



COFW

*Professionals, Writers & Friends Perfecting the
Happily Ever After*

April 2021

Issue 4

Welcome to Central Ohio Fiction Writers Newsletter

Contents

1. COFW Basics: Contact and Meeting Info. Dues. Media Connections
2. May Meeting
3. COFW Fiction Plotters
4. April Minutes
5. April Recap: If It's Not Working, Try Something Else: Kate McMurray's Better, Stronger, Faster First Drafts
6. Upcoming Releases
7. Award Winning News
8. COFW Magic Spreadsheet
9. The Power of Setting Goals

Newsletter Editor: Rachel Dye

Central Ohio Fiction Writers (COFW) <http://cofwevents.org> is a non-profit professional association for romance writers and a local chapter of the Romance Writers of America® (RWA) organization that offers monthly meetings. Since 1987, COFW has promoted excellence in fiction writing, encouraging writers to grow and gain knowledge in their craft. Members provide a networking system to share knowledge and support the goal of becoming published.

2021 Leadership Board

President: Bernie Miller

Secretary: Shari Heinrich

Treasurer: Michelle Orloff

Non-Board Positions

Newsletter Editor: Rachel Dye

Programs Chair: Vacant

Education Chair: Vacant

Social Media Chair: Vacant

Incentives Coordinator: Vacant

Ignite the Flame Contest Chair: Vacant

Monthly Meetings Facility Coordinator: Vacant

Equipment Inventory Coordinator: Vacant

Meetings

First "Teen" Saturday of the Month. Social: Noon to 12:30. Business: 12:30. Guest Presentation: 1:30. Location: Check www.cofwevents.org

Dues

New Members: \$35

Renewal before January 31: \$30. After January 31: \$35.

- Dues run January to December
- Membership with Romance Writers of America required.

Follow COFW

Twitter <https://twitter.com/COFWriters>

Facebook: <https://facebook.com/COFWriters>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/cofwriters/>

Closed Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/177462723049177/>

Central Ohio Fiction Writers

P.O. Box 24254 Dayton, OH 45424

Next Meeting: April 17, 2021; How to Growth Hack a Bestseller (One-Day Workshop)

Growth what? Growth hacking is one of the hottest buzzwords in marketing today, responsible for start-up viral sensations like Dropbox, Instagram, Facebook, and the original Hotmail. Few people realize that to guarantee success, the principles of growth hacking must be implemented long before a product is released. But how can an author apply these techniques when writing/self-editing/marketing their novel to better ensure a hit? Join publisher and editor Liz Pelletier as she demonstrates a new and innovative way to develop, write, edit, and market a book with the greatest chance of making your next release a best seller. **This is an advanced workshop but even new writers will find it useful!**

Business meeting at 12:30 pm, Discussion at 1:30 pm

Our meeting will be held via Zoom. The password will be posted on the Central Ohio Fiction Writers Group page which can be accessed via the Romance Writers of America website under the Forums tab.

COFW Fiction Plotters Meet Monthly - East

Need a boost with a story idea that has yet to see words on a page? Can't get your protagonist out of a hole you've written her into? Not sure whether the antagonist is antag-ging enough? Consider stopping by the COFW Fiction Plotters group. We meet the first Wednesday of the month at 10 a.m. at the Panera Bread in Taylor Square in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, 43068.

If you have questions, contact:

Andrea McConnell: fyrefly93@gmail.com

Saralee Etter: saralee_etter@yahoo.com

COFW Fiction Plotters Meet Monthly - West

All the same fun as above but located in Huber Heights. We meet the second Monday of the month at 6:30 pm at the Panera Bread off I-70 exit 36.

If you have questions contact:

Jeanne Estridge: jeanneestridge@gmail.com

Rachel Dye: juliette.r.hyland@gmail.com

Agenda, Meeting 04/17/2021, Zoom only

Central Ohio Fiction Writers

The mission of the Central Ohio Fiction Writers is to promote excellence in romantic fiction, help writers become published, and establish careers in the writing field.

12:00 Networking

12:30 Call Business Meeting to Order

Feel free to adjust your names on the Zoom so we know what to call you all

Welcome Visitors & Round Table: introduction of members and visitors. None done, as we all know each other.

