

KEYNOTES



The newsletter of the Romance Writers of America / New York City Chapter #6 NOVEMBER 2017

**NEXT CHAPTER MEETING & CRITIQUE SESSION: SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4
TRS, 40 EXCHANGE PLACE, 3RD FLOOR, 12-4PM**

TOPIC: INSIDER TIPS: CRAFTING A SLAM-DUNK HOOK AND QUERY

SPEAKER: CAT CLYNE AND ANN LESLIE TUTTLE

Today's romance fiction marketplace is *extremely* competitive. For both new and established authors, getting your new novel or series noticed above the noise is challenging to say the least. One way to catch the eye of industry professionals and readers alike is with a slam-dunk hook that communicates the unique, must-read element of your story or series. Learn from two industry insiders how to woo an agent and editor by crafting a slam-dunk hook and query for your romance novel or series.



Cat Clyne, Editor, Sourcebooks

Cat Clyne has been helping writers hone their craft for most of her adult life. She worked in academia and magazine publishing before joining Sourcebooks in 2010. Cat acquires single title romance in all subgenres: romantic suspense, contemporary romance, paranormal romance, erotic romance, Highlanders and historicals. She is looking for stories with a slam-dunk hook, curl-her-toes romance, and out-of-the-box thinking (surprise me!). Cat has a fondness for damaged heroes and a well-written band of brothers bond. Born in Germany to diplomat parents, Cat has a Master's degree from New York University and lives in Brooklyn. Learn more at www.sourcebooks.com. Cat's list of authors includes

USA Today bestseller Amanda Bouchet (*A PROMISE OF FIRE*, debut fantasy romance), USA Today bestseller and two-time RITA award-winner Roni Loren (*THE ONES WHO GOT AWAY*, emotional contemporary romance), Wattpad sensation Isabelle Ronin (*CHASING RED*, swoony contemporary romance), and Diana Muñoz Stewart (*I AM JUSTICE*, kick-ass female-centric romantic suspense).



Ann Leslie Tuttle, Agent, Dystel, Goderich & Bourret

Ann Leslie Tuttle joined Dystel, Goderich & Bourret in 2017 after working for 20 years at Harlequin Books where she most recently was a Senior Editor. At Harlequin, Ann Leslie was fortunate to work on an extensive and varied list of bestselling and award-winning titles in romance and women's fiction. She received her B.A. degree from the College of William and Mary and an M.A. from the University of Virginia. Finding and nurturing talented new writers has always been Ann Leslie's passion. At DG&B, she is actively seeking all kinds of romance from contemporaries, historicals, and romantic suspense to paranormals and inspirational. Ann Leslie lives in New York City. Learn more at www.dystel.com.

CONTINUED.....Company bios on page 7.



WELCOME
to our new Editor

FALGUNI !

And many thanks to
Ursula for her past service.

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	Writing More, Better, Faster

THANK YOU!

To Our Contributing Writers
Maria Cox, Alexis Daria, Anna DePalo,
Kate McMurray, Alice Orr, Joan Ramirez,
Ruby Scalera, JN Welsh

2017 CHAPTER CALENDAR

Oct 7 Nov 4 Dec 2

MEETING INFORMATION

RWA/NYC meets the first Saturday of each month. Meetings are held at TRS, 40 Exchange Place, NYC. 12 noon. Membership is at the discretion of the Board. Annual dues are \$40. Make all checks payable to RWA/NYC. There will be a \$20 fee on returned checks.

ATTENTION: The Board welcomes all comments/suggestions/etc. Please send emails to info@RWA/NYC.com.

DECEMBER THEME

REFLECTIONS

As the year comes to a close, take a look back at 2017 and your hopes for 2018.

PLUS! We welcome articles on all topics, book reviews, conference notes, etc. etc.

KEYNOTES DEADLINE

Send articles to keynoteseditor@gmail.com by the **15th of the month**. All articles must be typed and up to 500 words. Send pictures as attachments; not in article.

RWA/NYC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Happy
Thanksgiving

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: NEVERTHELESS, SHE PERSISTED
BY KATE MCMURRAY



I'm one of those relentlessly positive people who doesn't like to give up on anything. I don't even officially not finish reading books; if something isn't clicking with me, I'll put it aside to finish later (whether or not I get back to it is an open question).

But someone asked me recently, "When should I give up on writing?"

As far as I'm concerned, you don't.

