

So today I'm sixty-one... RIGHT...

By Holly Lisle

We had our little pizza and birthday-pie (I'm not a cake fan) celebration last night, because Matt doesn't have today off.

So today, while I AM going to be taking the day off from the novel, I'm working on fixing the [HollysWritingClasses.com](https://hollylisle.com) website.

Doing a big overhaul, upgrading stuff to a new platform and new software, moving ALL the students and class owners...

This isn't going to be done today. The actual work of it isn't even going to be STARTED today. Today, my moderators and I are just figuring out the new software, and trying to find the easiest ways to bring everything over.

And...

I'm kind of thrilled, actually. I love doing this stuff – and I keep seeing how much more smoothly everything is going to work, and how much more fun it's going to be to use.

And I'm still keeping my promise to myself that I would not work on the novel on my birthday.

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Today I studied the map, asked WHY... made good progress on OUTLINE 5... figured out why YESTERDAY crashed...

By Holly Lisle

Can't say today was easy. I walked in circles (literally) because pacing helps me generate ideas, talked to myself out loud to ask important questions, looked at my map and drew a few circles on it to identify story issues...

And then I went back to the line-for-scene outline and managed to come up with eleven line-for-scene sentences, a MASSIVE conflict I'd forgotten to consider while pushing for the series end, and now not only do I love the new direction the series takes in the final novel...

But I cannot wait to write the damn thing.

Could stuff in BOOK 4 break things in the final outline between now and then?

Sure.

Could I hit some sort of wall tomorrow while figuring out the remaining eleven LFS sentences?

Oh, most certainly.

But there are solid principles to storytelling that I follow... and if I don't end up using what I have now, it will only be because I have something that is provably better.

About the Tuesday Crash...

I forgot that I hadn't had any food since Sunday at about 7 p.m.

It's a mostly regular intermittent fasting thing we do – one meal a day Tuesday through Sunday, then don't eat again until Tuesday at around 7 p.m.

And mostly that works just fine. Sometimes, though, I get a little hungry by Tuesday morning, and instincts kick in that send me in search of food: BODY gets up and walks to the fridge or to the cashew can, BRAIN grabs body, turns it around, and sits it back at the desk, BODY waits until brain is engaged in though (so not paying attention) and walks over to the damn fridge again...

That, with multiple repetitions, was Tuesday.

Tomorrow, I have eleven more Line-For-Scene Sentences to go to finish the Book 5 outline.

So – this is within reach... and I should be back to writing Book Four on either Friday or Monday.

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Have figured out the plot summaries for Ohio 4 and Ohio

5 – now to the line-for-scene outlines

By Holly Lisle

Kind of a headdesk day today.

Been at this for about three hours already, and it looks like I've only achieved 60 words so far: A 30-word plot sentence for Ohio 4, and a 30-word plot sentence for Ohio 5.

It's a lot more than that, though.

While I can't count any of the words, I had to rant at myself in my text notes to figure out the primary and secondary conflicts on each of the two remaining novels, and make sure I included stories for each of the primary series characters...

And I had to figure out how to retrofit one of *this morning's* revelations into the three earlier books without breaking anything...

And I had to ditch my main character's sister – not just for novel four, but for the entire five-book series. It won't affect that many scenes, or the overall plot (which, in fact, was one of the problems and part of the reason I have to do it), and I've figured out how most of the affected minor scenes be adapted for secondary characters who already have other things to do in this series.

If there is a second five-book series in this world... or just one-off novels... I might be able use the sister.

In this series, though, she ended up having nothing essential to do, and her presence raised questions about why she was there in the first place (she gave my MC something important to do at the start of Book 3) – but I figured out a better way to begin Book 3 that will still hit all the same goals.

So... now I'm going to start the new Book Four line-for-scene outline, and hope I can salvage some scene sentences. If I can't, I can't.

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Reworking the Ohio #4 Outline – The outline from the current chapter on is “burn to ground, start over”

By Holly Lisle

As noted in yesterday's post, today's work has required me to gut the outline for Book 4, and rethink.

While I'll be able to keep the scenes I've already written in Book Four, I won't be able to keep much of any of the future scenes I'd planned.

Progress is slow, and also (big surprise) painful, because all changes to what I'd planned in Book 4 will have a domino effect on what I'd planned for Book 5, and once I finish the first draft of Book 4, I'm going to have to replot Book 5.

