Praise for

The Positively Productive Writer

"Feeling rejected? Simon's book will change your mood in a minute! A marvellous book, positive, practical and inspiring… every freelance writer should keep a copy on their desk. If you're ready to give up, just reach for this book – it re-ignites your writing energy, effortlessly. It worked for me, and will work for you."
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Della Galton – Prolific short story writer and author of *Passing Shadows, Helter Skelter* and *The Dog With Nine Lives*.

"Writing is, in many ways, like any other job. You need talent and tenacity to succeed – but from time to time, you also need a little encouragement to stay positive. *The Positively Productive Writer* offers practical advice to help you harness your confidence and keep your writing goals in sight."
Isabel Ashdown – Award-winning author of *Glasshopper* and *Hurry Up and Wait*.

"Genuinely helpful in encouraging new writers to manage their time well, and to believe in themselves."
Kate Long – Bestselling author of *The Bad Mother's Handbook* and *Swallowing Grandma* and *Mothers and Daughters*.

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"Simon Whaley's advice for writers is sensible, practical and inspiring. The Positively Productive Writer delivers a well-judged kick up the butt for writers everywhere."
Jane Wenham-Jones – *Writing Magazine columnist, novelist, and author of 'Wannabe A Writer?' and 'Wannabe A Writer We've Heard Of?'*

"After reading Simon's book I thought I might feel a bit more positive as an author. What I actually felt was an overwhelming motivation to sit at my laptop and write, write, write! He's totally changed my thoughts on rejection and I love the section on daily brainwashing. I don't think I'll ever get in my own way again!"
Heather Bestel – www.alittlebitofmetime.com

Simon Whaley's latest book, THE POSITIVELY PRODUCTIVE WRITER, will delight any rejection-weary scribe. It encapsulates all there is to say about how you can improve your writing skills in a very positive manner. We've long been asserting that positive thought works. Simon explains exactly how to use it to achieve your writing dreams. Buy this book. We wish we'd written it!
Cass and Janie Jackson – www.flair4words.co.uk

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The Positively Productive Writer

How to Reject Rejection and Enjoy Positive Steps to Publication

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The Positively Productive Writer

How to Reject Rejection and Enjoy Positive Steps to Publication

Simon Whaley

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Other books by Simon Whaley:

100 Ways For A Dog To Train Its Human
100 Muddy Paws For Thought
Puppytalk – 50 Ways To Make Friends With Your Puppy
Running A Writers' Circle
Best Walks in the Welsh Borders
Fundraising For A Community Project
The Little Book of Alternative Garden Wisdom
The Bluffer's Guide to Banking (by Robert Cooper and Simon Whaley)
The Bluffer's Guide to Hiking

Contributed To:

The Freelance Photographer's Project Book
100 Greatest Walks in Britain
100 Stories For Queensland

This book is dedicated to *all* writers who sit down regularly to write. Some days we find it far easier to do this, than others. This book is for those *other* days.

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I'd like to thank the members of the writers' circle I go to, who have endured many of my workshops. As many of them know, the idea behind this book began life as a motivational workshop for one of our January meetings. There's a fine line between motivating members and kicking them in the posterior, and there were times in the workshop when I wondered whether I'd crossed it. However, many kindly commented to me afterwards how beneficial they'd found the advice and exercises, so I resolved to give them a good kick up the rear end more frequently!

I'd also like to thank Diane Perry, Julie Phillips, Vivien Hampshire and Lynne Hackles for allowing me to mention times in their own writing lives, which have helped to illustrate points I wanted to make in this book.

Finally, I'd like to thank my writing students, many of whom have gone on to become good friends, as well as published writers. I know they find it difficult to understand why I'm just as excited as they are when they receive their first acceptance letter. Positivity though, is very infectious.

Thank you.