This industry is tough, no doubt. That was clear from the outset when I was a college senior applying for editorial assistant jobs, and it's clear now as I mull over how to better promote myself to sell more books. There's adversity—agents or editors leaving their jobs, publishers closing, the vagaries of the market—and there's rejection. Writing careers are too slow or too fast or too frustrating a great deal of the time.

And, heck, I got a rejection last week from a publisher who basically said, "this sub-genre hasn't been a big seller for us" which is frustrating because that's not something I can change or fix.

But I remember being twelve years old, browsing the shelves at my town's bookstore with my friends and fantasizing about a time when *my* name would be on the spines of one of those books.

So maybe we have to approach things a little differently.

Consider: Say you've gotten some rejections. How do you deal with those? Are you angry? Ashamed? Unfazed? How does getting a rejection letter make you feel?

Not to dredge up past pain. Rejection sucks. But it's a part of the industry. *Someone* will reject you at some point, be it a publisher who doesn't know what to do with your sub-genre or an agent who doesn't connect with your writing or a publisher who drops you due to lack of sales or a reader who leaves a negative review.

So do you take that rejection and consider it a reason to quit, or do you make it an opportunity?

Sometimes a book just doesn't connect with a reader for no real reason, but sometimes a book is rejected because it's not good enough... yet.

I'm of the philosophy that we can always learn new things. Whether you're unpublished or you've published 100 books, there are still new things to learn. I still read craft books and attend workshops because I want my next book to be even better than my last one.

So consider that rejected book. What's good about it? What can you fix? Is there a particular thing you can focus on fixing? Are there craft books about that thing? Or, is it time to put that manuscript in a drawer and start querying something else?

That's not failure, to be clear. It's the opposite, actually. Sometimes putting a manuscript aside (for now) and focusing on another project is the key to success. Sometimes making a difficult choice is just the thing you needed to do to get to the next level. Making changes, trying new things, continuing to learn, those are all the ingredients of a successful writing career. Persistence, in other words, is at the center of that success.

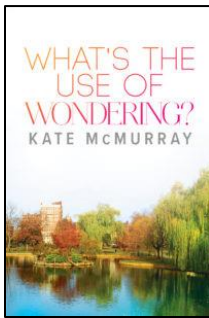
My advice: Hang in there. Keep trying. Persist.

Charlaine Harris has called her career a twenty-year overnight success story, which I love because it shows the value of continuing to pursue a career even if your first few books don't take off. Maybe you've got a Sookie Stackhouse book in you that you haven't written yet.

I've had some black moments. I've gotten rejection letters that made me think I was a talentless hack. But it never occurred to me to quit. Revise, yes. Try to make my writing better, of course. But never quit. I still think of my twelve-year-old self imagining my name on a book cover.

And I love writing. I want to write more. My career is just beginning.

And, hey, my sixty-six-year-old mother recently signed a book contract. It's never too late.♥



Kate McMurray is an award-winning author of gay romance and an unabashed romance fan. When she's not writing, she works as a nonfiction editor, dabbles in various crafts, and is maybe a tiny bit obsessed with baseball. She has served as President of Rainbow Romance Writers, the LGBT romance chapter of Romance Writers of America; and as Vice President of RWA/NYC. She lives in Brooklyn, NY. Visit her at www.katemcmurray.com.



I think new writers
are too worried
that it has all been
said before. Sure it
has, but not by *you*.
— Asha Dornfest

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **October Elections:** Since none of the roles are being challenged, the board secretary will submit a vote on behalf of the chapter. The new board will be:
 - LaQuette: President
 - Harper Miller: VP Communications
 - Alexis Daria: VP of Programs
 - Maria Cox: Treasurer
 - JN Welsh: Secretary
 - PAN and PRO Liaisons will be determined at a later date
- Critique group email has gone out but the group needs a few leaders to brainstorm with Kate and then run organize the group. A Google doc is attached in the email to collect information, thoughts and ideas. Respond to Kate if you are interested.
- NaNoWriMo: Ideas for a community for us during the month of November. CIMRA is hosting an RWA workshop. If you have any questions about joining contact LaQuette at laquette@novelsbylaquette.com
- The chapter discussed the Ripped Bodice Survey result about diversity. The discussion was lively and informative

Round Robin begins.

