

## A Writer's Mini-Game Plan: Seven Rules for a Successful Career

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Luck has little to do with writing success. A long lasting writing career doesn't just happen. A writer can burst onto the scene and quickly disappear. Another can have a series of hits then write a bunch of flops and never be heard from again. The difference between a long lasting career and one that burns out is strategy. Here are seven rules to help you find the right strategy for you and get you started on your journey to long lasting success.

**Learn the power of focus.** For most of us, we have more than enough to do on a daily basis. And when it comes to any writing project the list can grow exponentially- you have a blog to write, a monthly newsletter to keep up with, two deadlines for upcoming books, a speaking engagement and more. A long "To Do List" can be overwhelming and for many of us can lead to procrastination, confusion or just plain paralysis! The solution? Do one thing at a time. Come up with a goal for the day. Writing or marketing? Then do the tasks that will accomplish that goal. If you have extra time you can focus on other less pressing tasks.

**Keep moving.** Humans are smart. Sometimes too smart. Many times obstacles come in our way like a tree in the middle of the road and instead of going around it, we try to chop it down or climb over it. Don't focus on the obstacles. A rejection is an obstacle but instead of focusing on it move to the next submission or work on something else. So your first play wasn't the greatest, start your next one; okay so your favorite editor left your magazine, try to woo the new one. Don't focus on the roadblock. Go around it.

**Don't use a shovel to eat soup.** Use the right tools that work for your project. Whether it is the tool of language (different language is used in romantic fiction versus fantasy or literary) or software. However, you don't need all of the latest technology to be a prosperous writer. I still write all of my initial story ideas long hand before entering them on my computer. To help 'speed' the process, a year ago I bought a Neo AlphaSmart that has helped me capture ideas and bits and pieces of my manuscript and upload it directly to my computer, but my handwritten notes are still my old standby. There are a lot of reasons to spend money, new software, writing books, gadgets that promise to make your writing life easier, choose only the ones you really need.

**Time stops for no man.** How you spend your present time dictates your future. Daydream about writing and months later you'll have a lovely daydream and nothing to show for it. If you envision a book write it every day, if not every day at least every week. With our busy lifestyle many of us--beginner and professional writer – let time get away from us. For some of us, we are always trying to 'find' time to complete or start our next manuscript. Time never stands still so it's up to you to grab a hold of it rather than waiting for it to be 'enough'. I know a dear friend of mine who when she was working full-time always dreamed of being able to stay home and paint. She now works from home, but still doesn't find enough time. Why? Because she hasn't learned the

importance of time management. She fills her time with activities that don't get her close to her dream of writing. So now every day she puts in a half hour when she must paint and is working towards her dream of being a full-time artist. Time is not the enemy, how you use it is. So be conscious of what you do with it. You'll be surprised how far you'll go.

**Be your own cheerleader not your opponent.** We all suffer from doubts, but don't let your inner critic stop you. When a baby is learning to walk she'll fall down a lot. She'll get bruised and cry, but in order to master the skill she'll need to keep on getting up and trying again and again. We understand that falling is part of the process, but for some reason as adults we've become averse to falling. We've interpreted it as 'failing' and it is. But one must fail his way to success. When you fail at something, instead of letting the critic have the final say, replace it with your inner cheerleader. The one that says, "That's okay, keep going." or "I know it didn't work this time, but next time will be better." Like the baby learning to walk we have to keep getting up. One rejection letter or two hundred should not stop you from building your writing career. So an editor didn't like your latest story, come up with something else or submit to a different editor. Every career will have its ups and downs. The ones that burn out are the ones that hit the floor and stay there.

**Claim your status.** Whether you're published or unpublished claim the fact that you're a writer. Don't wait for someone else to give you that validation. Once again your inner critic may be saying, "I'm not a real writer because I haven't published anything." or "I'm not a real writer because I'm not published in hardback." "I'm only a genre writer; I'll be a real writer when I'm in mainstream." or "I've only been published in the community newsletter I'm not a real writer like a journalist." If you write, you're a writer. You don't need anyone's permission. However, I will caution you, if you make this claim, take the necessary steps you need to grow your skills as a writer. On the flip side there are a number of people who proudly call themselves writers, but never grow in their craft and their careers shows this lack. So constantly strive to be a better writer. This can be accomplished in many ways, online workshops, attending a conference, taking college courses, self-development by reading, etc. Don't ever stand still.

**Be flexible.** Successful writing careers are rarely linear. Writers have to take detours when a magazine closes or a new editor hates the writer's work. A successful mystery series suddenly becomes stale or market trends change the type of work that is accepted. Stretch your writing muscles so that your career can always take a new and exciting journey. Do you write poems? Try writing an article on poetry. Perhaps that could lead to a book. If your novel isn't selling, perhaps serialize it online or take the theme and write a short story. Fiction authors try non-fiction. Don't let yourself be victim to the whims of the industry.

Success is mainly strategy. Writers whose careers have lasted haven't been without failure, disappointment and setbacks, but these individuals have learned how to move forward on the goals they've set for themselves. Hopefully with these seven rules you can create your own game plan for success.

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