Simon Whaley

Introduction

New Start, New You, New Writer

This is not a *how to write* book – it's a *how to keep writing in order to achieve your writing dreams* book. It's for any writer who wants to achieve more. YOU CAN do it, if YOU really WANT to. Whether you want to see your name in print as the writer of a star letter in a magazine, enter a highly prestigious writing competition, or become a novelist, thinking positively *can* make a difference. Whatever your writing ambitions are, this book will help you to achieve YOUR dreams, but only if YOU are prepared to put in the effort. Why, though, should you listen to me?

I've written a bestselling book.

My first book, *100 Ways For A Dog To Train Its Human*, spent four weeks on the UK top-ten non-fiction paperback bestseller lists. It has gone on to sell over 220,000 copies. Was I lucky? Yes, there was an element of luck involved, but I firmly believe that I *created* the opportunity for that luck to come along and use. I was the person, after all, who wrote, rewrote (five times I'd like to point out), finished and submitted the book for publication in the first place. Its sales success was the icing on the cake. I did not set out to write a best-selling book, but I did set out to write a book. Since then, I've had eight more books published and have plenty more just waiting to be written!

I've had competition success.

I won first prize in the David Thomas Charitable Trust Writing Awards (*Writers' News magazine*) in April 1998 for a story called *Foggy Morning* and received an *Award for Excellence* from the

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Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild for a series of articles I wrote in a local magazine. The North American edition of my book, *100 Ways For A Dog To Train Its Human*, was nominated for excellence in the Dog Writers Association of America's Book Humor category.

I am a regularly published writer.

Several hundred of my articles have appeared in print and on the Internet. My short stories have been published in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

Since January 2004, I have been a full-time, freelance writer. Despite all of these achievements though, I am still a rejected writer. Sometimes, I am rejected several times a day.

Do I have a degree in writing? No. Did I get a good grade in my English O level? No. (I scraped through with a C grade, which in those days was the lowest pass.) Is my mother or father the head of a big publishing company? No. (More's the pity!) Do I have an agent? No. Not at the moment. I haven't needed one for my first nine books, but that doesn't mean to say that I won't have one in the future. My success so far has been achieved without one.

A POSITIVE WRITER IS A PRODUCTIVE WRITER. A PRODUCTIVE WRITER IS A SUCCESSFUL WRITER.

I believe my writing achievements are down to thinking as positively as I can at ALL times. Yes, I have days just like everyone else that could have gone better, although I try not to think of those as bad days. But, as a positive writer, I've learned to look on the bright side of my writing life. A positive writer IS a productive writer. A productive writer is more likely to become a published writer. Therefore a productive writer CAN become a successful writer. Positivity leads to higher productivity, which in

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turn increases the opportunity for success.

If you dream about being the next JK Rowling, Stephen King, Stephanie Myers, Thomas Keneally, Chetan Bhagat or Terry Pratchett then there's something you need to know. They didn't achieve it by dreaming. They did it by sitting down and producing written work. That means putting a bum on a chair and either picking up a pen and notebook, or caressing a keyboard with some fingers. And that means regularly. Ideally, it means EVERYDAY. But then, in your heart of hearts, you already knew that didn't you? There's more to putting your bum on a chair and writing though. You NEED to *believe* that you CAN achieve YOUR writing goals and that you WILL attain them. You MUST believe in YOURSELF.

And there's the important word. **Believe**. You have to believe that you can achieve what you want to achieve, because it isn't anyone else's job to do so. I've lost count how many workshops I've run where someone has come up to me and said, "Oh, I don't think I could ever write a book." And guess what? They haven't. Because that is what they believe. They believe they don't have the ability to write a book, when, in actual fact, they probably do. But because they don't believe they can write a book, they don't write a book. It's called the self-fulfilling prophecy. So, why not turn it around and make the self-fulfilling prophecy one that *will* work in your favour?

On average, more than 125,000 new books are published every year. We therefore know that it is possible for the human being to write a book. We also know that it is possible to get a book published. Those who have succeeded have believed they can do it.

