PROWRITINGAID NOVEL NOVEMBER · GUEST WORKSHOP

Too Many Ideas, One November

A Focus Toolkit for ADHD Writers

Alexa Bigwarfe · Founder, Women in Publishing



HI, WRITERS

I'm Alexa Bigwarfe

13 years in publishing

Author, publisher, and founder of Write|Publish|Sell.

Women in Publishing

The largest women's organization for authors and publishing professionals.

Alexa's Publishing Chat

Podcasting for authors for more than ten years.

Betting on WE podcast

Empowerment podcast for women.

womeninpublishingsummit.com

QUICK POLL · DROP YOUR ANSWER IN THE CHAT

What pulls you away from your book the most?

A
Too many ideas

B
Kids, job, or caregiving

C
My phone and 19 tabs

D
All of the above

YOU'RE IN GOOD COMPANY

Scattered brain or scattered life? Same toolkit.

6.76%

of adults worldwide have ADHD symptoms, about 1 in 15, according to a 2021 global meta-analysis.

Plus everyone whose **life** is the squirrel: day jobs, kids, caregiving, and a phone that never stops buzzing.

Source: Song et al., "The prevalence of adult attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A global systematic review and meta-analysis," Journal of Global Health, 2021.



Your book needs a parking spot, a timer, a quiet desk, a launch pad, and a plan B.

1. Capture file **2. Short sprints** **3. Drafting setup** **4. The 90-second start**

5. The interruption plan

BEFORE WE GET TO THE TOOLS

Behind already? Start anyway.

Your day 1 is whatever day you start. November 1 was just the day the doors opened.

STARTING LATE OR FALLING BEHIND

That "why even bother now?" feeling has a name

Psychologists call it the **"what the hell" effect**. Once a goal feels blown, we're tempted to quit the whole thing instead of just picking back up.

WHAT OUR BRAIN SAYS

"I'm 5,000 words behind. What's the point?"

WHAT WE DO INSTEAD

Shrink the next step. Keep the dream.

Source: Cochran & Tesser, "The 'what the hell' effect: Some effects of goal proximity and goal framing on performance," in Striving and Feeling, 1996.

STARTING LATE OR FALLING BEHIND

Pick the finish line that fits your November

Still going for 50,000? Here's your daily number.

Start on	Words a day
November 5	1,923
November 10	2,381
November 15	3,125

Or resize the goal

25,000 words

Finish Act One

20 minutes a day, every day you can

All of these get you further than December 1 with zero words.

STARTING LATE OR FALLING BEHIND

Write the November you actually have

Day jobs. Kids. Carpool. Thanksgiving dinner for 14. Grab your calendar and plan around real life.

1

Cross out the no-write days

Thanksgiving, travel, the school play. Planned rest isn't falling behind.

2

Give busy days a tiny goal

10 minutes or 100 words. Done counts.

3

Load up your open days

A quiet Saturday morning can carry a lot of words.

STARTING LATE OR FALLING BEHIND

Fall behind? Give yourself a fresh start.

Researchers Hengchen Dai, Katy Milkman and Jason Riis found people are more likely to start on goals after a "fresh start" day: a new week, a new month, a birthday.

Recalculate

New daily number from today forward.

Resize

Smaller finish line, same book.

Restart

Pick your fresh start day: tomorrow, Monday, or the 15th.

Source: Dai, Milkman & Riis, "The Fresh Start Effect: Temporal Landmarks Motivate Aspirational Behavior," Management Science, 2014.

WHY YOUR BRAIN DOES THIS

"ADHD is not a disorder of knowing what to do. It's a disorder of doing what you know."

Dr. Russell Barkley, clinical psychologist and ADHD researcher

---

You already know how to write a novel. The struggle shows up at the point of performance: the moment you sit down to do it.

WHY YOUR BRAIN DOES THIS

An interest-based brain runs on four fuels

Every brain likes these. An ADHD brain may need one of them just to get started.

Interest

You care about it right now.

Novelty

It's new, so it glows. (Hello, squirrel.)

Challenge

There's a puzzle to crack.

Urgency

The clock is ticking.

The "interest-based nervous system" is a clinical framework from psychiatrist Dr. William Dodson. Reward-pathway research backs the idea: Volkow et al., JAMA, 2009, found dopamine differences in adults with ADHD.

WHY YOUR BRAIN DOES THIS

Why the day 12 idea looks so good

20,004

words written by day 12 at the NovNov pace of 1,667 a day

That's the messy middle. ProWritingAid says its Creative Nudges work best between **10,000 and 30,000 words** for exactly this reason.

Your current book is in the hard part. The new idea is all first chapter and no middle. Novelty wins that fight every time.

Sources: ProWritingAid Novel November page (50,000 words, about 1,667 a day); ProWritingAid Creative Nudges FAQ.