This is the price of the better idea – so before you turn your series upside down to chase this beast, you have to know that your “Better Idea” really is better.

This one is.

It is worth all the work it's taking me to redo the final two

outlines, because the single critical piece of information about the villain that my subconscious mind withheld from me through the writing of the first three books and the first quarter of the fourth brings a depth and a power to the story that I hadn't imagined was possible.

I already built the critical pieces of this story line into the first three books... *without knowing I was doing it.*

However, in Book 4, I started veering away from this secret I was keeping from myself and what it meant – and that was when my gut told me I'd gone in the wrong direction... and FINALLY told me its secret.

No words today. (There's no point in counting outline Sentences because they don't ever show up in the actual story).

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“No plan survives first contact with the enemy...”

By Holly Lisle

Or second contact...

Or third...

The quote may come from Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, or Carl von Clausewitz, or Dwight D. Eisenhower... or just some dude who knew shit.

But it's true – and it isn't just true about war.

It's true about any sort of creation that requires spontaneous adaptation to unknowable but expected change. Like writing fiction.

I outline while knowing the nature of outlining, which is this
—

The thing fictional characters do when presented with a story plan is to act around the plan — to do something that will beat the plan. Fictional heroes and villains alike invariably act like real human beings. That is, they work to improve their own odds of success inside the story, and by doing so, they invariably shift the odds in their favor, and invariably surprise me.

These surprises are good for the story — if they surprise me, they will surprise the reader.

They're just such a pain in the ass... because my heroes AND my villains keep blowing up my nice, neat, carefully plotted outline.

But anyway, that's where I am today — several hours into my workday, having to stop to re-plot the next few scenes of my outline to maintain the structure of the story I'm building so that I can keep the cool shit one of the little jerks just did.



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Tiptoeing through the minefield... and being mocked by my Muse

By Holly Lisle

I'd hoped to get 1200 words net today, but after a workday that started at six AM and included very little sleep the night before, I'm going to take what I got and go do things that don't require so much brain.

What I got, though...

Holy Crap!

I found out something absolutely enormous about the over-all series villain today – something that pretty much rocked my world.

Funny thing is, though, that this discovery is one of the sort that is going to require absolutely NO revision to get it to fit into the earlier books.

I have from time to time mentioned that while I'm writing, my

Muse (the non-verbal part of my brain where most of my best ideas come from) keeps secrets from me.

Some of them are minor. Some of them are kind of cute.

Today I met one of those secrets – And this one was EPIC.

More astonishingly, I have been writing important pieces of that particular secret into the novel from day one, never recognizing the actual meaning of what I was writing.

This wasn't a little mike-drop moment for my Muse.

This was that wicked elf dropping the mike, flashing his ass, and laughing like a loon. It was, "Hahahahahah! Sucker! I've known this all along."

(Why was my muse male today? Don't know. It shifts.)

Anyway, while I probably got my 1250 or more in real words written, **my net gain was only 846**. But with the Muse revelation, which was awesome once I got over the shock... I'll take it.

It was a good, good writing day.



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Special houses (may I never visit one on a bad day)... 1321 words of 1250 needed, 5573 total.

By Holly Lisle

Sometimes I scare myself.

I write words every day in a process where I give over a lot of control to my Right Brain Muse.

Small but important note: *Right-brain muses – parts of the brain that don't do much with words and spelling, but that do hold images and ideas and imagination – are theoretical, with the theory coming from studies done of people who had medically severed corpus callosa to stop intransigent seizures. It might very well be that with an unsevered corpus callosum, the brain is much more equitable in distributing its workload to both parts. I, however, like thinking of my left brain as the one that has the logic and reliably shows up for work every day whether we feel like it or not, while I like thinking that the right brain as the one infested with the nightmares and ghosts and really gruesome ideas for things to do to my poor characters that it finds disturbingly funny.*

Either way, there is a part of my brain that comes up with wicked plot twists, that scares me, that makes me laugh, and that makes me cry, even though all the stuff it's pitching at me is stuff it made up – stuff that never really happened – and I try to put that part in charge of the writing as much as possible.

This morning, this part stepped into the scene I'd planned, muttered "Oh, honey, that's not even close to the worst thing that could happen in this situation" – and went to town.

Today I was almost a spectator to the words that rolled onto the page at ridiculous speed.