Chapter meeting adjourned at 12:42pm.♥

NOVEMBER SPEAKERS.... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

About Sourcebooks: Sourcebooks' mission is to reach as many people as possible with books that will enlighten their lives. Founded thirty years ago, Sourcebooks is the country's largest woman-owned independent publishing house. Last year, *Publishers Weekly* named Sourcebooks the #10 publisher in North America. Known for its sales and marketing, as well as a strong focus on building authors' careers, Sourcebooks publishes children's books, young adult, romance, mystery, trade fiction, non-fiction, memoir, gift books, and calendars. At Sourcebooks, we believe *books change lives*. www.sourcebooks.com.

About DG&B: Dystel, Goderich & Bourret LLC is a dynamic literary agency boasting an impressive client list and a sterling reputation. Led by Jane Dystel, who founded the company in 1994, our agents are smart, hardworking, compassionate, and focused on their authors' success. We are a full-service enterprise known for our business savvy and integrity. *We don't just sell books. We build careers*. www.dystel.com.♥



FROM CAT CLYNE

Cat Clyne
Editor, Sourcebooks Casablanca
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What I'm looking for: Romance. Stories with that perfect mix of heart, humor, and heat featuring unforgettable and diverse characters in all subgenres: paranormal romance, romantic suspense, contemporary romance, erotic romance, and historicals, especially Highlanders. Unusual, cross-genre, and outside-of-the-box projects are most welcome, like sci-fi and fantasy romance, issue-driven romantic stories with a strong feminist undercurrent, or romantic thrillers—surprise me! I'm looking for stories with a slam-dunk hook that communicates the “must-read” element in one to two sentences. I'm fond of damaged heroes and a well-written band of brothers bond. I'm always hungry for a strong (kick-ass) heroine readers will want to root for. Cool worldbuilding and great dialogue will definitely draw me in.

Recently Acquired:

- USA Today bestseller Amanda Bouchet's ENDEAVOR, a delicious genre-bending sci-fi/fantasy romance trilogy featuring the kick-ass Captain Tess Bailey, her crew of Robin Hood-like thieves, a vicious military general, and a mysterious stranger with ambiguous motivations.
- Annika Sharma's FIRST GENERATION LOVE, a cool contemporary romance series centered around three best friends of Indian descent who find love in the Big Apple.
- Diana Munoz Stewart's WARRIOR WOMEN, a unique, action-driven romantic suspense series in which a wealthy and lethal family of female vigilantes wages a covert war for social justice.
- Teri Anne Stanley's BIG CHANCE DOG RESCUE, a smart, heartwarming contemporary romance series with the winning combination of cowboys, ex-Army heroes, and rescued dogs, set in the fictional small town of Big Chance, Texas. ♥

NATIONAL NOVEL WRITING MONTH



It's NaNoWriMo Time!

Take the challenge – 50,000 words in 30 days.

Register at www.nanowrimo.org.

And start writing November 1. Good luck.♥

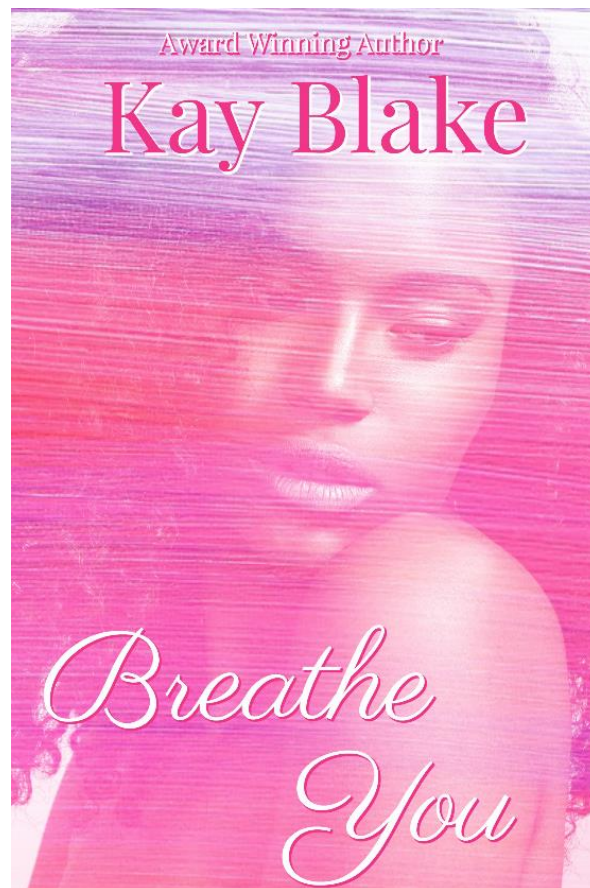
MEMBER ON THE SHELF

BREATHE YOU

by Kay Blake

(a novelette)

www.authorkayblake.wordpress.com



A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN: MY WRITING DEN!©
BY MARIA COX

This is a new monthly feature. Members are invited to share their writing room with us.



