



# write your book in 2017

how to set goals  
that lead to success

**KJ DELL'ANTONIA**

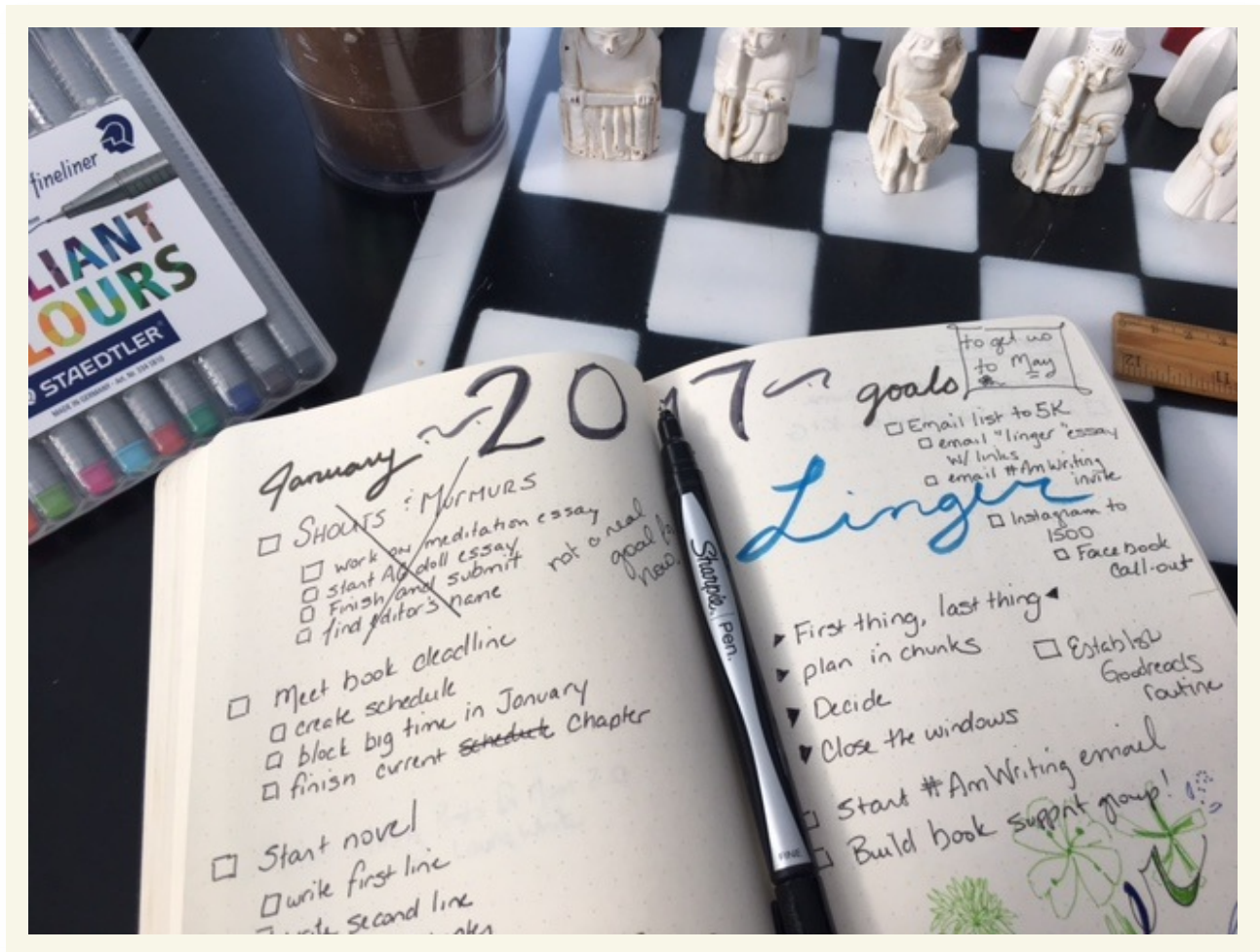
The New York Times  
The #AmWriting podcast

WRITE YOUR BOOK IN 2017!