Present for business meeting are:

- Janice Beckett, writing as Kimberly Becket
- Becky Barker
- Rachel Dye, writing as Juliette Hyland
- Shari Heinrich
- Sandy Kachurek
- Bernie Miller, writing as Jordan Riley Swan
- Michelle Orloff
- Linda Rice
- Erin Novotny, writing as Tobi Doyle
- Stacy McKittrick
- Karin Shah
- Jeanne Estridge
- Janet Ciccone
- Julia Blaine (guest)

Works in Progress

- Erin, writing as Tobi, May 29th, her second Garza security book comes out. She's joined a Facebook group, and she's using AI to give her characters different voices. And will sell it for visually impaired readers who have PDF reader. Working on prequel for the story, and will be using it for marketing, using ideas from "Wide for the Win" a Facebook group about marketing: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/556186621558858>
- Rachel Dye, writing as Juliet Hyland—Also using Wide for the Win for marketing. Also waiting to hear back from Harlequin on her synopsis
- Janice Beckett, writing as Kim Beckett—45K words on her 5th Horses Heal Hearts book. This is her last book under contract with Soulmate (and reminder, get your 5th book pin! Said a member)
- Shari Heinrich, editing her YA shifter book *Chihuahua Tales*, D2.
- Becky Barker—editing the audio book, a couple chapters at a time.
- Karin—last book in Chimera Chronicles, #7, comes out 4/21; and has started a new trilogy, a little more mystery focused. Will be paranormal romance. Plus moving back to Rochester, NY.

Incentive Program

- Michelle—good news, Vivian finalist, "Most Anticipated Romance" category

- Shari—did a freelance 650-word story for a grade 3 textbook; got “Honorable Mention #2” in the New York City Midnight Short Story Challenge (the contest she does annually), so she did not advance to round 2. She’s targeting *Cosmic Roots & Eldritch Tales* (6 cents/word, no simultaneous submissions)—1st 2 days of each month, so May; if rejected soon enough, then New Myths (6/1-7/31 subs, 1.5 cents/word)
- Stacy, kindle Unlimited, she put *My Sunny Vampire* there. Bernie says it’s a lot of fun when you refresh the page and realize the count for pages read is rising.

Minutes from March Meeting—Minutes are accepted as posted in the newsletter.

Treasurer's Report

Michelle shared the March treasurer’s report ahead of the meeting, on the COFW loop of RWA. This is a recap of the high points:

At the end of the month our current assets were as follows:

- Checking = \$6,972.28
- PayPal = \$250.00
- Available cash = \$7222.28
- Balance in the Perseverance Fund = \$1,519.90

Changes to account balances this month:

- Expenses of \$100 for March meeting speaker.

Membership for March remained steady at 31 members.

Reported by Michelle Orloff, COFW Treasurer

Programs Report

Program Chair Jeanne Estridge, assisted by Shari Heinrich

- May—Growth Hacking a Bestseller, Liz Pelletier. 1:30-5:30 pm, 4-hour workshop. Cannot be recorded; we cannot charge for it, but we can encourage non-members to join. Shari will begin outreach to writing facebook groups. We need to get social media going. Who can create a graphic if Shari provides details?
- June—Scrivener, Gwen Henandez
- July—Beth Barany, Using Brain Science to Finish your Novel. She’s charging the non-profit rate, so we cannot charge any attendees.
- August—The Case for Diversity and Inclusion, Jordyn Blanson (this is a presentation on diversity, equity, inclusion, and access)
- September—Trope Your Way to a First Draft, Rachel Dye.
- October—Sexual Tensions, Jeffe Kennedy
- November—Priscilla Oliveras has tentatively agreed to do our November presentation and given a list of possible subjects. Bernie will be putting them on Facebook poll and then sharing the link through the RWA forums. \$250. She has emailed topics to Bernie.

Shari Update: Roshanda Platt, Visibility is Power/Social Media, wanted \$3000 for 2 hours, so we politely explained that’s well beyond our budget. Shari will share some of her links to the Loop, as Platt explains how to sell ourselves as authors by reading our work on “live” events, such as Rachel has done.

Newsletter

Program Writeup: Sandy Kachurek will write up today’s program, which is Kate McMurray, “Better, stronger, faster first drafts.”

