

The Just Write Life



Winning NaNoWriMo

By E.J. Murray

NaNoWriMo, or National Novel Writing Month for the few who may not have heard of it, is a challenge held every November. You are encouraged to try to write fifty thousand words over the course of November's thirty days. Fifty thousand words is the definition of a novel, thus NaNoWriMo. I have been participating in the challenge since 2009, so I have a little experience under my belt and feel qualified to coach new NaNoWriMo participants on winning techniques.

I usually do "win"—although there are no actual prizes other than discounts on writing software and such. The fun is in joining thousands of other writers in a mad sprint for the finish line. The NaNoWriMo founders have a website where you can connect with others, keep track of your progress, message and encourage your friends, shop for merch, and participate in the online forum discussions.

(Continued on page 2)

Inside This Issue

New Members -----	3
Member Spotlight -----	3
Member Article -----	4
A Call for Beta Readers -----	6
V.P. Article -----	7
Who's Penned What-----	10
Upcoming Events -----	11
Grammar Tip -----	11
Critique Session Info -----	12

Chapter Officers

- Ann Gordon, President
ann@gordoncomputer.com
- Lisa Forsyth, Vice President
hermana_v@yahoo.com
- Josie Hulme, Public Relations
josiehulme513@gmail.com

(Continued from page 1)

They have virtual badges and certificates you can post on your website or social media platforms and real t-shirts for sale (most of the proceeds go toward worthy charities like classroom writing programs and libraries).

There are a few “tricks” to help you complete your challenge every year. Here’s what I’ve learned over the years as I participated:

- Try to write every day. Even if you have to get up half an hour early or stay up later, make an effort and get some words down. The more you let it pile up, the more overwhelming it looks and the more you’re tempted to just give up.
- Aim for a daily word count of 1,667 or more. I like to aim for 1,700 and give myself a little leeway in case some emergency does come up to prevent me from writing. That’s not a lot of words—you can do it if you buckle down and try!
- Don’t Edit! This is perhaps the most important “trick.” Every word counts, so instead of deleting something you don’t like, just do a strikethrough or bold the words or mark them somehow—and keep writing. You can do a document search later and delete what you don’t like.
- Focus on the daily goal instead of the finish line. If you start thinking “I’m never going to get to fifty thousand words!” you never will. Instead, focus on doing 1,667 words at a time. That’s a doable goal—often it’s not even a complete short story—and you can whip that out in less time than if you had saved up all your writing for the weekend.
- Sneaky Trick: Count everything! If you take a few minutes to write a blog post or social media announcement, write that in your document and count it toward your daily goal! Many may see this as “cheating,” but if you’re pressed for time, remember that you did write those words, even if they may not go with the rest of the novel. It’s your work, so my thinking is: every word counts.

This November, I did a rewrite of my science-fiction novel, *Earthbeat*, about a group of aliens from a hive mind who develop individuality and are exiled. They end up on Earth, of course, because every other alien race does. I had most of the novel written already but didn’t like where it was going or the (lack of) conflict I’d tossed at my characters. I like the new version much better and with fifty thousand words under my belt, I only have a little more writing to do before it’s ready to query. This is how I personally use NaNoWriMo: get the first part of a novel down in a chunk, then rework it and add enough to flesh it out into that genre’s word count average, which is around one hundred thousand words for sci-fi and fantasy.

What are your experiences with NaNoWriMo, if you have any? What would encourage you to participate if you’ve never tried it before? Remember: even if you don’t “win,” you have a lot more written than you did before you started, and that’s a big plus.



NaNoWriMo

www.NaNoWriMo.org

Member Spotlight: Linda Allison



Retired in early 2021 after almost forty years with a major US bank, Linda Allison has now turned her focus to becoming what she was always going to be when she grew up: a writer. Linda developed her love for writing creative non-fiction several years ago while finishing a Master of Liberal Studies program at Rice University. Writing short CNF essays and the occasional free-form poem is what she enjoys most. Linda lives in The Woodlands, Texas with the love of her life. She is, in twenty-five words or less: mother, grandmother, photographer, hiker, hard-core barre enthusiast, rock collector, serious foodie, lifelong learner, and a really terrible golfer who loves to play anyway.

