



JANUARY 2012 NEWSLETTER WRITER'S TIPS

Teresa's Quote of the Month

"A book is never done; it just goes to print."

People ask me all the time how I know when my books are done. I don't believe any piece of writing is ever really done. I've participated in readings where authors were sitting backstage revising their *published* work before they read it.

At a certain point, you have to just decide the story is good enough, knowing full well that when you get the final copy in your hand, you're going to see verbs that should have been stronger and repetition that slipped past you and points you thought you made that you somehow never did. You're going to wonder *why* you didn't think to add this or notice that you really should have taken out that. You'll remember all the people you forgot to thank in the acknowledgments page, and you'll ask yourself for the millionth time if that's really the right title for the book. You'll see lines that are better than anything you ever thought you could write, and lines that make you wish you'd never picked up a pencil. You'll find typos, no matter how many pairs of eyes have reviewed it, and you'll find inconsistencies that someone should have caught, but didn't. First you'll beat yourself up about everything, then you'll sigh heavily and say, "Well, I can fix that in the next edition or before the next print run." Because, after all, even with all its flaws, it's going to be a huge hit, right?

Writer's Tip

January is all about goal setting, right? In my years as a writer's coach, I've found that the writers who are most productive set regular goals. From what I've seen, monthly goals work best. Here is a goal setting tip sheet and sample form that I use with my clients.

Monthly Goals Sheet

Why Set Goals:

To stay the course in writing, it's important to set and meet goals. We all have big goals for our writing (I want to finish a book, I want to start a freelance business, I want to speak at events). And small goals (I want to read a book on writing dialogue, I want to start journaling every day). But most writers don't learn to prioritize, and that's where they flounder. Setting monthly goals is a quick, easy way to give yourself direction, make steady progress in your writing, experience a sense of completion and accomplishment, and keep yourself on track. Remember, your monthly goals are not set in stone. They are *guidelines* to help you stay focused. It's all right if they change. If an editor calls with an assignment, that will affect your goals for that month. If you start work on a writing project and realize halfway through it's not where your heart is, that will change your goals. If a family emergency comes up . . . Don't let your goals overwhelm or intimidate you. You are in charge of them. They are not in charge of you.

Primary Goal:

To set your primary monthly goal, keep in mind your "big goals" and ask yourself what kind of steady progress you need to make to achieve them. Then ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) **Do I have any deadlines this month?** (If so, you might want to prioritize those.)
- 2) **Are there any time issues to take into consideration?** (If you know you're going to be gone for a two-week vacation, set a simple goal; if you know there's a contest coming up in three months you want to enter, you might need to start on it now.)
- 3) **What do I want to work on this month?** (If you're excited about your goal, you're more likely to meet it.)

Your primary goal can have one component (I want to attend a one-day workshop on novel writing) or several components (I want to finish and submit an article for publication), which will require breaking down your goal.

Breaking down your Primary Goal:

There are several ways you can choose to break down your goal.

- 1) **Weekly:** If your goal is to write and submit an article, you may say Week One will be devoted to researching markets and reviewing their guidelines; Week Two will be spent writing the article; Week Three you'll draft the cover letter and rewrite the article; Week Four you'll send it out.
- 2) **Hourly:** Many writers find it useful to set aside certain hours each week. Maybe you devote the first Monday of every week to your primary goal or for two hours a day, etc. The rest of your writing time can be spent on secondary goals.
- 3) **All or Nothing:** Work solely on completing your primary goal for the first part of the month and when it's finished, you can spend the rest of the month working on whatever you like.

Secondary Goals:

Many writers benefit from setting secondary goals each month as well. Since your focus is your primary goal, keep your secondary goals simple. You can have as many or as few as your time allows. Many secondary goals may be ongoing (I will read one book on writing each month or I will send out five submissions a month). Make sure at least one is just for fun (I will have lunch with a fellow writer, or I will read at least one novel).

Holding Yourself to Your Goals:

Do you have to write down your goals, track your hours, be diligent? Not if that becomes more of a chore than something that inspires. But at least take a few moments at the beginning of the month to think about what it is that matters to you and to set your thoughts on what you need to do. If you're not the type to write things down, try speaking your goals out loud to a friend or spouse. Voicing your goals will make them seem more real, and you'll be much more likely to follow through.

Celebrate Your Achievements:

Writers must self-motivate, which means we must also self-congratulate. Does this mean you have to take yourself out to dinner every time you meet your monthly goals? If you want, yes! If not, determine what is dinner-worthy. Is it meeting your goals three months in a row? Is it selling that article? Is it finishing a chapter of your book? Whatever you decide is worth celebrating, make sure you take the time to pat yourself on the back. If you don't, who will?

Moving on to Next Month:

At the end of each month, go back to your goal sheet and check off the things you got done. Of the things you didn't complete, which do you want to roll over to next month and which have you decided to forgo for now or for good? Remember, don't set goals that are out of your control (I will get this story picked up by such-and-such magazine or I will win this contest). If this goal isn't met, you'll feel like a failure even though it was never within your power to begin with. Instead, state those types of goals as intentions (I intend to get a book published someday or I intend to speak at a writers' conference). Intentions inspire us and keep us motivated and excited. It's important to acknowledge our dreams and work toward them, but take them one step at a time.

Sample Goal Sheet:

Month/Year: Jan. 2012

Primary Goal: State Your Primary Goal and Any Deadlines Tied to It:

Secondary Goals: State or List any Secondary Goals:

Ongoing Goals: State or List Goals You Plan to Work Toward for Several Months:

Notes: Write here ideas for goals you'd like to work on next month, or use this space to make notes about your goals as you go along.

Or:

Monthly Goal Chart

Month/Year

Week	Primary and Secondary Goals	Estimate Time to Finish	Time To Finish	Check Off Tasks	Comments
	1. 2. 3.				