DOING WHAT IN A MONTH? ARE YOU CRAZY?

You’re thinking about signing up for one of those writing challenges where you write a boat load of fiction in a month: StoryADay.org, NaNoWriMo, ScriptFrenzy, Poem ADay etc. You want to make your writing a priority and this seems like just the thing to push you ahead. You know you’ll be happier – possibly saner – if you do.

SO, WHY ARE YOU STALLING?

*Because it’s scary, that’s why!*

To succeed with your writing you’re going to have to make changes, take action, wrestle with writer’s block, and convince the people in your life that yes, it’s worth putting in this much effort for something that makes you happy, even if no-one has paid you to do it...yet.

Taking action is always hard, whether it’s making a sales call or leaping off the dock into the cool blue water.

BUT taking action becomes much, much easier if you have:

- A clear picture of how this could **rock your world** (for the better)
- A mentor or **role models** who show you that this **really can be done**
- A **toolkit and map** to keep you on track after you’ve taken that first big step.

I want you to take 30 minutes, all at once, in a quiet place. Go through this worksheet. It’s going to help you figure out:

WHY YOU WANT TO SIGN UP FOR THIS CRAZY CREATIVE CHALLENGE

...and what might happen if you do. You’re going to be allowed to admit your biggest dreams and have fun with them. And you’re going to find out that even ‘failing’ can be a Good Thing.

WAYS TO FEED YOUR MUSE

What inspires you and what do you hate? Capture these important ideas here in this workbook. Reviewing them will help propel you into your writing every day, and get your brain into that ‘writers space’ as soon as you sit down.

PRACTICAL TOOLS TO HELP YOU WORK

How will you write? Where will you write? What do you do when you run into roadblocks? Thinking all these things through now will free you to just write when the challenge begins.

READY? THEN LET’S BEGIN.
PART I: WHAT IF? DAYDREAMS OF SUCCESS

OK, so daydreaming isn’t really going to get you there, but it’s a powerful way to figure out what you want and how much you want it. If you don’t have a destination in mind, you’re just wandering aimlessly, and that is hard to sustain. Having a clear sense of the path, the destination and the potential pitfalls will make you 1000 times more likely to succeed.¹

Also, it’s great to come back and read these notes on a day when it’s hard to write, to remind yourself why you are putting yourself through all this torture. This is your proof against giving up, your armor, and your holy grail.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU “SUCCEED”, IF YOU MEET YOUR GOAL?

How would you feel? What could you do? And what could you finally stop doing?

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¹ (1. Statistics not scientifically calculated.)
WHAT IF YOU “FAIL”, DON’T MEET THE GOAL?

How will you feel? What actual consequences will it have for your life? Be honest about what will happen if you fail to finish.

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WHAT COULD YOU GAIN FROM NOT FINISHING?

Would you really be a “failure”? Or would you have a partial draft? Will you have a clearer sense of your style? Will you have a better working method? Will you have a clearer sense of what you need to do next time to create projects you want to stick with? Is it worth risking failure in order to gain these things?

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WHAT COULD YOU GAIN FROM FINISHING?

Now that you've faced the prospect of 'failing', think again about what you could gain from 'success'. Self-esteem? A first draft? Several stories you could polish and submit? The knowledge that you can make writing a part of your daily life?

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PART II: GET INSPIRED

Sitting down to write every day for a month (or more) is going to take huge reserves of creative energy. You’re going to need to be able to draw from a well of inspiration and it’s more than OK to look outside yourself for that inspiration. But in the midst of a creative challenge, you’re going to be pressed for time. You need to take a quick hit, get to your word count and get on with your life.

This section is your creative well. Come back to it often and refresh yourself. This is where your role models live, where your mentors are, and where you remind yourself what you love. It will fuel you for the journey and best of all, there’s an inexhaustible supply. Dive in.

WHAT TRIGGERS YOUR INSPIRATION TO WRITE?

Which books, movies, music, art, TV show, activity makes you jump up and run to your desk, burning to write? A favorite novel? A book you hate and can’t believe someone published? A piece of art or music that goes perfectly with your theme or hero? Note them here, so you can quickly read a few pages/watch a few scenes if you’re having trouble getting started with your writing.

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WHAT DO YOU LOVE IN YOUR FAVORITE TALES?

Witty dialogue? Heroic characters? Descriptive prose? Realism? Escapism? Fast pacing? Slow descriptive prose? When your writing slows down, it’s probably because you’ve strayed from the things you love. Capture all the things you admire, here. Come back and check it out when you feel your energy flagging. Are you still writing what you love?

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WHAT DO YOU ABSOLUTELY HATE IN A CREATIVE WORK?

What enrages you when you see it? These are the topics, techniques and character traits you must avoid. In fact, you are going to show the world these things have no place in fiction. You are writing the antidote to the things you hate. And if you catch yourself falling into using them, that’s a huge signpost that you are on the wrong track and you need to find your way back to the true path of your story. Refer back to this often.