HOW TO SET MEASURABLE GOALS THAT LEAD TO  
WRITING SUCCESS

KJ DELL'ANTONIA

LET'S GET STARTED!



Ready to write your own book in 2017? Start a blog, publish an essay, or create a family memoir? You can get there—but you have to take that dream—“I’m going to write a book!”—and turn it into clear,

measurable goals that allow you to track your progress.

As editor Pat Walsh says, the number one reason your book will never be published is because *you haven't written it yet*. Writing takes time, persistence and consistency—but it also rewards them. If you make a decision to put your butt in the chair for a certain number of minutes or words every day, you'll write a book—or a blog, or a series of essays, or a manifesto on raising heirloom pigs. You'll get there. But you have to set goals, and you have to follow through.

On [Episode 34](#) of the [#AmWriting podcast](#), Jessica Lahey and I talked writerly goals: specifically, what makes a good goal, and how to set some, whether it's for New Year's, or your own personal New Year's—that moment when you decide, **this is it. I start now.**

We also offered a goal-setting worksheet to help you define those goals, and give you something visual to return to as you reach them. You'll find the worksheet at the end of this ebook.

We started off by defining a goal by what it's not—it's not a resolution. Resolutions are often big and amorphous, hard to measure and somewhat doomed. (“I will be kinder. I will be a better daughter. I will get healthier.”) A goal, on the other hand, at least as we've planned it, may be big—but it's also clearly defined and achievable, with measurable markers along the way.

Here's how to set Writer's Goals that get you where you want to be by next month or next year.

**Take time to do this right.** The biggest obstacle that stands in the way of actually deciding what you want to do is how busy you get doing all the things. You sit down with your calendar intending to make big goals, and you emerge half an hour later with a grocery list and a detailed plan for your 4-year-old's birthday party. Turn off the internet, close the door, pour a glass of wine or your favorite sparkly seltzer and think. Doodle. Draw timelines. Dream. When you look back at these pages in a few months, what do you want to have done?

**Name your Achievement Goals.** These are things you'd like to have done by year's end. One challenge of achievement goals is that you can't

always control the outcome, so here's our advice: set both goals you can control, and goals you can't—and then **give each goal three steps that you yourself can do.**

Your goal may be to get an essay into the New York Times' Modern Love column. You can't control that—but if you don't submit at least one essay, you guarantee failure. And if you don't write that essay, you're really sunk. And if you never start it? Yep. Doomed.

Try setting two goals you wholly control (finish a novel, a book proposal, an essay) and two you don't (get an agent, break into a dream publication). Write down three steps you can take, just you, towards making all four of those goals happen.

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## TIME HORIZONS

Next question: when? If step one is start an essay, when will you type that first word? How long does an essay take you? How much work time do you typically have? You can make like a business and set your goals quarterly.

Q1 ends March 31, my friends. What will you have done by then? Or plan backwards—if you want to be querying agents in May, what do you have to have done in March?

Alternatively, especially if you're a parent, you may want to go with [this three-New-Years-approach from organizer and host of the podcast Organize 365 Lisa Woodruff](#): one now, one in May and one in September.

If you do that, set your January goals with a May deadline in mind. Remember that August is a publishing world dead zone, whereas September marks a time for yet another set of fresh starts, and plan accordingly.

**Schedule a check-in.** Put it on your calendar. Set a notification. Check in at the end of the period, yes, but check in before that, as well. Ask a friend to email you at the end of a week and ask you what you've

done. Set an alarm to chime at 1 p.m. every Sunday and ask—did you write every day? Did you research those agents? What did you do towards your goals this week?

**End every week with a plan for next week.** You planned to work every morning from 5-7 am, but you can see an early morning orthodontist appointment that will derail you next Wednesday. Pick another time, and put it on the calendar.

**Strategize for success** When I set goals, I take the opportunity to reassess my work strategies. Because I'm a full-time writer, I work on writing-related tasks all day—but it's still easy for me to get caught up in putting out the fires in my email rather than making progress on a long-term project like a book.

Working on my hardest piece of writing first thing in the morning—before I look at anything else—really works for me, but too often, I don't get there. Now's the time to re-commit to making that happen, and set some other strategies as well.