My Writing Den is my writing sanctuary; this small enclosure is my escape from the 'real' world.

Recently remodeled this space was designed with one purpose in mind: to be more conducive to writing. In 2018, I look forward to spending much more time in my 'den' crafting romantic, spicy love stories which are sure to delight readers.♥

Maria Cox is a PRO member of Romance Writers of America and also the Treasurer of RWA/NYC. Maria has also served as President of the Phoenix Writers Club.



Maria has been writing stories since she was a young girl. She picked up her first romance novel when she was just eleven years old and has loved the genre ever since. Maria writes sensual romance, stories that showcase strong, sassy, and sexy characters. When not writing fiction, Maria works as a technical writer. She lives in Queens, New York. Please visit her site www.mariacox.net and/or follow her on Twitter.

MONTHLY THEME: TIPS AND TRICKS FOR WRITING MORE, BETTER, FASTER

This month our members are talking about the pros and cons of writing faster.



**WRITING FAST DOESN'T PAY
BY JOAN RAMIREZ**

I don't think it pays to write faster. As a freelance journalist, I have learned the nuances of getting just the facts. It's worked for twenty-five years. However, it's a whole different ball game with novels, especially romance. Here are some tips I've cultivated along the way. While I respect members' rights to disagree, do think about them:



1. Read out loud--This was told to me by a dear friend when I started writing children's books. It makes sense because it gives you an insight into the key areas:

- a. Characters' voices
- b. Plot
- c. Tone
- d. Pacing

2. I know we live in a technical world but creativity can't be rushed. If you have the ability to edit online, great. I have to sit with a red pen and mark up my paper copy. Again, whatever works for you.

3. The only way to write better is to get a handle on your plot. Outlining, to the depth that fits your plot and comfort level allows you to see the action. I'm visual. I need this to follow my characters in the story regarding goal and motivation.

4. Put the manuscript away. Most of us don't have the luxury of writing full-time so we have to take our writing moments as they come. The tendency is to get something down and for the sake of our sanity, especially if you're a weekend writer, get something out. If you're one hundred percent sure

that what you're composing is polished like a diamond (and diamonds are a girl's best friend, though with me, it's my husband), then go for it. In speaking to many established authors, I've found this isn't the case. They put their work away for at least a month before giving it a second go round.

5. To write faster, you need to edit slower. Take the time to do as someone very successful once said to me, "be in error and correct by editing the heck out of your draft."

There you have it. The rest is up to you.♥

Joan Ramirez is an elementary school teacher, has published three nonfiction books, and is currently revising her first in what she hopes will be a historical romantic suspense series.

THE NEED FOR SPEED – ANOTHER POV

BY ALICE ORR



Being an indie author, I hear a lot about the need for speed. They say there are three major rules for success as an indie. Write in a popular genre. Write a series. Publish every 3 to 4 months. I've got the first two covered. Romantic Suspense is a popular sub-genre of a very popular genre. I've also already published five novels in the Riverton Road Romantic Suspense series.

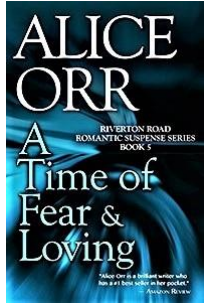
I was okay with the timing rule for a short while. A *WRONG WAY HOME* – Book 1 launched, and *A YEAR OF SUMMER SHADOWS* – Book 2 came out four months later. But that was an uncomfortable stretch for me. To accomplish it, I did a stupid thing. I rushed both manuscripts straight from my editor's hands into production and didn't do the final crucial read-through myself.

I've been around longer than enough to know there are edits only the author's eyes will see. I rushed it anyway, because I didn't want to commit the alleged deadly sin of letting too long pass between published books. I'm now having those first two books re-edited, and my eyes are definitely on the page this time.

I've also committed another sin that tolls the death knell to publication frequency. I'm guilty of wanting and having a personal life, complete with family and friends and even some fun. In a previous incarnation, I set those things aside to be a literary agent, all business, all the time. Now I'm experiencing a case of *Been There Done That*. I'm just not feeling the need for speed in a race toward success.

