

Making Your Writing Dreams Real

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Many aspiring writers dream of the day when they will be published. They imagine winning a prestigious award, seeing the shelves lined with their books, and getting calls from movie agents. Unfortunately, most aspiring authors never move past the dream phase. Don't be one of them. Here are seven steps to making your writing dreams a reality.

1) Set a concrete goal.

Decide what kind of author you want to be. Do you want to be the author of jingles, novels, poems, or articles? Be specific. Where would you like to be in one year? Write it down to the last detail (you're a dreamer; this is the time to dream big).

Do you want to submit five articles to a major magazine, complete a fantasy, interview a local celebrity? How do you envision your writing resume in two or five years? Create a mock version so that you can use it as a map to your desired destination. Remember: Concrete goals are measurable. Don't say 'I want to be a writer' but 'I want to write six articles about the environment or smokers' rights.'

2) Write down what you need to do to achieve your dream—in small steps!

For example, say your goal is to be a bestselling novelist. If you write down that your first step is to write a 400 page novel the task will seem daunting. Start with small, manageable steps: clear my desk, sketch idea for a story, outline a plot, write one page a day, research publishers, buy *Writer's Digest* magazine.

Make the steps something you can accomplish in a day or two so that you can feel the instant gratification of achieving it. By focusing on small steps, you'll have little victories to celebrate along the way to your goal. This helps to make the process towards publication not seem like such a struggle.

3) Be accountable.

If your goal is to be a freelance writer and your first step is to write a filler or vignette, come up with a deadline as to when you have to achieve that goal. When you do not have a deadline, there is no motivation to get started. What is the consequence if you don't succeed? Will you get fired? No. Will you go hungry? Again, no.

Create your own consequences. Tell a trusted friend about your intentions and brainstorm ideas. For example: If you don't make your deadline, then you'll have to miss your favorite show or wear a stupid outfit to work. Creating deadlines is good practice for when you will really have to face them.

4) Make sure your goals are based on what you can accomplish.

Toss out ultimatums. Some authors say they gave themselves one year to get published and that if they hadn't made it they would have given up. I wanted to have a novel published by fourteen, it didn't happen. I kept writing and submitting until it did. When you listen to stories about people who gave themselves ultimatums you're only hearing from those who made it.

There are many dreams buried in drawers because their creators gave up too soon. There are freelance careers that bit the dust because of a few rejections, songwriters who'll never hear their words sung because they hadn't "made it" by twenty-five, novelists whose manuscripts will mold because they never won a contest.

Don't put a deadline on your dreams. If you really want something, go after it until you get it. In publishing it is dangerous to put your hopes on the fickleness of people. What if you write a fantastic mystery when most publishers only want erotica? What if your heartwarming story about sixty-something cancer survivor lands on the desk of a twenty-something editor worried about acne and the effects of Botox? Don't let rejection hamper you. It may take you longer to get the interest of an agent or editor, but you eventually will.

Good stories will find a home. Base your achievements on solutions you can control. Make it a goal that you'll write an article, not that it will be accepted by a prestigious magazine; that you'll complete your novel, not that it will be an international bestseller. You can only control your actions, base your goals on them.

5) Repeat affirmations.

This suggestion will make some people gag. If you are already doing so, please skip this. For those of you still with me try this: Say 'I am a writer.' Give yourself permission right now to be a writer. Stop saying 'I want to be a writer' or 'I'm going to be a writer' or 'Someday I'll be a writer.' Instead say: 'I am a successful writer.' 'I make a living with my words.' 'People enjoy and/or learn from what I write.'

Your mind is your greatest tool, fill it with possibilities. People feel that being realistic has to do with uncovering reasons dreams won't come true, but visionaries know better. Endless possibilities await those who see the invisible. Don't waste your imagination on what may not happen (you may never publish, you may never succeed) and use your imagination to reinforce the wonderful events that will come. Expect them to happen. You may not know when, but they will. Claim your right to be what you want right now even when you don't feel that it's true.

6) Visualize.

Visualize your dream coming true. Every day take five to ten minutes and see the life you want clear in your mind. Go into a bookstore and see your books on the shelves. Open a magazine and imagine your byline there. If you can't see a visual image just imagine how you will feel cashing your first cheque, traveling on your first assignment, reading your first fan letter.

7) Make the dream real.

Dreamers dream. Writers write. It's that simple. You are what you do. Write something today. Write a short story, a poem, an article, a flyer, a play anything that involves you in the art of creation. Once you've written something, consider volunteering your services. Submit your work to an online magazine, or a community paper; offer to proofread menus at foreign restaurants (you'd be amazed by some of the errors found) or promote their business. If you don't wish to volunteer, set a price for your writing services and offer to write copy for a business, submit your stories to paying magazines. Think outside of the box and put your talents to use.

It is never too late to achieve your writing dreams. Now get to work. Your life is waiting.

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