When I had a non-writing day job, I went to bed at nine and wrote for an hour before turning off the light (I called that my “do you want to have read a book, or do you want to have written one” strategy). Maybe that's what would work for you.

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WORD OF THE YEAR





Finally, give your writing goals an overarching theme—one word that will encompass what you want your professional life to be like this coming year. Do you want to expand? Roar? Persevere? Grow? Last year, I chose one word for both my personal and professional lives: [Connect](#). I lived it, too—I made much more of a point of deepening and expanding my network of other writers, sharing, and helping and just connecting in every way I could, and I made a real effort to spend time with my close local friends as well, setting up walks and coffees and other opportunities almost weekly (as an introvert, I tend to forget how happy spending time with my friends makes me).

My word for 2017 is “Linger.”

Professionally, personally, with family, with friends, over essays and book chapters and all the work I put out into the world or keep to

myself, I want to linger. I want to take time, to stay at the table, to rest in the silence or the laughter. In my work, I want to re-read, to edit, to set aside and revisit. I've been a blogger for many years. With the book I'm working on, I need to re-accustom myself to the long form. I can spend time on an idea, I must spend time on each chapter. I love my word—but our culture doesn't love the concept.

Most of the words we use to share the meaning of taking more time with something than it might necessarily require to just get it done are negative. Dawdle, poke, loiter, delay. Fritter, dillydally, drift. Even “spend time” carries the burden of wastefulness; the puritan soul saves her time, she does not spend it. Wherefore efficiency, productivity, life hacks and effective time management strategies? What about quality time?

Been there, done that. The productivity I want now doesn't come in hacks and chunks. It comes from settling in away from the exclamation points and lists and convenience. It comes from getting past the first thought and the second thought and well into thoughtful double digits. I have been hoarding my time to master the art of doing everything in short bursts and posts, now I need to spend it out on the words and the people that are most important to me.

Boiling that down into one word will give me a touchstone I need to return to all year long—in February, when short blog posts beckon and my book deadline still seems comfortably distant; in May, when it's so tempting to rush from one thing to another, over the summer, when the book draft is done and I'm approaching my work in a fresh way, and then in the fall, when the year starts to pick up speed and rush towards the finish line. A single word can be a beacon, whether I'm making big choices or just trying to recalibrate after a rough week.

In 2015, my word was “decide”—as in, decide what I wanted. Decide how I wanted to spend my time. Plan my hours and days actively; respond rather than react. I still come back to “decide” when I need it, which is often. “Decide” is what allows me to refuse to let “busy” take over my days.

This year, I'll remain my organized, productive self. I'll still have a list



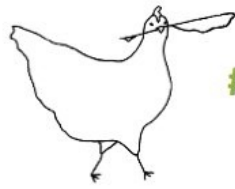
of goals, accountability points, a schedule and all of my usual tricks for sitting down and getting my work done. But part of that work will be to linger, to spend time—to dawdle along, if you will, and even to fritter. Because the book I 'm working on invites the reader to take a journey with me, a trip into the ways happy families create that happiness, and you can't rush something like that. It takes time to learn, to process, to write, and to share. And at home, it takes time to live—because one thing I've learned already is that happy people dillydally with the people they love.

So I will linger in 2017. What one word can you return to that will help you reach your goals this year?

*Thanks to Gretchen Rubin for turning me on to the one-word idea years ago in her book, [Happier at Home](#). Catch her [Happier podcast](#)—one of my faves—she talks about her word of the year on "A Little Happier," the short version of the podcast, [here](#).*

## THE WORKSHEET

You can [download your copy](#) or view it on the next page.



## #WriterGoalsfor2017

**#AmWriting**  
with Jess & KJ  
Podcast

Keep your butt in the chair,  
and your head in the game.

#podchat @Aphthoria

Goals I Can Control	Steps	Time Horizons
>	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
>	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
Goals I Can't Control	Steps	Time Horizons
>	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
>	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.

Fresh Strategies:

Word of the Year:

*Keep your butt in the chair, and your head in the game.*  
#AmWriting with Jess and KJ, Episode 35