

Organize Your Writing & Publishing Life

By Edie Melson

Finding God's Priorities

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21

These are the things I look at to make sure my priorities are in line.

1. My prayer focus. Even though I know I need to always begin writing with a time of prayer, that seems to be the first thing I forget when I get stressed. Having a daily quiet/prayer time is part of my life routine, but that's not enough. I must begin every writing time with prayer.

2. Time in God's word. If my daily time with God begins to shrink or disappear, then my writing life suffers.

3. Remembering the why. Yes, I've always been a writer, but when I answered God's call to write for Him, my foundation changed. When I find myself chasing numbers, I go back to number 1. I refocus on my calling and more importantly the one who called me.

4. I refocus on relationships, instead of connections. There is a difference in these two. Relationships are built, connections are just numbers. Connections—when nurtured—often grow into relationships, but only when we concentrate on serving people instead of amassing numbers.

5. I rehearse what God has already done. No matter where you are on your writing journey, you have already seen God at work. Make note of the good things along the way—the whispers from God you've heard in your soul, the honest words of encouragement others have spoken or written to you, the successes you've had. We place far too much focus on the things we've done wrong, instead of the amazing things God is doing through us.

Bottom Line

I've found that when I treasure God's word and His opinion, my heart stays safe and protected. I'm insulated from a worldly perspective determined to destroy anything God has called good.

Life Priorities—Have To, Need To, and Want To!

I have a love/hate relationship with lists. They definitely keep me organized and on track, but they also highlight just how many commitments I have.

To combat the downside, and keep me moving forward, I've found a way to categorize my writing tasks through a 3-tiered approach.

I call it my **HAVE TO**, **NEED TO**, and **WANT TO** system. It's the definitions of the writing tasks that determine where they fit in this. Today I'm going to share those definitions with you, along with examples.

HAVE TO

- These are my non-negotiable tasks. There's really no wiggle room for these because they affect either my income, my reputation, and/or someone else's income or reputation. For me, the usually include:
 - Blog posts I write for money or as a regular contributor to a professional site—like Guideposts and Novel Rocket.
 - Daily social media updates. These are the updates I schedule every morning, but they're divided up part here, in the Have To category and part in the Need To. I tell myself I HAVE TO schedule a minimum of 5 updates a day, 4 – 5 days a week. I'll share the Need To part later.
 - Articles that I've been hired to write.
 - Writing that's been contracted (like for a book) or on a proposal that needs to go out.

NEED TO

- These are the things that I know I need to do, if there's any way I can. They're also the things I let slip if something important with my life comes up.
- Daily social media updates beyond the HAVE TO five—I feel a NEED TO schedule 18 – 10 per day, 4 – 5 days a week.
- Contests that I feel would move my career forward.
- Commenting on social media and blogs.
- Finding new people to connect with through social media.

WANT TO

- This part of the list is what fuels my joy in writing. If I'm only ever doing the HAVE TO and NEED TO, my time writing is in danger of becoming drudgery. So I try to make sure that I hit at least 1 thing that's designated WANT TO. These include a lot of different things.
- Poetry—I think writers can improve by playing around with poetry.
- Short Fiction—again, it is part of improving my craft.
- Photography—I know, it's not writing per se. But I use my photography directly in my blog and in other parts of writing.
- Research and brainstorming for new projects.

The Writer & Juggling

Here are some tips that keep me sane:

- **Make a list.** Now I have to confess, I'm not a rabid list maker. I'm just the opposite. Lists make me feel pressured—at least they used to. But I have learned that lists can be my best friend. Because truthfully, I just cannot keep up with everything in my head. Not every list is a to-do list. Many of them are reference lists. Here are some ongoing lists I keep:
 - Blog post schedules. I write a lot of blog posts for my site, and also for other sites. I have a second Tuesday here, and a fourth Friday there, mixed in with a first Sunday on another site. Believe me, the list goes on. I have developed an ongoing list of the due date of every blog post I owe someone—including myself.
 - Due date list. This can be due dates for articles, books, edits, even my own self-imposed goals.
 - Submission list. If you do a good bit of freelance writing, this one's a must. It's also important if you're submitting queries or proposals to agents, looking for representation.
 - Special events list. Each event gets its own list. If I have a book signing, or a book launch, or I'm promoting a conference, I have a list for that. I include a goal of what I'd like to accomplish. Then I map out things I want to do to help me achieve that goal.
 - Social media list. I keep an ongoing list of websites and blogs that I check regularly for possible social media updates. This is where I get a lot of the Tweets and FB posts that I share.
 - Book blogger list. Anytime I run across a book blogger I add them to my list. Now, when I'm ready to launch a book, I have 100+ bloggers I can look at as possible contacts.
- **Set goals.** I've learned that I don't get very far down the road when I don't know where I'm going. So I have goals. I know where I want to be in 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, 5 years, etc. These incremental goals are mandatory for me. Even if I don't have an official contract with a deadline, I work better when I have a plan.
- **Take a Sabbath—if you'll forgive the pun—religiously.** I've learned, the hard way, that I'm no good to anyone if I don't get a regular, weekly time off.
- **Look at the year ahead.** This is one that has helped me a lot. I look at the things I know I have upcoming—about a year in advance—and use that to plan ahead. If I have a book releasing in September, then I know August, September, October and November are going to be heavy marketing months. I co-direct the Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers Conference in May of each year, so I do my best not to take any out-of-town speaking engagements or deadlines that month. Sometimes it doesn't work that way, but I try to control what I can.

