

Ask Jeff– How do I get my novel finished?

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Ask Jeff– How do I get my novel finished?

By Jeff Heisler

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Title: Ask Jeff– How do I get my novel finished?
by Jeff Heisler

Q: "Dear Jeff. How do I get my novel finished? I set a goal to have it done by end of the year and I've still got a long way to go. Any suggestions?" – Pam.

Jeff: A lot of writers have this problem. Fortunately there's a tool you can use to keep you on track. What you need is a quota.

Some writers are lucky that they don't have to push themselves to finish. They enjoy sitting at the keyboard so much– it's easy for them to finish novel after novel. Stephen King once described his writing output as "diarrhea of the keyboard." What? Were you expecting something rosy from the king of horror?

For the rest of us– and it does include some major literary talents– we need a system to keep us on track. That's where the quota comes in.

I highly suggest using word count for a quota. Set a number of words for the day and be sure to meet it. Find a comfortable daily output. Many bestselling authors have 1,000 or 2,000 word daily quotas. Others have less.

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Earnest Hemingway– THE writer, used a quota. People tell stories of Papa Hemingway sitting at the corner of the bar, hovered over his hand written pages. He mumbled to himself as he counted each and every word.

Others use a page quota. BAD IDEA.

Look, your brain doesn't like to work any harder than it has too. If you give your creative mind an assignment to write 2 pages of manuscript, you'll end up with a lot of this:

"Hey Sam?"

"Yeah."

"Sam?"

"Yeah, over here."

"How are ya Sam."

yada yada yada. . .

Word count quotas prevent you from typing pages of empty fluff.

How do you set your quota? If you have a deadline, divide the number of words you need by the number of days you have to write.

If you are aiming to complete a 75,000 word novel in 3 months then you figure:

3 months X 30 days a month= 90 days.

75,000 words/90 days=833 words a day (say 900 for the sake of simplicity.)

So that's your quota. If you plan on taking weekends off, or if there are any days when you know you will be unable to write– subtract those days from your calculation. Even a small quota can make a big difference. A 250 word per day quota averages about 1 page a day. You have a nice sized novel in a year.

Whatever your quota is– stick to it. If you go over your quota– fine, but that doesn't mean you can write less tomorrow, or take the day off. Most of your creativity happens when you are away from the keyboard. While you're off doing other things your brain, an excellent multitasking device, looks at its list of things to do. If you hold yourself to a steady schedule, your brain will make sure it's prepared.

"I've got that writing assignment coming up," it says to itself. "Lets see, how can I put that scene together?"

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By the time you sit down to type, the hard part's already done. Your brain just pours out the text and your time at the keyboard is simply dictation. When that happens your pages fly, and the writing gets less tedious and can actually be fun!

Treat meeting your quota like any other daily chore. You brush your teeth every day, shower every day, and write your quota every day. Think in those terms and you'll finish your novel in no time at all.

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Jeff Heisler is a freelance writer and editor of Write Away.

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A Find Way to Get Motivated

By Rich Fettke

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My coaching client, Jeff, had a goal to exercise three times per week. He said that when he works out he feels better, has more energy and feels more fulfilled throughout the day. The problem was that Jeff was not working out! His job as a financial planner took up much of his time and he always seemed to have an excuse for not making it to the health club. I could sense the frustration in his voice during our coaching sessions whenever he told me that another week went by without a workout.

I first asked Jeff the reasons he wanted to work out. He gave me a list of all the reasons and benefits and then he said, "I just don't seem to have the discipline in the moment. When I have the chance to go to the gym, I usually find something else to do, like call a couple clients or organize my office."

I then asked him, "What association or organization has a mission that you just don't believe in?" Somewhat curious, he told me that he didn't support the mission of a certain organization. Then came the challenge. I said, "Okay Jeff, let's set up a fine. If you don't get three workouts in by next week's coaching session, will you mail a check to that organization for \$500?" There was silence on the other end of the phone. He knew what I was doing. He knew this was not only a test to see how committed he was to exercising, but also a way to challenge him to take action on a goal that had been eluding him for months.

Finally, Jeff said, "Yes, I accept that challenge." The next week he came to his coaching call excited and inspired. He got in three great workouts and he felt energized! The challenge worked. He asked to

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keep the same challenge going for the next week, and then the next week and so on. The fine was just the push Jeff needed. The momentum he created by developing the habit of three workouts per week continued, and after a few weeks he didn't even need the fine anymore (though he chose to keep it just in case).

Rich Fettke, MCC, is known for helping people take action and stay focused on what really matters. He is the author *EXTREME SUCCESS* (Simon & Schuster, 2002) and was one of the first business coaches to receive the Master Certified Coach designation from the International Coach Federation. As a professional speaker, Rich delivers entertaining and educational programs to associations and corporations. Visit Rich on the web at www.Fettke.com



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