If you would like to be featured in our member spotlight section, please let Lisa or Ann know. We enjoy getting to know more about our members.

*“We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.”
—Ernest Hemingway*

New Members

We would like to welcome the following new members to Just Write:

- Rayma Bullock
- Linda Allison



Time is a Human Construct

By Josie Hulme

In my wishful fantasies, I used to think of writing as my job—full time if I was really dreaming. I would read posts and blogs from successful writers or listen to them speak at Quills Conferences. They'd say things like, "This is your *job* and anyone who doesn't respect that isn't respecting you" and "I put a note on the door that says, 'I'm writing for the next three hours. Enter on pain of death.' My kids never dare to interrupt me." And while I was listening to these, I'd think, "Oh yeah. I'm totally going to do that."



But when I'd try to implement these ideas, I'd fail. Not just a little fail. But A *lot* fail. "What am I doing wrong?" I'd wail. "Why isn't this working?!"

Well, I finally figured it out. The people saying these things weren't me.

I'll never forget one guest speaker at a Quills Conference glibly saying that he didn't understand why people complained about not having the time to write. He said, "I write everywhere! I always have a recorder with me and I dictate my story while I'm driving. I even write while I'm hiking!" Okay, so that's a cool idea. Then he followed it up with, "And then I have my assistant type it all up for me and she knows me and my style well enough to fill in all the blanks."

Yeah, this guy's not me. I don't have an assistant.

The guy with the sign on the door was just that, a man. I mean absolutely no disrespect to men or fathers out there, but at least at my house, the kids need 'mom' and the husband needs 'wife' far more than anyone needs 'dad' or 'husband.'

The woman who "pops my noise-canceling headphones on and writes for four hours in the morning" before jetting off for the rest of her fancy life doesn't have kids at home who need to get to dance rehearsal and soccer practice or a husband working on his master's degree in his spare time or a lawn that needs mowing and a garden that needs weeding and neighbors that need visiting...

Don't get me wrong, I'm not giving any of us aspiring writers a pass. Far from it! But what I am doing is suggesting that we need to work within *our own* reality. What works for me may not work for you, and what works for you may not work for the next guy. But with a little creative thinking and, let's be honest, some sacrifice (because every good thing takes that) and persistence, we can find the time to pursue our passion. Here are a few tips and ideas I have discovered.

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

- Get really good at writing fast. More on this in an upcoming article from me, “There’s No Such Thing as a Pantser.”
- Capitalize on the short time. Don’t think you need a lot of time to get something done. These first two points were the biggest game-changers for me. I was caught up in the pro-writers’ descriptions and thinking that if I didn’t have at least one hour of guaranteed no-interruption writing time then it wasn’t worth sitting down. Now I take every fifteen-minute breather I get to pound out some prose. Every one hundred words I type gets me one hundred words closer to the end of my book.