I know this contradicts my having once told hundreds of writers in my workshops to be Warriors on Behalf of Their Careers. I still stand by the truth of that advice. All the same, I've decided not to renew my personal fast-lane pass. Maybe I've fulfilled my required quota of attempts, some successful, to set the world on fire. Maybe it's time, at least for me, to seek another kind of success. The kind that possibly doesn't involve being a career warrior, or a road warrior either.

Consequently, NaNoWriMo isn't right for me, and perhaps not for some others among us as well. The rest, I wish the very best, including a super dose of Godspeed.♥



Alice Orr's latest novel is *A TIME OF FEAR & LOVING – Riverton Road Romantic Suspense Book 5*. Connect with Alice at all these locations:

www.aliceorrbooks.com; <http://facebook.com/aliceorrwriter/>;

<http://twitter.com/AliceOrrBooks/>; <http://goodreads.com/aliceorr/>;

<http://pinterest.com/aliceorrwriter/>;

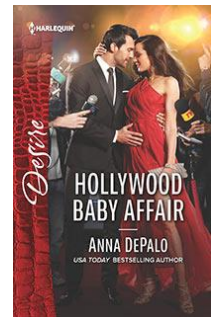
TIPS AND TRICKS FOR WRITING MORE, BETTER, FASTER

BY ANNA DEPALO



As far as writing faster, what's worked for me recently is this: the Scrivener app installed on my cell phone and a Belkin Universal keyboard. I switched from Word to Scrivener software a few years ago. I love the way I can now color-code scenes for POV and move them around simply by dragging and dropping files. And when the Scrivener app came out recently, I was all over it for the portability. No more having to open an email or Evernote file that I then had to import into the correct spot in my manuscript (though I sometimes still do this). The Belkin Universal keyboard has sometimes been temperamental interfacing with my iPhone software when it gets upgraded, but currently still functions well. I bought this particular keyboard because it works with multiple types of devices, and its open cover serves as a built-in stand. The keyboard is so light, thin and small, I can drop it into my purse and forget about it. I even bought a felt carrying case for it. Now, when I'm stuck in the car, waiting for one kid or another to be done with soccer practice, I can easily add to my WIP.♥

Anna DePallo is the USA Today best-selling author of more than a dozen romance novels. Her most recent release is *HOLLYWOOD BABY AFFAIR*, the second in *The Serengetti Brothers* series. You can find Anna online at www.annadepalo.com, where you can sign up for her newsletter, www.facebook.com/anna.depaloauthor, www.facebook.com/AnnaDePaloBooks and twitter.com/Anna_DePallo.



KEEP SANE, WRITE WELL, AND MAKE YOUR MONTH COUNT!**BY RUBY SCALERA**

First of all, congrats! Your interest in doing National Novel Writing Month, and your efforts so far, show an excitement for writing and storytelling and a willingness to rise to the challenge of writing a whole book in a month!

NaNo is *definitely* a challenge, but whether or not you meet your personal word count goal, the experience is a great teacher and the camaraderie and excitement that come along with a month dedicated to writing are inspirational enough to make you want to continue all year long! I've completed NaNo four years in high school and three years in college. My senior year I came in at 46,500 and I'm still kicking myself, but that's okay. I'm currently working on two manuscripts, and decided not to take on the challenge this year, but I want to share some of my tips I learned the hard way!

PLAN YOUR STORY:

I know it's a bit late for this one, since we're already a week into the NaNo challenge, but this piece of advice is relevant to anyone looking to binge write a story, or if you want to take a step back and try an outline now. While many authors consider themselves 'pantsers' – as in 'fly by the seat of your pants', it absolutely makes the challenge more difficult.

Without a general understand of your story, it's definitely harder to achieve word count. More importantly, you're less likely to end up with a project you actually like and feels complete. Even a simple knowledge of where your book is supposed to end up and how you're going to get there is helpful in ensuring a good finished first draft and a more enjoyable NaNo experience.

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE WORD COUNT:

Lies! I hear you shout, as you jump from the chair. *Conspiracy, blasphemy, lies! Lies! Lies!* Okay, part yes and part no. It's up to you to decide if you're doing NaNo as a way of completing a challenge (and totally gaining bragging rights!) or if you actually plan to send the book out after it's done – with edits, of course! If it's all about the WC, then that's fine! Hit your 1667 a day and enjoy the ride, but if you're trying to make a book – and eventually turn that into a *book* then it's better to think of NaNo as a tool to reach that end, rather than the be all and end all.