Reminder: the proper location for request for writeup, and anything else Newsletter editor has to report, is up in the chair reports. Shari will re-organize, and apologizes, as she had put this at the bottom of the Agenda after she updated Bernie's agenda.

Old Business

Education Chair (Digital classes): Shari had emailed Bernie and Erin to get the need for handoff out there, what a moderator does and how. Bernie has not yet met up with Erin. He'll get that going.

Dayton-area location for meetings?

- Janice: Doesn't have anything yet because of the COVID restrictions, as she's looking for a public library, and then would need to find out if the restrictions are lifted.
- Sandy is working with a church community room, and they're waiting for governor to announce in July for fall meetings.
- Forge Tavern, Bernie's friend is willing to host there each month, until we get a Dayton location. He needs just a few days' notice if we're not holding it. He has kindly agreed to even make a small selection of food available for purchase, although he's not open at the time we will meet.

RWA chapter affiliation status—our chapter's status, what had we decided at an earlier meeting? Answer: That we would hold off on additional discussions until after the July convention. Given that the July event has been turned into a small retreat, and the conference has been moved to November, we will resume discussions of where we stand during the May meeting. Two members have privately let Bernie know that they do not plan on renewing their RWA membership (which means our chapter loses them, too). Although a chapter needs 10 to charter, it needs only 5 to stay in existence. Please put this topic on the May agenda.

New Business

- Shari would like to open a discussion about what we pay members to lead workshops, which is a flat \$50. She explained that for other authors, she learned during the budgeting process that we allow outside authors to set their price for the workshop. Then we look at if that's in the range we have paid in the past. When she researched past years' actuals, she saw programs have run from \$100 to \$450, at that higher end for NYT bestsellers. It seems like we're saying our own authors, you're not worth what we think other writers are, you're only worth \$50. That doesn't seem right. And where's the incentive for us to come up with new programs? For example, the diversity workshop she created after the RWA implosion took more than 20 hours of time. She did it because she wanted the chapter to work on our diversity.
- Discussion
 - Isn't this something that was decided previously, and is in our policies?
 - This may be more of a board members discussion thing to decide. But it is good to let the chapter talk over the idea.
 - Some members don't feel right having the chapter pay us.
 - Erin does a lot of free local workshops; e.g., West Virginia Writers Workshop, June 11-13 (they cover the hotel room); she has been paid up to \$250 for a workshop; nor would she feel comfortable charging COFW.

- How would we even know what to ask for, as our fee? (Shari explained she had looked at several years of past years' actual expenses to see the range she mentioned).
- Some authors, even NYT bestsellers, have also given us a workshop for free, as Grace Burrowes did last year, and a previous time she presented.
- If you are on the board—and you lead a workshop—you cannot be compensated for giving a class/workshop.
- Any decision doesn't affect many this year. It affects Rachel for September workshop. Donna MacMeans was our other member-led workshop earlier this year.
- Let the board come up with some language. This could be a topic for them at their next quarterly meeting, now that membership has had a chance to discuss.
- Also, suggestion to look at those budgets again, and give the membership the trends of what we had paid.
- We're thinking this is more a policy/procedure thing.
- Adding a once-a-month plotters meeting on Tuesday, perhaps the 3rd Tuesday in person at the Panera in Huber Heights, right off 70, on route 202, at 6:00. Then the Monday one, that would still be via Zoom. Bernie could try to add a Zoom on the Tuesday ones he makes. Bernie will set up a COFW Loop topic to discuss this further, such as asking folks which Tuesday might work best, regularly, for their schedules.

Other new business?

- *Marci, AI for author marketing.* This is the brain child of Nikhil Shah, Karin's husband. She has shared the link on COFW for a survey, not even 5 minutes to complete. It's <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1KWg9VT5nCmiXauLNWfzG6ReuyuE7fivvi3yNJC1194Y/viewform>? He has developed the AI, Marci, to help a writer with promo, starting with social media, e.g., starting with Twitter. This link is for a survey. The AI will read your book, and talk about how you're like other writers, and other functionality that will roll out, so that it could be your marketer. They need beta testers. We could be in on the ground floor. They'd like to talk to COFWers in May, 10-15 minutes. **Decision**, since May is the 4-hour workshop: During the SOCIAL time in May, 12:05-12:15 will be for Nikhil to present to us.