THE BIG IDEA

Let's quit fighting the squirrel.

Our brains are going to chase shiny things. That's fine! We just need a place to put them, so we can get back to the book.

TOOL 1 OF 5

The Capture File

Park the new idea so it stops shouting.



TOOL 1 · THE CAPTURE FILE

A written plan quiets an unfinished goal

Psychologists E.J. Masicampo and Roy Baumeister found that unfinished goals kept popping into people's heads and dragged down their focus on other work.

When people wrote a **specific plan** for that goal, saying when, where, and how, the intrusions dropped and their focus came back.

Your brain doesn't need you to write the new book today. It needs proof that you will.

Source: Masicampo & Baumeister, "Consider It Done! Plan Making Can Eliminate the Cognitive Effects of Unfulfilled Goals," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2011.

TOOL 1 · THE CAPTURE FILE

One doc, five lines per idea

PARKED IDEAS.DOC · EXAMPLE

Working title: The Lighthouse Heist

The spark: Retired thieves rob the lighthouse that ruined them.

Why it excites me: Found family, salty banter.

Three what ifs: The keeper helps? It's a trap? There's no treasure?

Open again on: December 1

The last line is the magic.

A date turns "someday" into a plan, and a plan is what lets your brain set the idea down.

TOOL 1 · THE CAPTURE FILE

When a squirrel shows up mid-sprint

1

Notice

Name it out loud: "Squirrel." A little humor keeps the guilt out.

2

Park

Two minutes in the capture file. Five lines. Set a timer.

3

Return

Reread your last sentence. Type the next one.

TOOL 1 · THE CAPTURE FILE

Small squirrels go in [square brackets]

She grabbed the [WEAPON: something old and heavy] off the mantel.

Captain [NAME TBD] had never lost a ship.

[RESEARCH: did 1920s trains have dining cars?]

Brackets work in any doc. In ProWritingAid, square brackets become **Placeholders** you can find again later.

Rule: no googling during a sprint.

Bracket it.

Source: ProWritingAid Help Center, "How to use Placeholders."

TOOL 1 · THE CAPTURE FILE

Nineteen open tabs? Park those too.

Bookmark them all

In Chrome, Ctrl+Shift+D (Cmd+Shift+D on a Mac) saves every tab to one folder. Name it "December Me."

Close the window

They're safe. Nothing is lost. You can breathe.

Open one tab

Your manuscript. That's the whole browser for this sprint.

TOOL 1 · THE CAPTURE FILE

Four novels? Choose November's with three questions

Ask yourself	Why it matters
Which one could I write badly?	A draft you'll let be messy is a draft you'll finish.
Which opening scene can I already see?	A clear first scene means a fast start on November 1.
Which one will I still care about on day 12?	Pick for the middle, not the spark.

The other three get a capture file entry and a December date. They're waiting for you.

TOOL 2 OF 5

Short Sprints

Borrow urgency, and fit writing into a real life.



TOOL 2 · SHORT SPRINTS

Pick a sprint for the brain you woke up with

Sprint	Timing	Use it when
The Doorbell	5 minutes	You can't start at all
The Classic	25 on, 5 off	It's a normal day
The Ladder	10, then 15, then 20	You warm up slowly
The Guardrail	45 on, alarm, 10 off	Hyperfocus makes you forget to eat
The 42-Minute Hour	42 on, 18 off, or flip it	You want a rhythm you can repeat all day

The 42-Minute Hour comes from Michelle Oucharek-Deo.

TOOL 2 · SHORT SPRINTS

Regular beats inspired

3.2
pages a day from writers who committed to a schedule

0.8
pages a day from writers who waited for inspiration

~12%
of productive academics actually write every single day

Your takeaway: pick a rhythm your life can hold. Three mornings a week counts.

Sources: Robert Boice, Professors as Writers, 1990 (summarizing his 1983 study); Helen Sword, "Write every day!": a mantra dismantled, International Journal for Academic Development, 2016.

TOOL 2 · SHORT SPRINTS

Write in the cracks of a busy day

The car line

Draft on your phone in a notes app. Paste it in tonight.

The lunch break

One 15-minute sprint. Eat with your other hand.

The walk or commute

Talk the next scene out with your phone's voice typing.

The waiting room

Plan tonight's scene in five quick bullets.