There's a lot to be said for a rapid first draft – there's far less room to get caught up in particulars, and we all know the editing process is really where the magic is done. But you should be taking this November to write the book you want to write and be held accountable for it. I have to confess, I've never done a damn thing with any of my NaNo stories. But! That doesn't mean you can't – determine what NaNo is about for *you* and then go from there.

TELL YOUR FRIENDS!

Tell your friends. Tell your family. Tell your neighbors, your pets, the weird guy you went to chess club with. Tell *everyone*. The more people you tell, the more people you have watching you and cheering you on. In my opinion, the greatest and most special element of NaNo is that it holds writers accountable for their writing. It says, you have a story to tell and you better damn well tell it. Post



your updates on Facebook or Twitter, start a NaNo blog, literally comment under this article when you reach your word goals. Whatever it takes to spread the word of your endeavors will help to keep you on track and give you an even greater audience to celebrate with! (Plus, you can prove all the haters wrong!)

AND MAKE NEW ONES!

I can't tell you how jealous I am of the growing NaNo culture and all of the cool perks that come along with it – I *so* wish I had one of the Facebook filters. Even without all the merch and fun stuff, however, the site itself does a great job to help connect authors and participants locally and online. Joining other NaNo writers in their journey, either in person or in online forums and social media, is a great way to give and gain support for your challenge and to potentially make long-term writer friends. While the goal is ultimately to reach 50,000, remember that this month is all about the writer – you! And that includes joining communities that inspire and help you on your journey.

KEEP UP WITH WC:

I know I just said that it's not all about the word count, and I stand by it! But obviously word count is a part of the bigger picture – fine, the main focus of the bigger picture. Everyone has different ways of reaching their word count, but I will say from personal experience: Do not fall behind. Anyone who falls behind, gets left behind. Have I spent the last weekend of November holed up in my room furiously pounding out 20,000 words in three days? You bet your ass I have. It got so bad that towards the end of high school my parents would stop talking to me during the last week of November. I was a rabid monster – a shell of a writer who had lost her way.

Of course, there will be days when you can't write – and days when you write more than you mean to! It's not going to be the same for thirty straight days in a row, and that's fine. But always remember to check what your daily word count is supposed to, and do your best to keep up with it. Otherwise you're in for a really lonely Thanksgiving. Which brings me to my next point...

DON'T FORGET THANKSGIVING:

I know that not succeeding in my final run at NaNo three years ago was my own fault. I do honestly think that the fun wore off and I was ready to be done before the project was. That being said, Thanksgiving had *something* to do with. That year the holiday fell right at the end of the month. I'm talking 28, 29, 30. These are the days you're supposed to be cracking your knuckles and happily sprinting past the finish line, not sneaking peeks at the laptop from behind your plate of stuffing and feeling guilty about it. (Come on, there are way more things to feel guilty about on Thanksgiving...)

Of course, it's just one day, but most of the time it includes travel, family, preparation and school breaks. It's so easy to lose track of time and find yourself ten or twelve thousand words behind just at the end of the month. Prepare for it. If you're traveling home, write on the bus ride. If you're cooking for the whole family, essentially write ten thousand words extra the week before, because you just won't have the time. Thanksgiving has felled many a valiant NaNo-er. Don't let it get you too.

THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE FUN, DAMN IT: Oh, baby. There is a point. You're not there yet. Still fresh-faced and excited, to you NaNo still has the shine of a brand new challenge. But give it a week, maybe 10 days, and you'll feel the strain. Your head hurts. Your inspiration has all dried up and everyone you've ever met has staunchly refused to speak to you about your book until the month is over. This is this 20 mile mark in your writing marathon. The finish is close, and you can hold the hell on.



But in all truth, be nice to yourself. If you feel as though the walls of life are closing in around you, set a different goal. If you get sick or a big project comes in or you need to do major renovations on the house, give yourself a break. NaNo isn't do or die. It's a way to help you achieve better writing habits and reach for higher writing goals, but it doesn't help at all if you burn out. You need to find the happy medium of determination and kindness to keep yourself on track but continue to enjoy the challenge. It *is* supposed to be fun, though it doesn't always feel that way.

AFTER NANO:

There are two things to keep in mind after you've completed your challenge, whether hitting your personally goals or setting yourself up for more success in the future.

EDITING IS SO HOT RIGHT NOW:

Someone once told me about the incredible amount of submissions they get as an editor during December, and how they're all *awful*. Well, obviously. You just wrote a goddamned book in the amount of time it takes most people to read one. The first draft is pretty much guaranteed to be shit, in fact, it's kind of the point. But before sending out your beloved child into the cruel waters of rejection-landia, by God, you have to edit it.

