hard to know where to start or how



much time to allocate—and this can lead to procrastination or giving up.

As soon as you start to feel overwhelmed, take a step back and consider the following techniques:

Do nothing! Set a timer for ten minutes and use that time to do absolutely nothing but sit there and stare at your work. No social media, no distractions! It's not a comfortable feeling for most of us, but this discomfort often spurs us to get to work—and in the meantime, our minds often conjure up ideas for what to try when we're stuck.

Work in timed sprints. One well-known activity, the Pomodoro Technique, involves setting a timer for twenty-five minutes of work, followed by a five-minute break. (*Pomodoro* is Italian for tomato, and the technique is named for the common, tomato-shaped kitchen timers.) This is also effective in smaller time increments, so set a timer for two, five, ten, fifteen, or twenty

minutes with a commensurately short break between. Getting started can be the hardest part, but once you begin, your momentum is likely to grow.

Use organizational tools. We're lucky to write in an era when easy-to-use tools are widely available to help us break huge tasks into bite-sized chunks. You can explore Scrivener, Evernote, Ulysses, and other computer-based tools for writers, as well as general visualization tools such as mind maps, Tableau, and Datawrapper. Sticky notes on a wall are terrific, too!

Above all, don't give up! Not only are you not alone, but you're among friends. Nora Roberts spoke for many of us when she said, "I believe strongly in writing groups such as Romance Writers of America that offer support, information, and networking."



FIND YOUR RWA CHAPTER

A Writer's Voice, part 2—Or, One Path to Finding Yours!

BY ANN KELLETT

In part 1, we talked about the unique writer's *voice*—and that, sometimes, it's hard to define or pinpoint.

How do you know what your particular “voice” is?

How do you identify it?

How do you know it when you hear it?

And can it change?

Last question first, because this particular question seems to be a biggie.

Short answer? Yes...to a point.

I wouldn't have said this a few years ago. I would have said, “No. The way you write is the way you write. You've got one voice, and no matter how you try, you aren't going to sound dramatically different.”

Then, just for a lark, I tried a chapter of a light, frothy “chick-lit” type book just to see if I could carry off zany, comedic and a little edgy. And the feedback? “Wow! What a great chick-lit voice you have! You've really found your niche.”

There's only one trouble with that assessment.

I heard exactly the same thing when I wrote a traditional romance with a cute/funny meet...and

a romantic suspense with more than a touch of the ghostly. I heard like feedback on the depth of emotion I brought to a “death” scene...and the pure sweetness of a happy ending (at last).

I've written romantic suspense, I've written traditional romance, I've written inspirational fiction, I've written nonfiction, and I've dabbled in aforementioned chick-lit stuff. No matter what I do, someone will say to me, “Oh, now, this...this is your voice. You need to just concentrate on this.”

I'm a veteran writer. I've been at this game for a long, long time. You'd think I'd know what I'm doing. You'd think I'd really know my strengths by now. But the fact is, if I turn my hand to something, I often can “fake my way” through it, pretty convincingly, if the feedback is to be believed. Probably we all can.



So is it any wonder that we're all so flummoxed?

The unfortunate (and confusing) fact is, "who we are" as writers can also change.

Anyone who's ever taken a Myers-Briggs or other personality test knows that your results can differ dramatically depending on the mood you're in, whether you've had enough sleep, the atmosphere in which you're taking the test, and so on. If something as basic as personality can reflect in different ways depending on external factors, it stands to reason that an author's voice may in fact show itself as two or three startlingly different "voices."

So how do you distill down to one?

Or should you?

Once again, the short answer is yes. Find the one place where you're always "singing" in words, and stay in that spot long enough to distill it...if at all possible.

I say that because you may not be at the point yet where you know which "voice" is truly yours. You may just not have written enough yet. Or tried enough different things yet. Or totally enthralled or disgusted yourself enough yet to know what, for sure, you at least *don't* want to sound like!

But you will.

One day, you'll be writing something, and the sparks will fly out of your fingers, and a shiver will go up your spine, and you'll know you're Onto Something. That "something" will be telling your own stories, in your unique author voice. And there ain't nothing like the real thing.

Notice I don't say you'll be writing in your unique "style." An author can write different styles of work, yet still have the same voice. Style is one component of voice...but voice is even deeper, even more distilled than style. It's an essence. And you can get at it, if you're willing to be fearless and play a little.

So fasten your seat belts, because this is where it gets fun.

My favorite, all-time, number-one way to do any kind of serious writer exploration is by talking things out. I do this at a couple of points in the work. The first point is during the writing itself, or even prewriting. And the best venue to do this talking, for me, is in the car.