Today I scared myself.

No idea how much of this scene will survive in revision, but when my mind decided the bad guys were not going to win this round, it gave me something that I can see visiting me in nightmares for some years to come.

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A pre-writing post: After Monsterity, 1357 words that no longer fit Book 3

By Holly Lisle

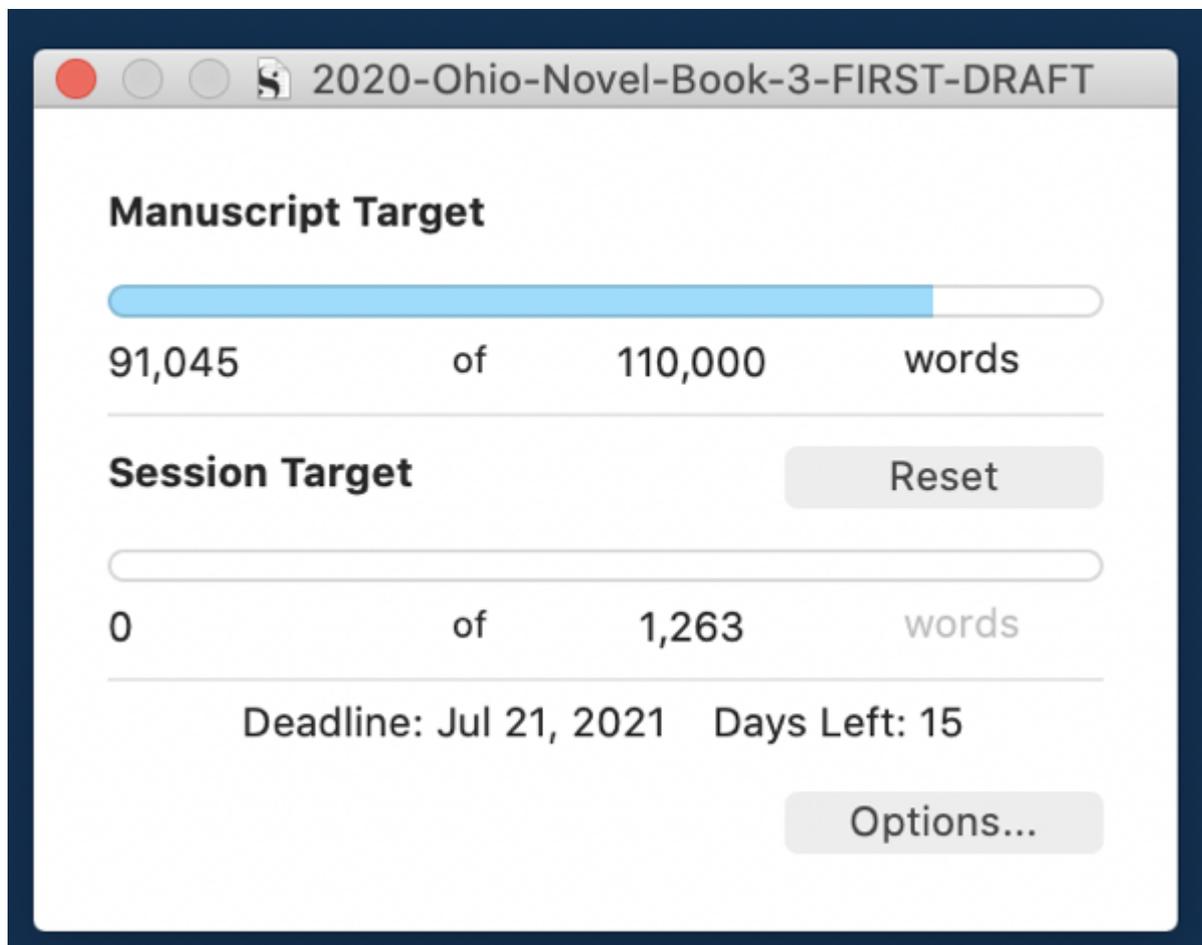
At least, they don't fit in the way I need them to.