Announcements

As long as Franklin County "gatherings" allow, as decided at the March meeting, we will hold our June meeting as hybrid (Zoom and in-person), at the Columbus location, The Forge Tavern, <https://theforgetavern.com/> at 1375 Bethel Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43220.

Motion to Adjourn: Rachel, seconded by Erin. Meeting adjourned at 1:18 PM. The program will begin at 1:30, Kate McMurray, "Better, Stronger, Faster First Drafts."

Minutes respectfully submitted, Secretary Shari Heinrich

If It's Not Working, Try Something Else: Kate McMurray's Better, Stronger, Faster First Drafts

by Sandy Kachurek

Writing and selling 25 books has put experience behind the advice of top-selling romance author Kate McMurray, who presented "Better, Stronger, Faster First Drafts" following our April meeting. Also contributing to her honed expertise is a 20-year background in publishing.

Writing a story fast is important today as books have become a commodity and readers want them ASAP. To meet that demand, however, many stories aren't getting developed well. Speed should not compromise a well-developed story that our readers dearly love.

Kate believes we can write quickly and do it efficiently, if we make our first drafts to read closer to our final drafts.

Kate's plan began with a tip of the hat to Lisa Cron, author of *Story Genius*, and the advice to "throw away all you know of pantsing and plotting." Like Lisa Cron, Kate believes the problem with pantsing is it creates a draft that's "all over" when you need to have some kind of "road map." On the other hand, the problem with plotting is "getting bogged down in minutia and not the core of your story."

The "myth of the crappy first draft" is another touted piece of writing that should be shelved.

With those supposed truisms out of the way, Kate asked us to keep our Works In Progress in mind as she went through her presentation that she riddled with plenty of applicable rhetorical questions. She also hoped that we would come away with at least one new idea or an improved idea.

Her structure fell into two major sections and five tips. A full description of these tips can be downloaded from the author's website, KateMcMurray.com, under "Workshops."

Writing a stronger first draft involves planning what you're going to write and when you're going to write it. Hence, Kate calls her two major sections, Content and Time Management.

Major Section I: Content

Tip #1: Plan Your Trip: When you know where you're going, you can get there faster.

Sitting down at the keyboard already knowing the basics of your story makes the first draft a better first draft. But how do you get to the basics? What questions should you be answering?

Kate says in order to know "what you're going to write," you need to ask and answer the big questions, and number one is Who is your story about? followed by What does she/he/they want? and Why can't she/he/they get it?

If you find getting to those answers a challenge, Kate asks you to consider "your favorite book of all time." Why do you love it? What specific scene or moment inside the story is your absolute favorite? Why is this moment or scene important to you?

If you've read or heard of *GMC: Goal, Motivation, and Conflict; The Building Blocks of Good Fiction* by Debra Dixon, you've recognized Kate's questions as similar to the G, M, C. Translated, the Goal is what she/he/they want in your story. Motivation is the why. The Conflict is the why not? Conflicts, explains Kate, can be as minor as deciding on a hair cut to as major as saving the universe.

Again, in planning the story before writing, "think of the character deeply," says Kate. Ask yourself these three further questions of your character and put your responses in just a few sentences: (1) What's the core/meat of the story, which may reflect the story's trope; (2) What's important to your protagonist; and (3) Why is it important to you?

Answers to these questions means you know your story before you begin typing. The rest of the story's details will fill in by itself. Kate adds, "Knowing these answers and knowing your story's setting and theme is not plotting. It's coming up with a broad overview--a road map--not an outline."

How much structure in your "road map" is up to you. Some writers sketch out the three-act structure, the Save the Cat structure, the Hero's Journey. Some follow the structure in *Romancing the Beat* by Gwen Hayes. "Whatever works best," says Kate, "but try different things to see what your optimal process is."

Tip #2: Waste Less Narrative Time. Be purposeful.

You waste less time when you start the story in the right place and when every scene serves a purpose, whether the purpose is subtle or big. Also, leave out superfluous details. For example, explains Kate, "if grandma sneezes, don't leave it as a descriptor, she better be getting sick as part of the plot."

How do you find out what's the right place to start and what's not superfluous detail?

"Start the story at the moment the status quo changes," suggests Kate. "The meet-cute is one possibility. It's the moment where everything changes for her/him/them."