I take a long drive alone, and as I perk along I pose whatever my story question of the minute is, then think about it out loud. I think in character sometimes; I think as narrator at others. I've talked out dialogue, plot knots, conflict, motivations...any number of things for my stories and characters, basically by having a conversation with myself. (This is why driving in the city, for these purposes, is perfect. Unless your windows are wide open and you're in stop-and-go traffic, you can expound away quite freely and people just think you're singing with your radio—which I also do!—or talking wirelessly on the phone.)

Some people use a recorder for this, but I don't. Not only do I freeze up if there's a machine going, but I don't need to record it—after I've rehearsed it out loud enough times, I've got it imprinted in my brain; I can literally come home and write it pretty much word for word.

The second form of "talking out" takes place

once there's something on the page. In this second form, you take a portion of the WIP and read it out loud, by yourself, to yourself. When you do this, two things will happen:

—you'll enjoy some parts of the writing way more than others, and

—you'll stumble over some parts of the writing way more than others.

Your tongue will get tangled, or you won't like the sound of something, or you'll keep hesitating before you say a certain sentence or phrase.

Your job then? To go back and fix those places until they roll nicely off the tongue.

It's both as simple, and as complex, as that. Simple because sometimes you need change only one word, and the sentence or scene works. Complex because in the process of figuring out what makes you stumble physically over a passage, you're also discovering places where you're not truly "in good voice." Something in the work doesn't resonate with you, so you have trouble getting through it. But when you go back and fix it so it flows...?

This exercise can help build your voice in two different ways.

First, it gets you accustomed to how your writer's voice sounds, reads, and flows.

Second, it helps you improve your writing craft—the actual craft—without your having to come within five miles of a potentially devastating, confusing, or nonsensical critique from someone else. *Anyone* else.

As big a fan as I am of critiques, "voice" is one area they can really mess with...so it's best at these times to Fix Things Yourself.

In a nutshell, that's my voice-finding method in its clearest, most straightforward form.

Sounds almost too easy, doesn't it? Trust me on this. After years of writing just this way, I can vouch for the fact that this is simple, not easy.

You may find it frustrating, almost impossible, at first.



You may think, "I'm not an aural learner. I'm visual." (Visual is OK. Use your flow charts, your highlighters, your index cards. Those are nuts and bolts. This is different.) Or, "I don't read well out loud. Won't I just do more harm than good?" (Answer? No. Because part of what penetrates the layers of writer-speak to the point where you're using your writer's voice, and you know it, will be the gradual release of inhibitions toward the spoken/read word that many of us have, especially our own spoken/read words. That's why this is as much a challenge to play as to work.)

Yeah, it'll be fun.

Yeah, you'll work hard.

Yeah, I want to know what you think of this...after you've tried it.

You might surprise the both of us!

Contests & Conferences

ONLINE WORKSHOPS

December Online Workshops

Using Your Character's Emotional Wounds for Character Development

Sponsor: Hearts Through History Romance Writers

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Presenter: Amy L Bernstein

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Association Purpose and Ethics

RWA BYLAWS, ARTICLE 2, PURPOSES AND LIMITATIONS

The corporation is hereby organized for the following purposes:

- To advance the professional and common business interests of career-focused romance writers through networking and advocacy and by increasing public awareness of the romance genre; and
- To carry on such other activities as are permissible for Texas nonprofit corporations exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c) (6) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as the same may be amended or supplemented ("IRC").

Notwithstanding any other provision of these Bylaws, RWA shall not carry on any activities not permitted to be carried on by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under IRC Section 501(c) (6) or by a nonprofit corporation formed under the Texas Business Organizations Code, as the same may be amended or supplemented (the "Act").

MEMBER CODE OF ETHICS

The RWA Member Code of Ethics ("Code of Ethics") serves as a code of professional conduct for RWA members. Its purpose is to encourage RWA members to exhibit integrity, honesty, and other sound industry practices, thereby elevating the professionalism of the RWA's membership.

The principles of this Code of Ethics are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision-making. The RWA Code of Ethics is a framework and is not intended to dictate behavior in particular situations.

Any member found to be in violation of the RWA Code of Ethics may be subject to disciplinary action pursuant to the Code of Ethics.

- RWA members support the preservation of authorial and intellectual property rights.
- RWA members strive for excellence and integrity in the profession of romance writing.
- RWA members strive to treat fellow members, RWA staff, and others with respect through adherence to the RWA Antidiscrimination Policy and the RWA Antiharassment Policy.

RWA'S OPERATING VALUES

External Values

- Romance writers have the right to reasonable remuneration and preservation of authorial and intellectual property rights.
- Literacy is individually and culturally vital.
- Storytelling is fundamental to human experience: romance fiction explores issues of universal and eternal human interest.
- United, romance writers are a powerful community.

Internal Values

- RWA belongs to its members.
- RWA fosters an environment of creative and professional growth.
- RWA thrives through the free exchange of ideas, knowledge, and diverse career experiences. [n](#)

View the full Code of Ethics at
<https://www.rwa.org/code-of-ethics>

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in Houston, Texas.

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