NovNov lets you log word counts by hand, so phone and notebook words count too. (ProWritingAid Novel November page)

LET'S DO IT RIGHT NOW

6-minute sprint, together

1. Open your manuscript

2. Phone face down

3. Squirrels go in [brackets]

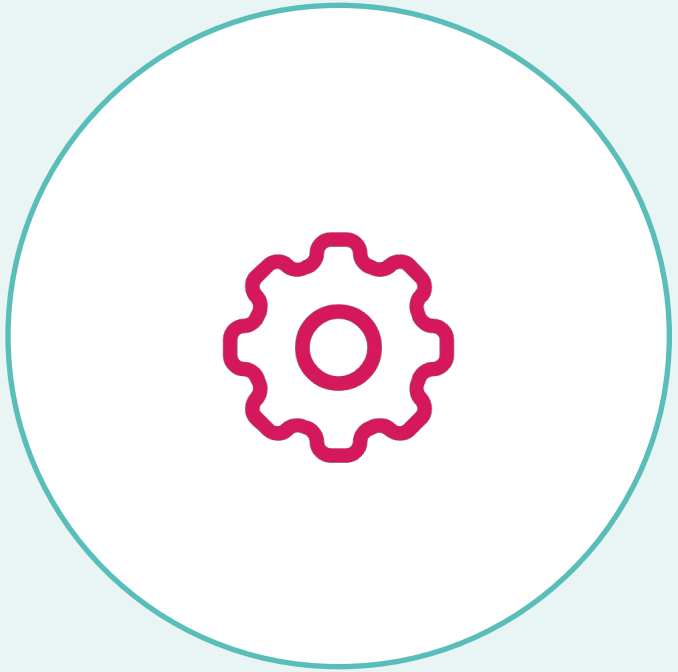
4. Type until the timer ends

5. Drop your word count in the chat

TOOL 3 OF 5

Your Drafting Setup

What to snooze in ProWritingAid for November, and what to keep.



TOOL 3 · DRAFTING SETUP

ProWritingAid has a drafting toolkit built in

Focus Mode
Hide suggestions while you draft

Writing Sessions
Timer, word count, and streaks

Placeholders
Bracket it now, fix it later

Creative Nudges
Story prompts when you're stuck

Resets
A one-minute breathing break

Reflections
Notice what helps you focus

Want the how-to? The ProWritingAid team are the experts. Their Help Center and NovNov sessions walk you through every one.

help.prowritingaid.com · ProWritingAid feature pages

TOOL 3 · DRAFTING SETUP

Test a little noise in your headphones

8 to 10%

better attention for young people with ADHD while listening to white or pink noise

The catch: the same noise made performance **worse** for people without ADHD.

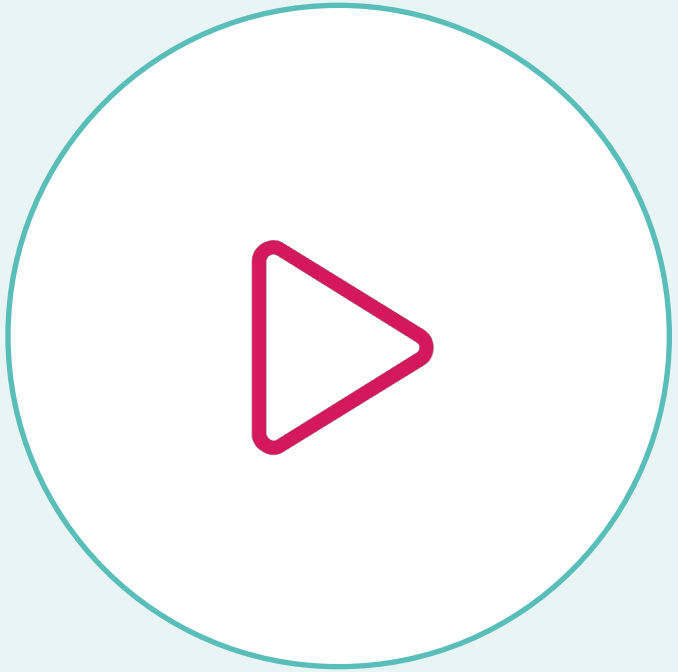
So run one sprint with noise and one without. Your word count will tell you which camp you're in.

Source: Nigg et al., Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2024. Meta-analysis of 13 studies, 335 children and young adults. A small effect; more research needed.

TOOL 4 OF 5

The 90-Second Start

Because starting is the whole battle.



TOOL 4 · THE 90-SECOND START

Decide your start before you need it

If [cue], then I [tiny first action].

If my coffee is poured, then I open my manuscript.

If the kids are on the bus, then I start a 10-minute Session.

In a 2008 study, these if-then plans helped children with ADHD hold back impulsive responses in a lab task.

Source: Gawrilow & Gollwitzer, "Implementation Intentions Facilitate Response Inhibition in Children with ADHD," Cognitive Therapy and Research, 2008.

TOOL 4 · THE 90-SECOND START

Same place, same time, same cue

43%

of people's daily actions were repeated almost every day, usually in the same setting

Habit researcher Wendy Wood found that the setting does the remembering. Write in the same chair at the same time, and the chair starts helping.