Not only will seriously digging in and making major and minor changes help your chances in actually getting accepted by an over-exhausted submissions editor, but it will make you want to keep working on the book. For the most part, once we finish NaNo, we never want to look at the damn thing again, and that's a shame. Start the editing process right away – if your ultimate goal is a book – and keep up with it. Your story – and you – should be celebrated!

NANOWRI-LIFE:

Forgive me for that title. The point I want to make here is that National Novel Writing Month doesn't require a fancy word counter and a Facebook banner and the support of a social media nation. You can do NaNo on your own time – literally whenever and however you want. If your goal is a short story and you want it written quickly, maybe make a Personal Short Story Writing Week. If you know December is a lot quieter than November, write your 50,000 story then, instead. NaNo inspires us to create and pushes us to our limits, but it certainly doesn't ask us to stay within the lines. Find the best way to make NaNo work for you, so you can continue to love writing and hopefully find the kind of success you're looking for.

If this is your first year doing NaNo or your tenth, whether you've already hit 50,000 or modified your word count to fit your daily schedule, I am so incredibly proud of you. National Novel Writing Month is a challenge. It is so much harder than you ever think it's going to be, no matter how many times you've done it in the past. Committing and opening your mind to the wonderful world of other writers and supporters that make the NaNo community what it is is reason enough to be proud of yourself.

So chin high and computer charged. You've got three weeks to go and kick some story ass. I can't wait to see where you end up.♥

Note: Literally Written Kitten and Write or Die are the only reasons I ever succeeded at reaching my NaNo goals. Check them out and leave your resources below!

Ruby Scalera is the author of several works of erotic and romantic fiction in both the contemporary and historical genres, and enjoys pushing the limits of freedom, feminism, and fun in her stories. She has been an avid writer for many years, and recently moved back to her home state of New Jersey from Boston, after completing her education in journalism and creative writing. In her free time, she loves to travel, and spent a semester abroad living in a 14th century castle in the Netherlands. When not exploring the world, she likes dreaming up stories, eating spicy food, driving fast cars, and talking to strangers.

TIPS & TRICKS FOR CRUSHING WORD COUNT GOALS

BY ALEXIS DARIA



For the first time ever, I'm on deadline, so I'm putting everything I've learned about writing fast and writing a lot to the test. **In June 2017, I wrote 22 days out of the month and added 62,298 words to the Project Roommates manuscript before hitting "The End" on June 30th.** Since a few people have commented on my word counts, rather than blaming it on "desperation" and discounting all the research and work I've put into learning how to increase my output, I made a list of tools, suggestions, and resources to share.

As with all writing advice, take what works for you and junk the rest.

KNOW YOUR BEST WRITING TIME

For me, that's early mornings. It's quiet. No emails. Noisy kids upstairs aren't up yet. By hitting my word count first thing in the morning, I approach it fresh and rested, and it's out of the way so I'm not worried about it for the rest of the day. Know what works for you and stick to that time. If early mornings are your thing, check out #5amwritersclub on Twitter. Bonus tip: Make sure you're getting enough sleep!

FIND A BUDDY

Having a virtual writing buddy to check in with is a godsend. This time around, my buddy was Sarah Morgenthaler, fellow 2017 Golden Heart finalist. We messaged each other when we woke up, declared our writing goals, and got to work. We checked in periodically, and the other Rebelles joined in and cheered us on throughout the day. I can't overstate the value of a supportive writing community.

UNINTERRUPTED WRITING TIME

When I'm deep into the story and someone interrupts me, it takes extra time to get back into it. Knowing I can sit down for a length of time and not have anyone interrupt me is invaluable. I bought

a membership at my local writing space so I could achieve this, and it has made a huge difference in my output. Carve out your writing time and protect it from interruptions.



AN OUTLINE

I know this is a contentious subject, but this is what works for *me*. When I have a limited amount of time, knowing exactly what I have to write when I sit down helps the words fly. I'm currently using an outline devised from *Story Genius* by Lisa Cron. There's still a lot of flexibility in this outline, but having the emotional arc planned out made it easier to write the story quickly.

A DEADLINE

Nothing like a deadline to light a fire under your ass. Some people find them stressful. For me, nothing motivates me more than knowing someone is expecting me to turn something in, or that I'll lose an opportunity if I'm not finished in time. Sure, I'm stressed out, but it makes it easier to turn off everything else and focus solely on meeting the deadline. No room for procrastination or self-induced writing drama.