The way to remain positive is to keep hold of your beliefs. Believe that you CAN do it and you are more likely to take the necessary steps required to ensure that you do reach your goal.

This book began life as a workshop I gave to the writers' group that I go to and afterwards many came up to me and said

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it was just what they needed – a great kick up the backside. In fact, one member later emailed me and said, "*Since your workshop I've set myself the target of writing 500 words a day, and I am achieving this. As a result, I've achieved over 12,000 words of my novel since our last group meeting. It's fantastic, I'm so overjoyed!*"

I also used my workshop as the basis for a blog posting and this generated a lot of positive feedback too. It was also picked up by an E-zine who wanted to use it as the main article for their next issue. They even paid me for it – how positive is that? So, being an optimistic writer, I realised that perhaps there was a book in this idea. And here it is.

You'll have noticed already that there are times when I have used CAPITALS to emphasize certain words. Now, I know that in the world of email etiquette, capitals are the equivalent of SHOUTING. I make no apologies for this. Sorry, I meant to say, I MAKE NO APOLOGIES FOR THIS! Why? Because there are times when we think we are listening, yet often we are only hearing what we want to hear. Until someone invents a book that can slap you across the face when it wants to ensure that you've understood an important point, this is the only method that I have available to me. Heck, if I want to slap you across the face with both hands, I may even **SHOUT IN BOLD!**

So, if you want to become a positively productive and successful writer, then turn the page and prepare to bend over. There's a foot heading for your rear end right now. **YOU CAN** do it if **YOU REALLY WANT** to!

Part I

Setting Achievable Writing Goals

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Goals

Do you start each New Year with a long list of resolutions? How many of them harbour your writing dreams? What are YOUR writing dreams?

- ☺ To write a novel?
- ☺ To become a bestselling writer?
- ☺ To sell an idea to Hollywood and retire on the proceeds?

The problem with making big New Year resolutions is that they are too big to tackle on their own. When we sit down as writers, it is often the big dream we have at the forefront of our minds. If we think about setting ourselves a goal, we tend to set a whopping great big New Year's resolution of a goal, even if it's on a wet weekend in April. Have you ever set out to write a 100,000-word novel and two hours later, when all you have achieved are three measly paragraphs, found despondency setting in? Suddenly that 100,000th word seems completely unobtainable. The end is nowhere in sight. Do you close your notebook, never to look at those paragraphs again?

A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH ONE SMALL STEP

It was the Chinese Philosopher, Lao Tzu, who said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with one small step. It might sound corny. It may even come across as patronising. But don't dismiss it, because it IS true. Every 100,000-word novel begins with a first chapter. Every first chapter begins with an opening sentence, and every opening sentence begins with a first word. To remain positive on our journey to the realisation of our dreams, we need to break our trip down into those smaller steps. However, in order to make that first step, you need to know where YOUR

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journey is going to take YOU.

I hope the word *goal* doesn't frighten you. It shouldn't. Your goals should excite you. They're yours, after all! However, I'm aware that the setting of goals and targets are part and parcel of many people's ordinary and mundane work life. As someone who used to work for a major high street bank, I was always being set targets. The problem with these targets is that they were always someone else's figures. I wasn't asked how many credit cards I thought I could sell, I was told what my target was and that's what I had to aim for! Remember, when I talk about goals in this book, I'm referring to something that you dream of. This is something that you *want* to aim for. A writing goal is for YOU to set, nobody else. This is YOUR dream that you are striving towards.

Don't wait for January 1st!

You can start making your goals at ANY time. Start today! Start now!

Long-term

When you set yourself a goal, what you actually need to do is set yourself *three* types of goals – long-term, medium-term and short-term. Our long-term goals are those big New Year-type resolutions, but instead of thinking about them and setting them five minutes before the chimes of midnight, we need to be practical. We need to be REALISTIC. Which of the following are realistic goals?

- ☺ Selling a movie to Hollywood?
- ☺ Writing a bestselling book?
- ☺ Writing a novel?