I have the pieces of the story that I need in them, but

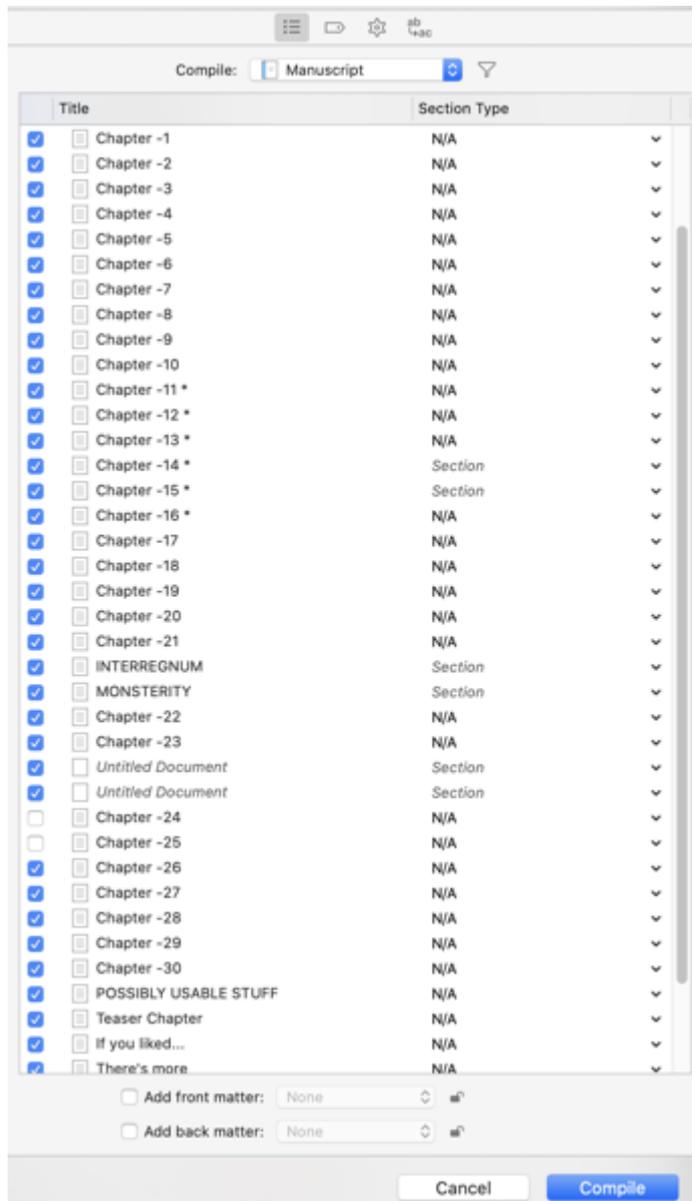
writing on which I spent 8022 words, four scenes, and two chapters needs to be small and tight and avoid (in this book, at least) – one scene, not four – the introduction of five new named characters.

I can handle one... and that one – who may or may not be critical in one of the later two books (or who may be a main character in a second series or a stand-alone for me if the first five books do well – is going to have to summarize the concept behind what he's doing.