- Focus. Does the day catch up to you when you finally *do* sit down to write? Are you falling asleep at the keyboard? Try the Pomodoro Technique: twenty-five minutes of writing followed by a five-minute break. Take a twenty-minute break after every four cycles. The guy that came up with it suggests you use the kind of kitchen timer that makes a ticking sound, the theory being that the audible ticking is a subconscious signal to your brain that it needs to focus and go fast before time runs out. I’ve taken this technique and broken it up even more: a thirteen-minute writing time followed by a two-minute get-up-and-walk-around break, with a thirty-minute get-a-mom-job-done break every hour.
- Turn off your phone. Turn the notifications off on your computer and lock your door. This may not stop people from interrupting you—after all, you’re still ‘mom’ or ‘dad’ or ‘daughter’ or ‘roommate.’ That’s reality. But you *can* minimize unnecessary interruptions. We’ve been trained with a Pavlovian response when we hear that ding on our phone. *We want* to answer it. *We need* to answer it. So turn the ding off. Whoever texted or emailed you can wait an hour to get a reply. Whoever just posted something can wait forty minutes for your like. And if you have a sick mom or a child on a trip and they just might actually need you during this precious half hour, there are things you can set up where they can get through your ‘do not disturb’ settings. Google it and set it up.
- Sacrifice another activity. Notice I said ‘activity’ and not ‘relationship.’ Family life is tough enough without making it harder by never participating in activities because you’re always writing. So be wise with what and how often you sacrifice. But I find that, if I’m not diligent, I can easily waste 30 -60 minutes of precious time in my day, just waiting for someone or lost in social media or lounging in bed or scrolling through channels...
- Don’t forget to read. I know this seems like the opposite of finding time to write, but reading in the genre you write is essential and will make you a better and faster writer.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

- Be prepared for genius. Keep a pen and notebook, note app on your phone, voice recorder, etc. handy for the times when you're standing in the grocery line and the perfect comeback for your protagonist comes to mind. Or the plot twist you've been pondering. Or that one crucial detail that takes your character from stale to stunning.
- Be mobile. Bring your laptop in the car when you're picking up your kids from school. Take it on vacation. Take it to work. Don't forget your headphones if you're easily distracted.
- Ask for support. Your significant other is probably capable and more than willing to step in and give you a little break. It's good for your kids to see you pursue your dream. Ask them for their cooperation. Encourage a movie night or the building of a fort or a date with dad or mom and take that quiet time to work on your own project.
- Last, but certainly not least, give yourself a break. Being a writer is an odd blend of social/anti-social, observant/preoccupied, confident/scared to death... Bottom line, it's tough. Sometimes the plot is smoking, but the prose is blah. Sometimes the prose is scintillating, but the plot is banal. Sometimes you're on top of the world and sometimes you're curled in the corner with a box of tissues. It's okay. We're all like that. That split personality is what makes us good writers. So it's okay if your book is taking a while or your character keeps changing her mind or if you just got another 'no thanks' from an agent. Take a deep breath and start typing again. Put in the time. Learn the craft. Keep trying. It'll come.

A Call for Beta Readers

If you need help with your full-length novel or collection, this is the space for your ad. Let Ann or Lisa know and your request will go in the next newsletter (expected March 2022).



Titling Your Work: Six Strategies and Considerations

By Lisa Forsyth



“A good title tells you what the book’s about. It reminds you, when you lose heart, why you started writing it in the first place.” —Jeffrey Eugenides

I love that quote because he’s right. A good title gets you pumped to finish the story you’ve started. A lot of times I’ll write a story based on a title I’ve already come up with. I’ll even tinker around with a cover design before I have a first or second draft. This serves to keep me motivated. Once I have a title and a cover image, the book’s essence is officially pulled from the ether, ready to be written.

But what happens when you’re a good chunk into your novel or story and you still haven’t come up with a title you like? There’s nothing wrong with using a placeholder. Sometimes you have to finish at least one draft before discovering what your story is about, especially if you’re a pantsner. Once you know the gist of the plot, character arcs, and themes, an excellent title is more likely to reveal itself in obvious ways. In case it doesn’t, begin a list of options and use the following tips in a brainstorming session. That hidden gem may not be so hidden after all.

Tip #1: Define the Plot and Genre

A great example of this is Terry Brooks’ *Magic Kingdom for Sale, Sold*. We know the genre immediately: fantasy. We also know the plot involves the sale and purchase of a magic kingdom. This alone intrigues the reader with questions of who puts up a magic kingdom for sale and what sort of person has the wealth and audacity to buy it?