- **Ask for prayer support.** I was messaging back and forth with a writer today who is on an almost impossible deadline. She was asking for suggestions that would help her succeed. One of the first things I told her to do was to call in the prayer support. Ladies and gentlemen, we are on the front lines in today's society. Words have power and when we wield that power for good, we can expect to encounter resistance. So often writers tell me they're hesitant to ask non-writer friends for prayer support. They feel like their writing is unimportant. I say POPPYCOCK! I also recommend you have a group or team that prays regularly for you.
- **Be accountable.** This is another biggie for me. If I don't have someone who is expecting me to report back to them, I can let things slide. I have someone I exchange texts with daily, for prayer and accountability. I also have a group of writers online that I'm accountable to, as well as a couple of local writers I meet with regularly.
- **Ask for help.** I have an ongoing agreement with several writers. We can borrow blog posts from each other without first asking permission. This means that at 2am, when I wake up in a cold sweat because I forgot to write a blog post, I can visit one of their sites and voilà a guest post. I always link back to the site where I got the post, and include a bio. Believe me, this arrangement has saved several us on several occasions.

Tips for Storing Digital Files and Labeling Computer Files

Every single writer should have a system of keeping track of ideas. I have several. I also save the same ideas in multiple places to make them easier to find. Here is an overall peek at my storage system.

Computer Files: I have multiple files on my computer for ideas. Here are just a few

- Blog posts
- Devotions
- Quotes
- Book Ideas (divided into fiction and non-fiction)
- Article Ideas
- Links

As I said, I may store the same idea in multiple places. For instance, an idea for a blog post, might also work well for an article. Or I might expand it into a book idea. The reverse is also true. I may take a book idea and pull it apart and put multiple things from it into blog posts and articles.

I keep several different quotes files, including writing quotes, inspirational quotes, and Bible verses. These will often grow into ideas for articles, blog posts and devotions.

I also keep a list of links. If I come across a cool idea on the web, I paste the URL and a quick description of what I think I could write about.

I have a place on my iPad and iPhone where I can write ideas.

I'm also a big believer in making audio recordings. Especially when I'm driving or if I have a long idea, I can just record it on my iPhone's voice memo and transcribe it later.

I've also begun to do some sketching. Trust me, it's nothing I want to share yet, but it seems to jump start my creativity. So I keep some colored pens and pencils—with a small sketch pad—in my computer bag.

I've discovered that taking pictures is also a good way to record inspiring ideas. I take pictures of interesting people, places, even geometric shapes in buildings and clouds.

Finally, in case electronics fail me. I always carry a small notebook in my purse. The trick here is to remember to transfer those ideas to my other files so I don't lose them!

Labeling and Working with Computer Files

I've spent years trying to come up with a system for labeling computer files. For far too long, my files looked something like this:

- Soul Care for Writers, First Draft
- Soul Care for Writers, Working Copy
- Soul Care for Writers, Final Draft
- Soul Care for Writers, Final Final Draft
- Soul Care for Writers, Real Final Draft
- Soul Care for Writers, For sure final draft
- etc...

By the time I finished a book, I'd have so many similarly names files I couldn't find anything.

I'm ashamed by how long it took me to wise up and create a system.

Now EVERYTHING I save on the computer follows the same formula:

Title, descriptive word or two, date.

Here are a few examples from my Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers Conference files

- BRMCWC, Faculty proposals, 2025
- BRMCWC, Classes, 2025
- BRMCWC, Schedule, 2025

I've found that putting my files in this order keeps things that are together, together.

Working File Folders

I also keep everything separated into folders. When I'm working on a book or an article, I have a folder with that name. If I do multiple articles for the same place, like Focus on the family, I'll have a Folder called, Focus on the Family. Inside that folder, I'll have other folders with the title of each article. Here's what I put in the individual article folder. I'll use an article I worked on for Focus on the Family.

In the article folder for Teach Your Grandkids to Pray:

- Teach Your Grandkids to Pray, draft, 10.2.23
- Teach Your Grandkids to Pray, research, 10.4.23
- Teach Your Grandkids to Pray, deleted bits, 10.2.23

I keep all the research in a separate file because often I'll use it for future products.