Of the three goals listed above, the most realistically achievable is the third one – writing a novel. Why? Because it's the one goal that YOU have full control over. YOU CAN write a whole novel,

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if YOU make the commitment. Notice how the goal is to write a novel, not to have a novel published. To have a novel published requires other people (publishers or agents) to help you to achieve your goal. YOU are more likely to achieve YOUR goals if you have more opportunity to influence the outcome of your goal.

Once you've written a novel, that's the time to set yourself the new long-term goal of getting it published. Yes, you will need other people to help you with this, but there are steps you can take *when* you reach this moment. Part of that process will be to break this long-term goal down into more manageable stages, over which you have more control. Of course, achieving this new *to be published* goal is psychologically easier when you actually have a finished novel to send out to publishers in the first place!

How long is a long-term goal?

How long is a piece of string? Long-term goals are those bigger projects that take time to complete. They could be a few months, a few years or even longer. Think BIG and dream. Long-term goals need to stretch you. They won't be easily achievable, nor should they be. Nothing in life worth achieving is ever easy. They should challenge you and make you grow as a person and as a writer. If your long-term goal is easily achieved, then the only person you are fooling is yourself.

Medium-term

If a long-term goal is the destination of our journey, then our medium-term goals need to be the service station stops. Breaking goals down into smaller, manageable chunks helps us to remain focussed on the overall project, whilst also giving us the psychological boost of achieving something. Examine your writing goal and ask yourself how you can break it down into smaller targets. If, for example, your long-term goal was to enter a prestigious short story competition with a closing date in four months' time, your medium-term goals could be as follows:

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- ☺ 3 months before the closing date – complete the first draft.
- ☺ 2 months before the closing date – complete editing the second draft.
- ☺ 1 month before the closing date – complete the final revision.

By following these medium-term goals and meeting every one of them, YOU WILL achieve your long-term goal of having an entry written and prepared in time for submission to the competition. Instead of sitting at your desk with pen and paper in hand trying to think of a perfect short story to write and send off in four months' time, you only need to think about completing the first draft in a month. This makes the job feel easier to tackle psychologically. You don't have to look quite so far ahead. Your immediate goal is nearer to you. As a result, it is more attainable. Psychologically, you'll be thinking, *this is something I CAN do*.

As a writing tutor, I've discovered that many new writers believe that what they write has to be perfect, highly-polished prose, immediately. They worry about every word as soon as they've written it and so they spend hours agonising over the first word. When the perfect sentence fails to materialise, they begin to doubt themselves and their ability. And so the negativity begins to grow. Perfection isn't created first time round. Perfection is honed. First drafts are not perfect. Accept that.

In my short story competition example, you know that your entry doesn't have to be perfect in a month's time, because you know that you've programmed other medium-term goals in the future to deal with perfecting your story. But once YOU have completed that first draft, you'll know that YOU ARE one step closer to achieving YOUR goal.

Remember – Rome wasn't built in a day!

(And you can take out the clichés when you edit your work.)

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Short-term

Short-term goals are the immediate ones. They need to be the goals to aim for over the next few minutes, hours or days. Do you want to write 500 words before lunch? Perhaps you want to finish the first draft of an article by the end of the day, or complete the whole thing and send it off by the end of the week. Short-term goals are the stepping-stones that help you to achieve your medium-term goals. They are the important motorway junctions that lead you to the medium-term service stations. These are the goals that will make you feel pleased with yourself at the end of the day. They are the first steps on *your* great journey of a thousand miles.

Short-term goals need to be finely balanced. They should be attainable, but they should still force you to make a concerted effort in order to achieve them. There's no point in saying that you want to write 500 words before lunch, if you only achieve 300 words by the allotted time and decide to make lunchtime three hours later in the hope that you will have achieved 500 words by then! If you only have half an hour to go before lunch, and you're 200 words short, then push yourself to reach YOUR target. As I've already said, you can perfect the words later.