At this point, Kate highlighted some of her "Fears and Pet Peeves."

Your character should be reflected in every scene. Every scene should propel her/his/their narrative forward.

Typical scenes where the narrative gets bogged down include the "dinner date" scene, where the couple are talking over their meal. The "BOGSAT" scene, aka Bunch of Guys Sitting Around Talking scene. The "sex scene," if it's there only for "funbies." Kate says, "even in a sex scene, there must be character or romance development; the sex must affect a plot point."

Another pet peeve is adding in a lot of information you know the reader doesn't need. Only write what the reader absolutely needs to know for a scene or plot point.

Major Section 2: Time Management

Tip #3: Find Your Ideal Writing Time.

What part of the day are you most focused? most awake? most creative? Plan to write during that time. If you're not sure, try out different times. Experiment. When you find the one that works best, block it out for your writing. Be consistent. Safeguard that time as much as you are able.

Even when you've found your time and are engaged in the writing process, you can become distracted. Kate gave out what she calls "distraction busters," suggestions to dampen the incoming information from your devices and keep you focused on your writing.

At one time, she used "Freedom," an app that blocks all distractions on your devices at once [still recommended as of October 2020]. Now, she follows the Pomodoro Technique, which, according to Wikipedia, uses a timer to break down work into intervals, separated by short breaks.

Writing sprints were also on her list. [COFW writing sprints are every Monday, Wednesday, Friday beginning at 7 p.m. on our closed Facebook site.]

Tip #4: Conquer Writer's Block. Fix what doesn't work.

If you get stuck in your story, Kate suggests trying to free write a scene, or re-outline a scene's getting from point A to point B. Cut scenes that don't work. Skip ahead in your story. Write your story in a nonlinear way.

Maybe you need to "refill your well." Take a walk, a shower, meditate, self-care. Find a way to minimize your stress and "forgive yourself if you have to miss a day of writing."

Tip #5: Get It Done, Even With a Day Job.

Kate has a day job and writes during every break. She also suggests you can write on your phone while in transit to and from work [not while driving a car], or join a 5 AM Writer's Club [a COFW member said she's a member of it].

How long does it take you to "get in the zone?" Immediately? In a bit? Knowing the time it takes to get focused helps you to focus. Make a schedule. Download helpful apps.

Wrap it Up. So a Draft is Done.

How do you get from first draft to final draft? Revise each scene or chapter as you go? Revise what you've written the previous day before writing new story? Wait until the end of the first draft before revising anything?

It's up to what works for you. If something isn't working, try something else.

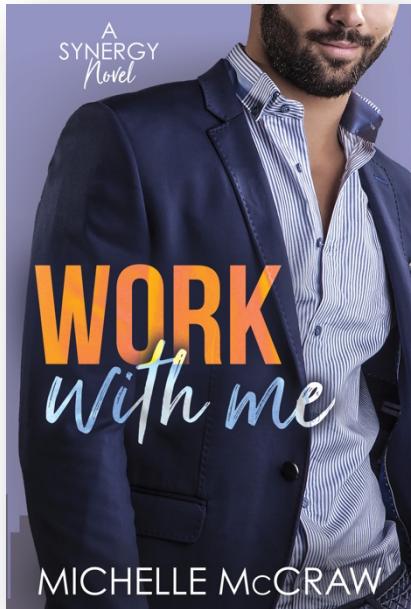
Kate says, "The first draft is still the first draft. It needs revision. Once honing your drafting process, it won't need as much revision." She's gotten faster at writing her first draft to final because she's done it for at least 25 published books. Editorial feedback also plays a part in the revision process.

"Be encouraged!" Kate says. "What I've presented is based on what I've found works for me."

She recommends we do the same.

*Kate McMurray's *Like Cats and Dogs* releases in May, with book 2 in December 2021, and book 3 in 2022. See more of her "Smart, Savvy, Sexy Romance" on her website: www.katemcmurray.com

New Releases!



Work with me by Michelle McCraw

She's built a firewall around her heart. He's determined to crack the code.

Alicia's first gig for her new tech consulting business is a make-or-break opportunity, and she's determined to make it. But when she strides into the kickoff meeting to show them who's the (girl) boss, she's shocked to find the guy she just asked out for coffee in the power seat. Yeah, the one with the sexy scruff, the bottomless brown eyes, and the gentle hands. He turned her down, and now he's turned up in her meeting. Awkward.