A DIARY

"Qualitative Data," I call it, thanks to Monica Leonelle (*Write Better, Faster*). It's a place where I can complain, brainstorm, celebrate, and write about how the writing is going. I was shocked by how much I like having this extra doc in my Scrivener file, and I update it at the beginning and end of each writing session.

TEA

I go off caffeine every so often, but for this book, I started each day with a cup of earl grey. Not for the caffeine, but because I like the flavor. I didn't realize I was hooked until I had two horrible days where I lazed around feeling awful, and didn't write a single word. Those happened to be days where I didn't have any tea. I'll go off caffeine again soon, but for now, I'm not going to mess with what works. Bonus tip: drink lots of water!

A FUN WAY OF RECORDING MY WORD COUNT

Some people use stickers or spreadsheets. I used to keep a spreadsheet that logged my writing sprints, similar to the Pomodoro method. Now I log my daily word count in a simple spreadsheet, and on big word count days, I draw a progress bar to color in every 500 words. I also log my word count every half hour in the notebook, so I know how quickly I'm writing. Each little colored rectangle is like a fun reward.

TURN OFF SOCIAL MEDIA

Very important. I don't think I need to explain why. Airplane mode is your friend.

A PLAYLIST

I choose songs that match the tone of the story, or have lyrics that speak to the themes or the characters. Sometimes when I'm struggling to get started, I'll realize I'm not listening to the right playlist. When I switch, it helps me get my head back into the story.



WHITE NOISE

Since I'm using a communal writing space, I keep a white noise machine on the desk (provided by the venue) so I'm not worrying about every little noise I make, or any noises outside of my own headphones. I also listen to a white noise app called Relax Melodies when I'm really trying to focus.

DRAGON

Dragon is a powerful speech-to-text software. Alas, I can't use it at my writing space, but this is a good tool for improving writing speed and saving your hands. I especially like it for dictating stuff like blog posts, or transcribing handwritten notes.

NANOWRIMO

I've participated in National Novel Writing Month since 2004, so I have years of practice writing 50,000 words (or more) in one month and logging the results. Thanks to NaNo, I know how fast I can write without sacrificing quality.

TIME

This is probably the trickiest factor, but it played a big role in my June word count. Through a combination of luck and concerted effort, I've managed to set up my life so I have time to create, and the mental and physical energy to crank out the words at this rate. Not only that, but for the last two weeks of June, my freelance work was minimal, so I made the most of the free time and finished the first draft. You don't find time to write, you make time, so do your best in this area (as much as your life allows) and then actually stick to it.

RESOURCES

These are some of the books that helped me increase my writing output.

- Write Better, Faster: How To Triple Your Writing Speed and Write More Every Day (Growth Hacking For Storytellers 1) by Monica Leonelle
- Writing Faster FTW by L.A. Witt
- 2k to 10k: Writing Faster, Writing Better, and Writing More of What You Love by Rachel Aaron

It does take practice to increase your writing speed and word count, but there are tools that will help, like the ones listed above. I've combined them into a situation that works for me, but I recommend putting some effort into figuring out what works best for you. Always be on the lookout for little tweaks you can make to your process, especially since it might change over time. Now, I write for a few hours in the morning, and focus on other book-related tasks or freelance jobs the rest of the day. I still need to work on actually using airplane mode more often (why is it so hard for me to unplug?!) and fitting in trips to the gym, but each book I write is an opportunity to fine-tune my process. What about you? What tips do you have for meeting word count goals? ♥

Alexis Daria is a contemporary romance author, artist, and native New Yorker. Her debut, TAKE THE LEAD, is a 2017 Golden Heart® finalist. DANCE WITH ME (Dance Off #2) will be out 12/12/17. She loves social media, and you can find her live-tweeting her favorite TV shows at @alexisdaria, or talking about writing and books on her blog at alexisdaria.com.





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To be eligible for General PAN Membership: RWA General or Honorary members in good standing should have earned at least \$1,000 on a single novel or novella that meets the definition of Romance Fiction.

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To help members reach the next level, PRO focuses on the business side of writing rather than craft. This program is available to any active General or Honorary member who: (1) is not PAN-eligible and (2) has one complete original work of romance fiction of at least 20,000 words, or multiple complete original works of romance fiction which combine for a total of at least 20,000 words.♥

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