Example of long, medium and short-term goals

To enter a writing competition:

- The closing date is in four months' time. (**Long-term goal**)
  - First month – create a first draft. (**Medium-term goal**)
    - First week – outline story. (**Short-term goal**)
    - Second week – create character biographies. (**Short-term goal**)
    - Third week – finalise plot. (**Short-term goal**)
    - Fourth week – write first draft. (**Short-term goal**)
  - Second month – edit first draft. (**Medium-term goal**)
    - First week – put story aside. Don't look at it. **(Short-**

term goal)
    - Second week – review story. Edit text. **(Short-term goal)**
    - Third week – put story aside. Don't look at it. (**Short-term goal**)
    - Fourth week – review story. Edit text. (**Short-term goal**)
  - Third month – revise story to produce final draft. (**Medium-term goal**)
    - First week – put story aside. Don't look at it. **(Short-term goal)**
    - Second week – review story again. Read it aloud. **(Short-term goal)**
    - Third week – put story aside. Don't look at it. **(Short-term goal)**
    - Fourth week – final review and edit. (**Short-term goal**)
  - Fourth month – Submit story. (**Medium-term goal**)
    - First week – Check all competition rules. (**Short-term goal**)
    - Second week – Post entry allowing plenty of time before the final closing date. (Good luck!) (**Short-term goal**)

To write a novel:

- Write a 100,000-word novel in a year. (**Long-term goal**)
  - Write 8,334 (figure rounded) words every month. (**Medium-term goal**)
    - Write 274 (figure rounded) words every day. (**Short-term goal**)

To write more articles in the next year:

- Write 12 articles in a year. (**Long-term goal**)
  - Write one article every month. (**Medium-term goal**)
    - First week – research article topic. **(Short-term goal)**
    - Second week – devise article structure and write

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opening paragraph. **(Short-term goal)**
- Third week – complete first draft. **(Short-term goal)**
- Fourth week – revise and edit article before submitting. **(Short-term goal)**

Take a look at the second example above – to complete a 100,000-word novel in a year. At first, that goal may seem daunting, especially if you've never written anything of this length before! I know. I've been there! However, the medium-term goal of a little over 8,000 words a month isn't quite as frightening. Break this down further into a short-term goal of 274 words a day, and suddenly the whole project looks achievable. That's when you realise that you CAN do this. And that's the point of this practical exercise. If writing a 100,000-word novel fills you with dread and panic, I guarantee YOU WILL FAIL. If you believe that you can't write a 100,000-word novel, YOU WILL FAIL. Whereas writing 274 words every day is much more attainable and easier to cope with mentally. And when you achieve your first 274 words, YOU WILL be proud that YOU HAVE achieved YOUR goal. If you continue to do this, by the end of the first month, YOU WILL have achieved your medium-term goal of over 8,000 words. Therefore, if you continue to achieve your daily short-term goal of 274 words for 365 days, by the end of the year, YOU WILL reach your goal of a 100,000-word novel. Congratulations. Celebrate. YOU deserve it!

The more frequently you achieve your short-term goals, the easier it becomes to accept that YOU CAN do it. You will begin to ***believe*** *in yourself. You'll then realise that your other long-term goals ARE achievable too, but only if you break them down into manageable targets.*

S.M.A.R.T.

When you've produced your own personal list of short, medium

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and long-term goals, ask yourself whether they are S.M.A.R.T. enough. Don't panic, this doesn't mean that they have to be cleverer than you! However, to ensure that you can achieve them and, more importantly, know when you have achieved them, all of your goals need to meet the S.M.A.R.T. criteria. The acronym stands for:

- ☺ Specific
- ☺ Measurable
- ☺ Achievable
- ☺ Realistic
- ☺ Timely

SPECIFIC goals are clearly defined goals. *To write 100 words in an hour* is a specific goal. You know what you have to do and when you have to do it by. You will know when you have achieved your goal. Whereas, *to write some words*, isn't a precise goal. How many is *some*? When will you know that what you have written is enough?