Another example is *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. This title spells out the genre while giving us a glimpse of the plot. The title also creates excitement in the reader. We want to know what the sorcerer’s stone is and what it’s capable of. The following are a few more classic titles that effectively define genre and content:

Cosmos by Carl Sagan

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain

The Time Machine by H.G. Wells

A Series of Unfortunate Events by Lemony Snicket, a.k.a. Daniel Handler

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

Tip #2: Consider the Title's Length

Do you want a short, one- or two-word title that comes out punching or does the story call for a longer, more descriptive title like those mentioned above? Brief titles should still generate questions or conjure images that drive the reader to your synopsis. Effective short titles include:

The Exorcist by William Peter Blatty

1984 by George Orwell

The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

The Lovely Bones by Alice Sebold



Tip #3: Use a Literary Device

Alliteration, rhymes, connotation, and double entendres are tools we can use to create powerful titles. Here are a few examples of alliteration and rhyme:

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis

Black Beauty by Anna Sewell

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl

Life of Pi by Yann Martel

The following are examples of connotation and double entendres:

Misery by Stephen King (*Misery* is the first name of protagonist Paul Sheldon's most popular character, and it directly ties to his captive state with Annie Wilkes).

Ash by Malinda Lo (*Ash* is not only the name of Lo's Cinderella character, but the name relates to how she lost both of her parents and sleeps with cinders).

Sojourn is a time travel romance I've written. The title not only refers to a fictional 1980s rock band, but the brief stay the protagonist experiences in the 1980s.

Tip #4 Consider Reader Expectations

Market for your audience. Technical and self-help books may require no-nonsense descriptive titles, while middle grade books with creative or silly titles have done well. Research the books in your genre to see what is selling. You can always break a reader's expectations, but as with bending any rule, you must have a good reason to do so.

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

Tip #5 Consider Your Series

If you're writing a series, you may want to mirror each of the titles. That can mean using the same word count for each title, incorporating a common theme, or utilizing a similar phrasing style. For example, in *The Inheritance Cycle*, Christopher Paolini uses a one-word title for each book in the series (*Eragon*, *Eldest*, *Brisingr*, and *Inheritance*). Each of the seven *Harry Potter* books begins with the same four words: *Harry Potter and the* (*Sorcerer's Stone*, *Chamber of Secrets*, etc.). Sue Grafton's popular "Alphabet" series starts with *A is for Alibi*, while each subsequent book carries the next letter in the alphabet and so on. Mirroring your titles will help a reader remember each of the books in a series far more easily than choosing titles which have no relation to each other.

Tip #6: Homage

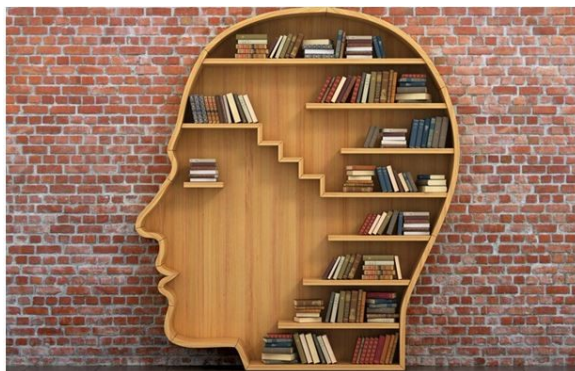
Perhaps you're wanting to pay homage to one of your favorite authors or their works. Your title can reflect this homage while remaining relevant to your story (and including a dual meaning for bonus points). Many famous novel titles were taken from poetry, the Bible, Shakespeare plays, etc. Here are a few examples noted on bookriot.com:

East of Eden by John Steinbeck came from Genesis 4:16 "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden."

Mortal Engines by Philip Reeve came from Act III Scene III of Shakespeare's *Othello*. "And O you mortal engines whose rude throats / Th'immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit."

Ernest Hemingway borrowed his title *For Whom the Bell Tolls* from a poem by John Donne.