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WHAT KIND OF EMOTION DO YOU WANT TO ELICIT IN YOUR READERS?


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HOW WILL YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HEAR FROM READERS THAT YOU HAVE ELICITED THE RESPONSE YOU WERE AIMING FOR?

This could really be in the “What If” section, but I put it here, to remind you of the importance of tone. Don’t worry about the unknown reader too much. Imagine the one person who always understands you, reading this book and write for them. Imagine that they get it, every nuance. How does that make you feel?

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DON’T YOU WANT TO DIVE IN TO WRITING NOW

Enjoying this workbook? Read more at http://storyaday.org
PART III: GET PREPARED

It’s great to be motivated and it’s important to be inspired, but if you don’t have the tools you need to write every day, then the rest is just wishful thinking.

Use this section to figure out how, when and where you will write and what you will do when the going gets tough (hint: the answer is not “give up”!)

WHAT ARE YOU PREPARED TO SACRIFICE TO FIND TIME TO WRITE?

I’m not going to lie to you. If you’re going to make time to write a novel, something’s got to give. What will you put aside, to realize your dreams? One hour-long TV show and half an hour on Facebook/Twitter? Can you get up 30 minutes early? Stay up a bit later? Can your spouse make dinner a few nights a week? Is now the right time to train your kids to load the dishwasher/do their own laundry/manage their own homework assignments? Are you willing to be more organized in your everyday life (put your keys on a hook by the door every time you come in, and regain that 15 minutes you usually spend searching for them?). Do you need to gossip with the gals at lunchtime?

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WHAT WILL YOUR STRATEGY BE IF YOUR PLOT/CHARACTERS START TO WANDER FROM YOUR PLAN/OUTLINE?

Whether or not you’re an outliner, armed with index cards, you must have a sense of where you think your characters and plotlines are going. But frequently, characters wander off and start doing their own thing. What will you do if that happens? If you are an outliner, can you build some flexibility into your outline? If you hate outlines, can you admit that you might need to make some notes so you don’t completely lose track of the other things that are happening while your character goes off on a side quest? What will you do?

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WHAT ARE YOUR BEST IDEAS FOR BREAKING A BLOCK/SLUMP?

After a week or two of intense writing you’re going to find it hard to keep the juices flowing. Refer back to the first section (the “What if”) to remind you why you’re doing this. That will help, but wishful thinking is not the only tool available to you. You need practical ways to shake things up. Will you try writing standing up? On paper instead of on the computer? Will you call your voicemail and tell it your story today? Act it out in front of a video camera? Take a walk? Ask for help? What will you do?

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HOW, WHERE AND WHEN WILL YOU WRITE?

How do you write and what do you need to do to make sure you always have your tools ready? Need to commit to charging your mobile device when you go to bed each night? Do you ‘need’ to leave your favorite pens everywhere you might be during the day? Will you need a voice recorder? A notebook in your backpack? Your laptop? Can you write in short ‘sprints’ if you can’t carve out an hour or two? Will outlining/planning help?

Picture yourself working during the challenge and note down all the practical things that will help, or any changes you need to make.

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Congratulations! You’ve gathered together some powerful tools to propel yourself to success in your writing life!

So what’s next? Turn the page.
WHAT’S NEXT?

By this point you should either be inspired and raring to go, or sitting there with a lump in the bottom of your stomach because you know you don’t want to put yourself through this.

WHAT IF I DON’T WANT TO DO IT?

If you have taken the time to go through this workbook and now the idea of a month-long creative writing challenge sounds like absolute torture then

Don’t do it!

Just because your friends are all signing up doesn’t mean it’s right for you. So don’t torture yourself. Don’t set yourself up for failure. You can still use all the things you learned in this workbook to power your writing, but you just have to set your own schedule. Maybe you can find a community or writing class that’s going at a slower pace, and join that. Maybe you’ll just go it alone.

The beautiful thing about the writing life is that there is no ‘right’ way to do it. Be yourself.

WHAT IF I’M READY TO SIGN UP NOW!

If you’re ready, you’re ready and no-one can hold you back. Refer back to this workbook often as you go through the program. It will help you short-circuit the doubts and climb out of the slumps without wasting precious writing time.

The StoryADay.org newsletter will keep coming out regularly, full of tips and inspiration. Watch your inbox.

GOOD LUCK!

OH, AND ONE MORE THING...
ENJOYED THIS WORKBOOK? I’D LOVE TO KNOW

After you’ve finished the workbook and have discovered your secrets to the writing life, I’d love it if you would email me your favorites. I’m always excited to hear how other writers are getting inspired. You can reach me at mailto: julie@storyaday.org or come to the blog and leave a comment: http://storyaday.org/blog

if you know other writers who could use a kick in the pants, why not share this workbook with them? You can email them the PDF or send them to StoryADay.org where they can sign up for the Creativity Lab mailing list and become part of the “in crowd” (which we are, right?).

And thanks!

Julie Duffy, StoryADay.org