By using this method of naming computer files, I'm much more likely to be able to lay my hands on things I need, even years from now.

Now I'd like to sidetrack a little bit. There is one single tip I have that will always help you stay organized and on track.

WORK AHEAD. Plan your personal, drop-dead due date, at least a week before anything is actually due. This will always make sure you're on time and ready for anything life throws at you!

Capture, Catalog, and Retrieve Writing Ideas

Be Ready When Writing Ideas Appear

- 1. Always keep a notebook nearby.** It doesn't matter if it's a digital app or a physical book filled with actual paper. All too often I've thought I'd remember an idea or a new twist without writing it down. I rarely do. Beyond that, I spend a lot of time and angst trying to remember the brilliant idea.
- 2. Have a way to record ideas handy.** When driving, make sure you know how to record voice memos on your phone. Every smart phone has this capability and there are also numerous apps that can record your voice as well.
- 3. Snag headlines and news stories that intrigue you.** You can take a screenshot of digital articles, or use a program like Evernote. For newspaper headlines, use old-fashioned scissors and a manila file folder to keep track.
- 4. Take notes—Additional Notes.** When you snap or snip an interesting article, be sure to include notes to remind yourself why that particular piece caught your attention. There is nothing more frustrating than coming across something you thought was important with no idea why you thought it was important.

5. Set up a system to keep track of those illusive ideas. These can be digital documents on your computer or a filing system in a nearby drawer, just make sure you can retrieve those ideas after you record them. For me, I use a series of files on my computer. I have one for quotes, one for blog post ideas, another for clever names, one for possible articles, etc.

6. Add a visual prompt to your idea. I admit it, I'm a born lurker. I've been known to snap surreptitious pictures of interesting people when I'm out and about. I also take shots of places and things that I'd like to later describe—either in an article or a work of fiction.

7. Become a professional eavesdropper. Observation is a powerful tool. So along the lines of always having a notebook handy, take note of the conversations going on around you. But don't stop with just the words that are spoken, write down the body language, tone, setting, everything that makes up an intriguing scene.

Each of these things on the list came directly from a lost idea because I wasn't ready to capture it and hold on.

Turn off Your UNHELPFUL Internal Voice

What to do when you're overwhelmed and can't figure out what to do next?

This issue is a first cousin to writer's block and the same things we can do to help with that, can help when our writing life has us unable to move forward. First you should know there's a scientific reason for that roadblock. The creative act stems from the right side—or creative side—of the brain. Later in the process, when polishing and organizing begins, the left side takes over. Here are some of the characteristics of each side.

Right Brain

- Visual in process, focusing more on patterns and images.
- Generally intuitive, led by feelings.
- Is the epitome of multi-tasking, able to process ideas simultaneously.
- Progresses from the big picture to the details.
- Lacks organization, utilizes free association.

Left Brain

- More verbal, needs to find specific words to express ideas.
- Analytical, led by logic.
- Takes things step by step, one idea at a time.
- Organizes details first before moving to the big picture.
- Very organized, utilizing lists and detailed plans.
- Mixing up the process—trying to use both sides of the brain at the same time—can lead to a tangled mess and a major roadblock. All of this information is good to know, but what if our left-brained, Internal Editor won't go away? How do we make her be quiet? Unfortunately, there isn't one way that works for everyone, but here are some tips that should help.

Ways Writers Can Turn Off Your Internal VOICE

- 1. Don't give in to temptation.** Our Internal Editor gets stronger the more frequently we give in to her demands. If she thinks you need thing before you can move on, stay strong. Pull out a notebook and write down what you need. Later, when it makes sense, you'll have plenty of time to complete the task.
- 2. Set a different type of goal.** Instead of a goal to finish a difficult project. Break it into a time-focused task and plan to work on it for a set amount of time. This gives you permission to work in chunks of time without having to finish a long task. This can often sidetrack the Internal Voice because of her need to meet a goal. Sometimes, in her drive to succeed she can even become an ally.
- 3. Don't give in to fear.** Many times, our Internal Voice is driven by fear. Fear that we will never finish, fear what we do won't work, or fear it will never be done well enough. Remind yourself life is a process. Nothing is ever set in stone. Sometimes just giving ourselves permission to work with the time and tools we have is all we need to derail our Internal Voice.
- 4. Embrace how your mind works.** Each of us is created uniquely by God. Our minds work in different ways and the word organization many things. There is no right or wrong way to organize. We should let how others do it

Every single one of us is able to bring order out of chaos. We should keep our expectations of how organization works to a minimum and we must resist the urge to compare ourselves to others. God has designed each of us to accomplish the things He has planned. We can rest in that and refuse to be overwhelmed and instead walk in faith—anticipating what God is going to do with our words.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10