Jackson's seeing red, and it's not only Alicia's stilettos. Now a consultant's in charge of what used to be his project, pouring salt in the wound of his exile from San Francisco to Austin. How is Jackson supposed to redeem himself? And why is he obsessing over unbuttoning buttoned-up Alicia?

Alicia's not about to endanger her business by kissing a coworker. Jackson can't afford another screw-up. They can't be together, but working together means they can't be apart.

Available May 3rd

Award Winning News!!!

Michelle McCraw's book, *23 and You and Me*, is a Vivian award finalist in the most anticipated category. Way to go Michelle!

COFW has a goal sheet!



Want to track a daily word count and compete with your fellow COFW members for the highest point total? Add your name and goals to our Magic Spreadsheet here: <https://bit.ly/2Wprwt0>
February Winner: Janice Beckett
The winner gets Eddie!

The Power of Setting Goals

Shari Heinrich

If you're meeting all your writing goals, skip this article. If you're not sure if you're meeting your goals, or if you've never written down your goals, or if you always like finding tips and tricks that might work for you, this article might be for you.

Start with the Why

First it helps me to "start with the why." *Why* do I want to write in the first place? And what do I want to accomplish? Take a moment and think about that. For me, I love language, I've always been a writer, and I have characters who pop into my head and want their story told. But I don't want these stories simply sitting around on my computer. I want them out in the world. At the end of the day, I write because I love doing it—though it takes a lot of time and energy—and despite it making me trade bicycling time for writing time. I want to see my words in print.

Keep it Under Your Control

My dream is to be able to quit the day job so that I can spend 8 hours writing and the business of writing instead, and once more have my evenings for bicycling and gardening and everything else. But that's not a realistic goal, because it's not under my control. To be at the point I could quit my job, I'd need so many people buying my books that the income exceeds what I'm making now.

It's a great aspiration to keep me motivated, but it's not a solid goal I can hang my hat on, that I can control.

The goal I can control: Write a book. I've done that before—three times. None of them published. A goal I can control is hiding in those books. *Queen of Wands* is the one I'm querying. I keep saying I'm going to hunt for more agents. But I hadn't written down a new goal since my first 6 queries have not yielded an agent. I can't control getting an agent, but I can control querying. The goal is that by May 31, I will have queried 5 more agents.

Another goal I did have about book-writing was to *write faster*. When I brainstormed book 4, *Chihuahua Tales*, I set a goal of "first draft in 2 months, 48K." I had a second goal to perform draft two (first round of edits) in a month.

Write Down Your Goal

You are roughly 40-42% more likely to achieve a goal you write down, versus one you do not.^{1 2 3}

I wrote down my goal for that first draft: Complete the first draft in 2 months. I did not think to write a goal for the entire book. However, knowing I have a slow editing pace. I *should* have written one down. Once I have that big goal, I know where I want to end up. Next, it's time for me to do a reality check—is that goal attainable, with a full-time job, a love of gardening, a love of photography, and the need to work out 3 to 4 times a week? Since I didn't write that goal down, do you think I met it?

¹ [New Tech Northwest](#), based on Harvard Business Study

² [Life Hack](#)

³ [Michigan State University](#)

Break it Down into Sub-Goals

For that draft of *Chihuahua Tales*, I broke it down into sub-goals to make it achievable and hold myself accountable, knowing the word count I had to average each week to hit a final draft at 48K. I met that goal, and I proudly shared the accomplishment on my Facebook writer page.

I did not write down my goal for the second draft. I could have. I had written half a dozen notes on what I needed to accomplish in that second draft. In the month of March. Then weeding happened. Every year, I battle diabolical hairy bittercress, with its seeds on long stalks of various heights, flinging seeds 5-15 feet away from the parent. This year the blooming season came roughly a month early. Some of those dang things were blooming in February, in fact.

Was that my one-month realistic? I have no way of knowing, because I never stopped to map out how I would make sure it *could* happen, given how busy my spring is.