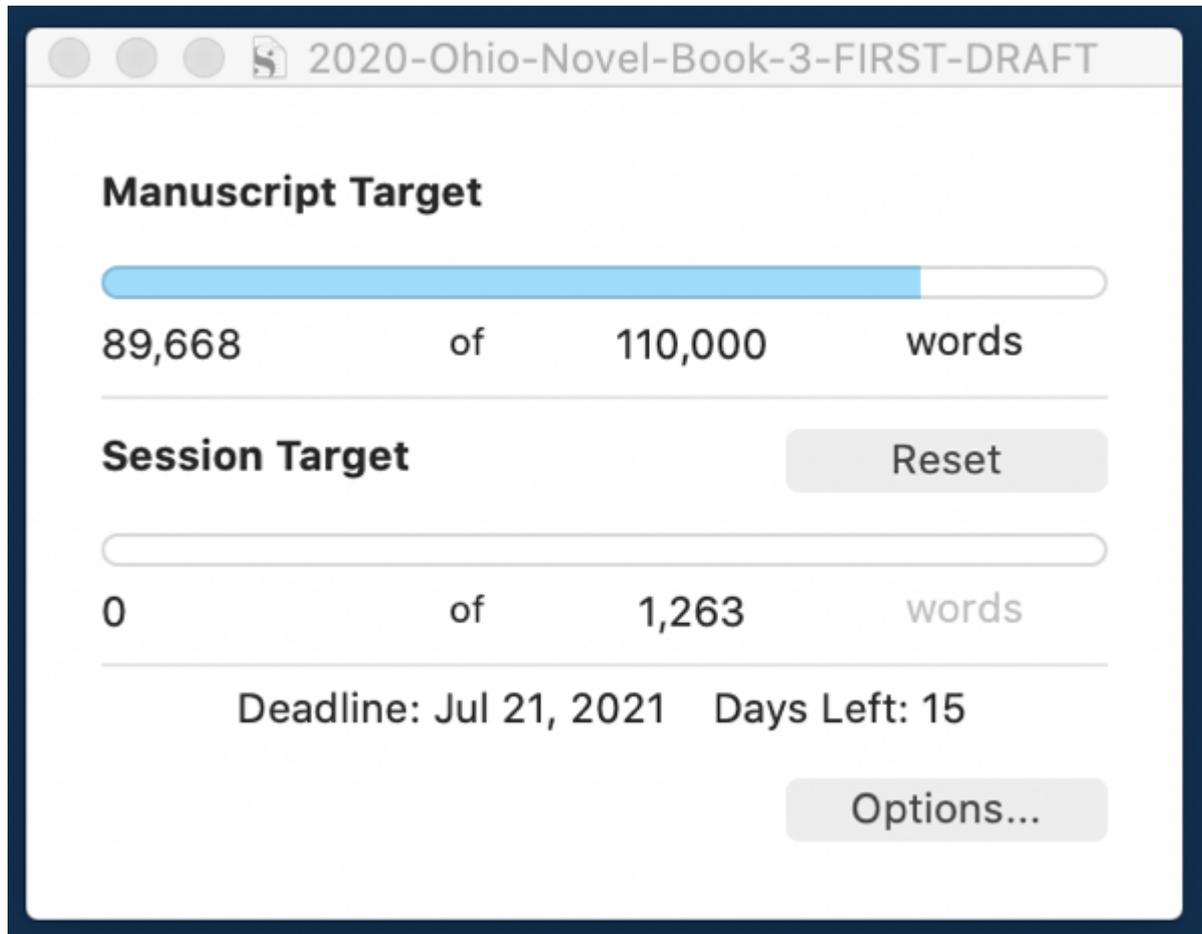
Here was today's lovely starting word count.



Here is the unchecking of two chapters that will have to be dropped into the Book Four manuscript as soon as I post this.



And below is the wordcount following the removal of those two chapters to Book Four.



There is a bright side. I have a wonderfully funny way to start Book Four now, and a hefty chunk of words I'll get to count the instant I open THAT manuscript.

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**I loathe drama – ZERO words,
ZERO replacement scene**

sentences built.

By Holly Lisle

Sometimes my job as a writer and my job as a writing-community owner conflict.

Today was one of those days – and it was ugly and infuriating. I lost one very nice member who has been with me for years because that writer's work was attacked in an fashion by another member.

I'm doing my best to get that member back – I had to make amends to the writer who was attacked because I failed to understand the problem when she brought it to me initially. She chose to be polite about the person attacking her work, and did not name names.

My moderators discovered independently both the attack on the work (which is absolutely forbidden in my site Terms of Use), and the identity of the attacker.

I had to ban the attacker from the forum (temporarily, but probably permanently, because I don't think the member who left will come back, and I'm not sure the banned member will be able to stay within the TOS).

And this mess was completely avoidable. I have terms of service up on the site. I expect all members to read them. I then expect them to follow them.

And I expect to never be yanked away from my actual job of writing fiction because someone has decided to treat another member horribly, costing me a student. Possibly two.

For this, I lost a complete day of work.



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1131 words in the wrong direction: I just caught what I was doing, and I'm going to start off tomorrow by ripping back

By Holly Lisle

So. Word-counts first. I got 1131 words today (fewer than my goal of 1250, but not by much).

I stopped with time still on the clock and some words not yet written because I realized that I took yesterday's great leap

forward, and started driving this novel into an area of fiction in which I do not under any circumstances want to write.

Tomorrow, I'm going to have to start my day by ripping out a chunk of today's words. Might be as few as 250, might be as many as a thousand.

But the rest of today, I'm going to be thinking about what I can create to replace the part of the story I wrote into that giant pothole, and that I'm going to have to destroy.

Not the best of days.

But at least I caught my error before it ate the second half of Book Three.

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