

## Don't Survive the Unpublished Time: Thrive!

From the moment you decide to pursue a career in writing until the moment you get “the call,” your devotion, motivation, and determination will be tested. You may experience an overwhelming feeling of anticipation most days, but on others, you may spiral into dejection and wonder when, or if, you’ll ever realize your dream.

Many careers follow a linear path along a reliable timeline: get a college degree, find an entry-level job, and work your way up the ladder. However, writing is an art form, and there is no proven linear path to getting published in a certain amount of time. Some authors will have an extremely short path to publication, while others will struggle for years before it happens.

With no guarantee of when you’ll get published, you can easily slip into survival mode when your confidence lags. When you’re focused on surviving, you aren’t optimizing your chances for success. If your doubts are paralyzing your forward momentum, you’re in survival mode. If you haven’t touched your work-in-progress in more than two weeks, you’re in survival mode. Who wants to linger near the edge of failure or quitting? No thanks!

No matter where you’re at on your journey to publication, there are five steps you can take to avoid survival mode. These will keep you motivated and lessen the periods of doubt.

1. **Set Goals**
2. **Get Support**
3. **Study**
4. **Find Means of Instant Gratification**
5. **Write Constantly**

### 1. Set Goals

If you’re serious about getting published, consider writing down annual, monthly, weekly, and daily goals. This sounds harder than it is. Take a few hours to jot down what you want to accomplish this year.

Example: You want to write and revise one book, submit it to ten agents, and start a blog.

Your annual goal would look like this:

- a. Writing:
  - a. Write *Greatest Book Ever*
  - b. Revise *Greatest Book Ever*
- b. Submission:
  - a. Submit *Greatest Book Ever* to ten agents
- c. Promotion:
  - a. Start a blog

Now you’re ready to break these down into monthly goals. You do not have a year to write a first draft if you plan on revising and submitting it in the next twelve months. If you aren’t certain

how long it will take you to write the first draft, give yourself eight months. Plan another three months to revise, and that will leave a month to submit to agents. Choose a less hectic month to start your blog.

Your monthly goals would look like this: (example is for 80,000 word book)

- a. January: Write 10,000 words
- b. February: Write 10,000 words (total 20K)
- c. March: Write 10,000 words (total 30K)
- d. April: Write 10,000 words (total 40K)
- e. May: Write 10,000 words (total 50K) and start blog
- f. June: Write 10,000 words (total 60K)
- g. July: Write 10,000 words (total 70K)
- h. August: Finish First draft (total 80K)
- i. September: Start Revisions
- j. October: Continue revisions
- k. November: Finish revisions
- l. December: Submit to ten agents

Each month, take a few minutes to determine your weekly and daily goals. A sample of October's might look like this:

Week 1: Revise chapters 12-15, research two agents and print out their submission guidelines.

Monday: Blog, revise 5 pages of chapter 12.

Tuesday: Revise rest of 12 and 5 pages of 13

Wednesday: Blog

Thursday: Revise rest of 13

Friday: Blog, research two agents and print submission guidelines

Saturday: Revise 14

Sunday: Revise 15

Now that your goals are set, make sure you review them often. Each week, check your word count, revision status, or amount of agents queried. It's easier to stay on track on a weekly basis, than to wait six months and realize none of your goals will be met. Re-evaluate your goals every quarter to make sure they are still feasible. Don't be afraid to modify them.

Why are you doing this? You'll have written proof that you're pursuing your dreams, and these goals will bolster your confidence.

## **2. Get Support**

You're a writer now. Does that mean you have to trudge through every step of the process alone? No! Sure, no one will write your book for you, but writers are a generous bunch. We understand the ups, downs, and in-betweens of this lifestyle in ways your non-writing friends will not. How do you get this support? There are many ways.

- Join writing organizations. Writing organizations abound for any genre. Most offer member resources, such as an interactive website, support forums, and newsletters.
- Find blogs by other writers. Follow them and leave comments. You can't help but get swept into a writing community when you interact with bloggers.
- Join Facebook and become "friends" with your favorite authors.
- Join Twitter and follow the tweets of other writers.
- Join a local writers group.
- Subscribe to magazines geared toward writers.

### **3. Study**

Make a point to regularly study the craft of writing, and your confidence will soar. Purchase or borrow books from the library. Take an online class. Read agent's blogs, magazines, and writer's blogs. Review grammar books a few times a year. Attend a conference and take the workshops.

Opportunities to learn more about writing lurk everywhere. Keep your eyes and ears open. When doubts hit, remind yourself how dedicated you are. Review the notes you took. Good writers aren't born; they're made. Every step you take to become a better writer boosts your talent.

### **4. Find Means of Instant Gratification**

When you're over the first rush of the new writer phase—you've written and revised a book or two and are reasonably informed about how publishing works—you'll enter a tougher phase. Maybe you've entered a few contests and been disappointed. Maybe you've submitted your brilliant first book and received a rejection. Maybe your dream agent hasn't even requested a partial. Whatever has happened, you no longer feel the giddy delight you had when you started writing. Yes, you still love it, but you wonder if everyone else is doing something right while you're doing everything wrong.

Your friends—the ones you've met through blogging, social networks, or writer's groups—suddenly are getting agents, winning contests, having full manuscripts requested, and even getting the call. You're happy for them, of course, but a tsunami of doubt crushes you.

*What am I doing wrong? I've studied the craft. I've memorized my dream agent's submission policy. I write and revise and submit, but it's getting me nowhere. Am I like those American Idol wannabes who murder their audition songs but are convinced they're the next Mariah Carey?*

Hold on. For every one of your friends who suddenly makes a break-through, there are roughly 99% more who are stuck in the same boat as you. Someone else's success has nothing to do with yours. There is no sense in comparing yourself. It will do no good.

In order to slay the doubts during these times, you need to have some success of your own. This is when you need instant gratification. What better way to achieve this than through your own blog?

A newer trend in publishing is author platform—the author’s self-promotion tools designed to sell books. Many authors will choose not to have a blog, and that’s fine, but for the unpublished writer, a blog is a terrific means to obtain instant gratification *and* build a platform.

When you devote a portion of your week to write your posts and make an effort to attract followers, you’re bound to have people follow your blog. They’ll read and comment on your posts. And sometimes these comments will soothe the misery of being so close and yet so far from your dream. They’re proof someone likes your writing. Proof you aren’t a talentless hack on a path to nowhere. Proof your dreams can still come true.

## **5. Write Constantly**

The best cure for any doubts about your future career is to write. Write when you don’t feel like it. Write when you do feel like it. Write when you’re convinced you’ll never get published. Write when you get a rejection. Write when you hear about an author who published her first, and only, book and got a six-figure advance. Write every week or write every day. Just write.

Whether your path to publication lasts ten months or ten years, these steps will ensure you continue to work to make your dream come true. You won’t just survive the unpublished years. You’ll thrive.

Best wishes to you!