With all that weeding, then a freelance gig I accepted to write a piece for an educational publisher for a third-grade text, the week-long Women in Publishing Summit, and all sorts of other opportunities, March turned to April. I was still working on the new sequence for the ending. I still hadn't written down my goals. As April nears its end, I'm *still* working on the ending scenes. Is it a coincidence that I met the first goal, which I wrote down, but am two months into the next goal (which I didn't write down), and still haven't accomplished it? *And* still haven't written it down?

As my sticky notes of upcoming writing events began littering my floor (dang cats!), I knew it was time to make my next writing calendar. This method of turning posterboard into a calendar was integral to my finishing the final draft of *Queen of Wands*. I made placeholders for a lot of writing-based tasks, but what did I leave out? Agent research—that goal I hadn't written down. So as I drafted this article, I wrote down the goal of agent research. It takes time to pick agents. My post-it note for April, pick 1; for May and June, pick 4 more each month. And query along the way.

By making the goal visible, I'm holding myself accountable. By breaking it down, and spacing it across the weeks, I'm also looking at the feasibility. The way I worked my board with *Queen of Wands* editing, where I had post-its for each chapter edit, then a "proofread 10 chapters" card, I was allowed to fall behind. That meant I had to move the card from one week to the next week. If I edited more than the chapters I had targeted for a week, I decided if I was going to edit ahead, or take a break. I always liked those weeks I had the breathing room to decide.

As I finish this article, I'm finally writing the task cards for the steps I want to perform on this draft of *Chihuahua Tales*. I've started with a goal to be querying by the end of August. However, as I place my post-it notes of task, I'll figure out if that goal is realistic. It's OK if I shift it as part of the planning process, because I'm making sure I give myself an achievable goal, fitting into my ever-busy life.

Plus, I need to consider a new contest I've entered, where I'll be writing at least a 4K short story four times, from June 6 through August 23.

Tune Your Goal to Make it SMART

I've long used the technique for SMART goals because it makes my goal easier to reach:

- **Specific**—Hone in on what you want to accomplish.

- **Measurable**—Make sure you can quantify it. I need to know when I reached my destination, or if I jumped off the train too soon.
- **Attainable**—put it in my sphere of influence. I can't truly control whether an agent picks me up. But I can control the steps in the agent-hunting process, which begins with writing a query letter, maybe a synopsis; researching the agents, and then sending it to each following the guidelines they provide. Thus, “query 4 agents in May.”
- **Realistic**—Do I have the skill, the time, the drive, the *whatever* to reach this goal? If I've never written a full draft of a book, that doesn't make it unrealistic. But if my goal is to write a young adult paranormal novel, that's not as realistic if I've never read young adult books, never read paranormal books, don't have an idea for my book.
- **Time-Bound**—Give yourself a target for completion. If you don't know when you want to arrive at your destination, you don't know when you *have* to start. Each day, that train could roll out, but I need to be on board rather than chasing after a squirrel. This is why, when I do my 3-month (or more) board, I project what “Shari logic” thinks is doable, pulling it sort of out of thin air, but in the context of how long it took to get the query-ready version of *Queen of Wands* (4/2017-12/2020), framed by the context of where I believe I am in my craft. Again, as I plug in the tasks that are part of my writing process, I'll figure out if that date is realistic, or if I need to push it out, or perhaps even pull it in.

Share Your Goal with an Accountability Partner

Older research said, don't share your goals. You'll be less likely to reach them. Then Ohio State University's study said, share your goal with someone you respect and you're more likely to achieve it.⁴

Current research goes deeper: If you share your goal with an accountability partner, and check in, your chance of achieving your goal goes up to 85-95%.⁵

I vocalize my goals to others, but I haven't been willing to do this “accountability partner” thing. I think that's partly because I've found success in reaching my goals once I've written them down, and better time-accountability now that I do these calendars. I give thanks to [WriterCon](#) career coach [Kerin Grove](#), who shared this idea at the 2020 conference. This idea clicks with my brain.

At the end of the day, we're all different writers, in different stages of our writing journey. If something I've shared works, use it! Purge the rest, freeing up space for you to hook onto the next idea that might push you to reach the goals *you* have as a writer.

⁴ [Ohio State University Fisher College of Business](#)

⁵ [WKYC, reporting study by American Society of Training and Development](#)

COFW

*Professionals, Writers & Friends Perfecting the
Happily Ever After*