Busy life? Anchor to something that already happens: after drop-off, after the dinner dishes.

Source: Wood, Quinn & Kashy, 2002, as summarized in Wood & Rünger, "Psychology of Habit," Annual Review of Psychology, 2016.

TOOL 4 · THE 90-SECOND START

The 90-second launch sequence

0:00
Phone on Do Not Disturb, in another room

0:15
Open the one doc, pinned to your dock or taskbar

0:30
Start a Writing Session timer

0:45
Headphones on, same playlist every time

1:00
Read your re-entry note from last time

1:15
Type one ugly sentence. By 1:30, you're writing.

TOOL 4 · THE 90-SECOND START

Bundle your writing with a treat

When Katy Milkman's study participants could only hear their gripping audiobooks at the gym, they made **51% more gym visits**.

The fancy coffee you only drink at your writing desk

The playlist you only hear while drafting

The candle you only light for sprints

Source: Milkman, Minson & Volpp, "Holding the Hunger Games Hostage at the Gym," Management Science, 2014.

TOOL 5 OF 5

The Interruption Plan

For kids, bosses, doorbells, and low-battery days.



TOOL 5 · THE INTERRUPTION PLAN

When life barges in, take ten seconds

In a 2003 study, people who got a few seconds of warning before an interruption used them to note where they were headed, and got back on task faster.

1. Type a bookmark

[NEXT: she opens the letter]

2. Leave it open

Don't close the doc. Your cursor holds your place.

3. Come back small

Read the bookmark. Type one sentence.

Source: Trafton, Altmann, Brock & Mintz, "Preparing to resume an interrupted task," International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, 2003.

TOOL 5 · THE INTERRUPTION PLAN

End every session by setting up the next one

"The best way is always to stop when you are going good and when you know what will happen next."

Ernest Hemingway, 1935

RE-ENTRY NOTE · EXAMPLE

[NEXT: Mara realizes the key is a fake. Open with her throwing it into the sea.]

TOOL 5 · THE INTERRUPTION PLAN

Have a plan for low-battery days

10 minutes	100 words	1 Reset, then one sentence	1 re-entry note for tomorrow

Any one of these counts. A streak of tiny days beats a week of zero days.

NovNov's own promise: progress counts "whether that's 50 words or 50,000." (ProWritingAid Novel November page)

RECAP

Your November focus toolkit

Capture file

Park the idea with a date.

Short sprints

Regular beats inspired. Use the cracks.

Drafting setup

Snooze the editor. Test the noise.

90-second start

Same cue, a treat, one ugly sentence.

Interruption plan

Bookmark it.

Come back small.

Let the squirrels come. We've got a plan now.

One book for November

One place to park every shiny new idea

One reason to show up tomorrow: your streak, your word count, and cheers in the chat

THANK YOU

Questions? Drop them in the chat.

Alexa Bigwarfe is the founder of Women in Publishing and host of Write Publish Sell, helping authors and publishing pros get visible, get found, and sell more.

womeninpublishingsummit.com

writepublishsell.com

@alexabigwarfe



Sources

- Barkley, R. Widely quoted lecture line; "point of performance" from his work on ADHD and executive function.
- Boice, R. (1990). Professors as Writers. New Forums Press.
- Cochran, W. & Tesser, A. (1996). The "what the hell" effect: Some effects of goal proximity and goal framing on performance. In Striving and Feeling.
- Dai, H., Milkman, K. & Riis, J. (2014). The fresh start effect: Temporal landmarks motivate aspirational behavior. Management Science.
- Dodson, W. "Interest-based nervous system" clinical framework.
- Gawrilow, C. & Gollwitzer, P. (2008). Implementation intentions facilitate response inhibition in children with ADHD. Cognitive Therapy and Research.
- Hemingway, E. (1935). Monologue to the Maestro: A High Seas Letter. Esquire.
- Masicampo, E.J. & Baumeister, R. (2011). Consider it done! Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.
- Milkman, K., Minson, J. & Volpp, K. (2014). Holding the Hunger Games hostage at the gym. Management Science.
- Nigg, J. et al. (2024). Do white noise or pink noise help with task performance in youth with ADHD? JAACAP.
- ProWritingAid: Novel November, NovNov 2025 Recap, Help Center, and feature pages.
- Song, P. et al. (2021). The prevalence of adult ADHD. Journal of Global Health.
- Sword, H. (2016). "Write every day!": a mantra dismantled. International Journal for Academic Development.
- Trafton, J.G. et al. (2003). Preparing to resume an interrupted task. International Journal of Human-Computer Studies.
- Volkow, N. et al. (2009). Evaluating dopamine reward pathway in ADHD: Clinical implications. JAMA.
- Wood, W. & Rünger, D. (2016). Psychology of habit. Annual Review of Psychology.