

A Little Goal-Setting for the New Year

From Nooks & Cranberries, nooksandcranberries.com

Step 1: Start Dreaming

Think like a kid for a moment and ponder what you want to be when you “grow up.” We assume that since you’re working through this guide, the answer is a Writer. With that mindset, what would success look like for you in the following categories? Please dream big here, but don’t worry about the details—we’ll cover them in later pages.

What you’ve created (i.e. writing a book, publication in some of your favorite magazines, etc.):

Financial (i.e. building a nest egg, being able to quit your day job, enjoying the occasional “fun money” that you earn with each article):

Step 2: Why Do You Write?

Now that you’ve taken some time to think about your ultimate goals, it’s time to think about your motivation behind them. Let’s face it, writing is not an easy job for most. It’s often a solitary quest, and requires a lot of discipline and sacrifice. So why do you do it? Think about your answers above and list all the reasons why you want to write that book, work for that publication, or whatever the case may be. List as many reasons as possible—you can refer to them throughout the year whenever the going gets tough.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Step 3: What Do You Want to Accomplish in 2013?

Working from your answers in Step 1, it's now time to start breaking down your lifetime goals into manageable bits. Successful goal-setting requires identifying a series of steps, and that's what we're working on here. If Step 1 was a telephoto look at your goals, consider this the wide-angle lens. We'll swap it out for a macro lens in a bit.

For freelance journalists and any writer trying to build their platform:

Publications You'd Like to Write For in 2013

Dreaming Big:

A Stretch, but Totally Doable if Done Right:

An Easy In:

Publications You'd Like to have Feature You or Your Blog, Book, etc., in 2013

Dreaming Big:

A Stretch, but Totally Doable if Done Right:

An Easy In:

For authors working on a book

What steps would you like to complete by the end of 2013? Do you want to complete your first draft of your book proposal, find an agent, finish and submit your proposal, or have your proposal accepted? Thinking as ambitiously yet realistically as possible, write your goal down here, in a few LARGE words:

What categories of steps do you need to take to achieve that goal? For example, if you want to write your book proposal, maybe you need to start researching how to write the perfect proposal, along with coming up with marketing ideas and ways to build your platform—two crucial aspects of the proposal.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Step 4: Making Your Vision a Reality

Now that you've clarified your vision and identified some things you can do in 2013 do work toward your writing dreams, it's time to whittle those steps into some doable tasks.

For freelance journalists and any writer trying to build their platform:

We're all about dreaming big over at Nooks & Cranberries, and you should be too. So go back to Step 3 and pick out the publication you'd most like to write for from your Dreaming Big category. You're going to work on getting to that point right now. If at any point you start hearing tiny voices of self-doubt in your head, turn down the volume on them.

Write down the name of that publication in large letters:

Research the publication and its writer's guidelines.

- Gather the latest 3-5 issues, whether from your personal collection or from the library.
- Study the masthead. Read the bios on the contributors page, if applicable. Pay attention to the writers' names and compare them with the masthead—what pieces are written by staff, and which are by contributing writers? Do you notice a pattern as you read back issues? Jot down some sections and departments that look accessible to freelance writers. Can you tell which editors are responsible for them?
- Find a copy of the publication's writer's guidelines. Many publications offer these on their websites. Also search resources like Writer's Market, mediabistro.com, and various other freelance writing resources and blogs for tips for how to pitch to that publication. Jot down some notes right here so you can refer to them in an instant.

Since we're working from the Dreaming Big list, chances are you may have some work to do before you're ready to make your big break. But if you think you're ready, then by all means send them a query! Some of them take a while to respond, however, so while you wait, start working on your next steps.

- Think about all your credentials and relevant experience that make you qualified to write for that publication, and write them down here. For example, if you're looking to writing for a major national food magazine, you'll want to think about everything from your writing experience to any culinary background you may have. (When you start drafting your query letter, don't forget to drill even deeper into your experience as it pertains to that specific topic.)

- What pieces of your portfolio and resume do you think would be good to add to your existing experience? Think like an editor here and imagine what sort of credentials you would look for in a prospective writer. Do you need to come up with a few good clips? Or do you have some amazing clips but none related to the publication's primary topic?

- What steps do you need to take to round out your resume and portfolio? Staying with the example of breaking into a major national food magazine, perhaps you can start writing about food for your local newspaper or regional magazine, or even think outside the box and write a consider a publication that you don't normally associate with food writing but that might have a logical tie, such as writing a nutrition story with recipes for a health or fitness magazine. List the steps you want to take—along with some concrete ideas for each—right here.

- Write down the first step you're going to take—and then do it!

Repeat the process with the other publications you listed in Step 3.

For authors working on a book

Write down each of the categories of steps that you listed in Step 3. Under each heading, list as many steps as you can think of taking. Identify three that you can start on this week, and do then. Set deadlines for the remaining steps and add them to whatever calendar or time management system that you use.