MEASURABLE goals allow you to monitor your achievements so far. The specific goal above, *to write 100 words in an hour*, is measurable in two ways. Firstly, as you write, you can keep track of how many words you have written and secondly, you can measure how much time you have left to achieve the goal.

ACHIEVABLE goals are sensible goals. By this, I mean sensible when taking your current situation and circumstances into consideration. For example, writing 10,000 words in a day may be achievable if you have hired a log cabin on a remote island, miles away from any distractions, family members, friends, phones, emails etc. and you can spend 12 hours in front of your laptop, notebook or computer. It is not achievable if you have to take the kids to school, do the weekly shop, do a day's work,

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collect the kids from school, then feed and entertain them until they go to bed. The key to remaining positive is to understand your limitations and work your goals around them. If you can't achieve them, depression will quickly surround you like a fog. Suddenly, you'll start to believe that you will never be a writer. Don't let that happen.

REALISTIC goals are rational goals. Realistically, is your goal *to write a bestselling novel* achievable, if you haven't written anything longer than an irate email to your gas company? It's not impossible, but is it realistic? If you buy a ticket, it's not impossible that you will be this week's lucky jackpot winner on the lottery. People do win most weeks, don't they? But is it realistic? Is it likely to happen to you?

TIMELY goals are those that every professional writer has. They're called deadlines. Everything has to be achieved by a certain time. A deadline allows you to measure whether you have achieved what you set out to achieve. A goal with no timescale gives you no incentive to sit down and tackle it. That's why, as a positively productive writer, it's important to have a mixture of short, medium and long-term goals.

So, when you begin to create your list of goals ask yourself, are they S.M.A.R.T. ones? Do you know what you have to do and when you have to do it by? Do you think you can do it in the time you've set aside? If your family circumstances mean that you can only devote 30 minutes a day to your writing, then you need to know what your goal is for those 30 minutes. S.M.A.R.T. goals will help you to become a positively productive writer. Staying positive means being able to measure how far along your journey of a thousand miles you have travelled, and how much further there is still to go.

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Which comes first – short or long?

It's imperative that you have a clear understanding of where your great writing journey is going to take you, and therefore the easiest way to devise your short and medium-term goals is to work backwards. For example, to achieve a 100,000-word novel in a year, divide the figure by 12 to get a monthly total (100,000 words ÷ 12 months = 8,333 words per month). Or you could divide this by 52 weeks to get a weekly total (100,000 ÷ 52 = 1,923). Or, you could divide it by 365 days to arrive at a daily total of 274.

If you begin by setting yourself short-term goals, without knowing what your long-term goal is, then you will have no idea where your journey will take you, or when you have actually reached the end of it. As my previous work colleagues always enjoyed saying, "*Any road will do if you don't know where you are going!*" You should therefore concentrate on creating short and medium-term goals that will help you to achieve your long-term goals. Know exactly where YOU want to go. This means goals designed by YOU, for YOU to get more of YOUR work written and submitted.

START NOW*. Come on! To reach your long-term goal of becoming a positively productive writer you don't need any specialist equipment. Start a new document on your computer, or get a small index card and create a table or divide it into three columns. Label each column – long, medium and short. Now create and list YOUR goals. The first short-term goal is easy. In fact, write it down now. It is:*

To create a series of short, medium and long-term goals

Then, as soon as you have created your goals, you can tick this one off and already you've taken that first step! Well done. See? It's easy when you know how, isn't it?

Writing down your goals like this also makes them clearer in your mind. This may seem strange, but seeing something in

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black and white helps the brain to focus on what it is we want to achieve. The art of committing something to paper suggests that we are making a *commitment*. Writing it down formalises that commitment. Suddenly, it's there for all to see. This takes us one step closer to turning them into reality.

> *"A goal is nothing more than a dream with a deadline."*
> ***Joe L Griffith***