As you can see, there are various strategies for naming your work. Keep in mind that the title must pique the reader's curiosity just as the cover image should do. As a bonus tip, when in doubt, poll your friends and family to see which title on your list resonates with them the most. That "hidden gem" may be an obvious find to others.



Who's Penned What

A List of Members' Published and Sold Works



“AS COLD AS THE WITCH’S HAND”

Lisa Forsyth, writing as E.M. Kilbourne

Short Story

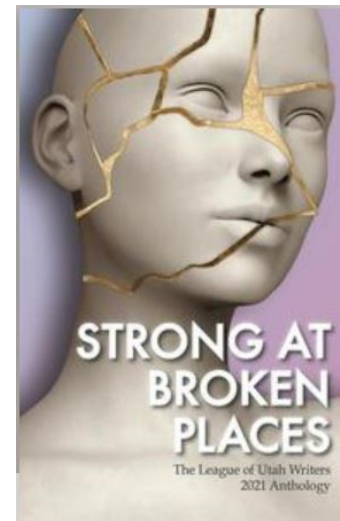
A lonely woodsman rescues a beautiful stranger from a snarling wolf. She rewards him with a single wish.

“WAVES”

Peter Steele

Poem

Peter's poem, Waves, was included in this year's League anthology, Strong at Broken Places. Congratulations, Peter!



“IT’S WORTH IT TO ME”

Alissa Holyoak

Short Story

Alissa has sold her short story to Friend magazine.

Congrats, Alissa!

Upcoming Events

The Pre-Quill Conference

Date: April 23, 2022

Location: Hybrid Event



Grammar Tip: Subjunctive Mood

Why was the famous song from *Fiddler on the Roof* written “If I *Were* a Rich Man,” rather than “If I *Was* a Rich Man?” This is the English version of the subjunctive mood. Found in Spanish and other languages, it is used to express hypothetical situations and is employed with a command or strong suggestion. The verb in third person drops the s, unless “to be” is used, in which the verb will take on the plural form “were.”

A few examples:

If I *were* feeling better, I’d go to the store (expresses a hypothetical).

We recommend she *wait* until after the exam (expresses a strong suggestion).

Jackson must *complete* the following exercises (expresses a command).

If Sarah *were* to drive, she’d need her glasses (expresses a hypothetical).

For more information, see Grammarly’s article on the subject: <https://www.grammarly.com/blog/english-subjunctive-what-is-it/>



Critique Sessions and Submission Guidelines

Critique sessions run twice a month. Invitation emails are usually sent the first and sixteenth of each month; these invitations include an RSVP deadline. Once the deadline has passed, the spreadsheet with current group information is sent. Each session is generally divided into two or three groups with three to six participants each, depending on how many members participate.

Submissions are then emailed to each member of the participant's group and returned by the end-of-session deadline, usually the fifteenth or the last day of the month. If you want to read a submission from someone in a different group in addition to those in your own group, you may request their work, but please do not expect them to read yours in return.

Fiction and non-fiction chapters, short stories, articles, and poems are all welcome in our critique sessions...query letters too.

Submission Guidelines

- 3,200 words or less (not including any synopses at the beginning)
- Include a synopsis if there are chapters/sections prior to your current submission
- 12-point or larger serif font (such as Times New Roman or Cambria)
- Double or 1.5 spaced lines
- Word document format (.doc, .docx)
- Include your name or initials in the filename
- Submit within two days of receiving the group spreadsheet

Critiquing Guidelines

- Please make at least six suggestions or comments in your reviews
- Be honest, kind, and encouraging
- Corrections and comments are made using the "Track Changes" and "New Comment" features under the "Review" tab in Word
- Include a note at the end of the document with an overall review or comment
- Ideally, return your reviews by the last day of the session

"When it snows, you have two choices: shovel or make snow angels." —Unknown

Happy Holidays :)

