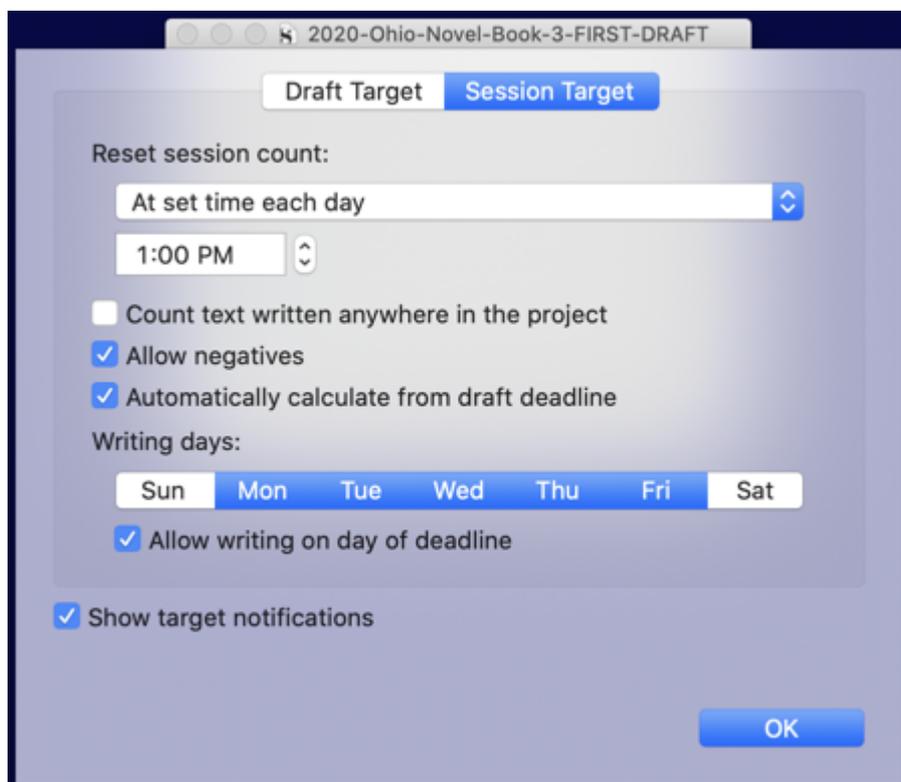


So... Monday. Document built, outline set up, and 522 words of fiction written on Ohio #3

By Holly Lisle

So. Built my Ohio Book 3 line-for-scene outline into Scrivener's nifty sidebar today (can't show – way too many spoilers). But I can show how I have the document set up to make sure (at least as sure as possible) that I'll stay on deadline, even though I came in under the count today.



I gave myself extra time (until 1PM every workday) though I try to be done with the writing at about 11 AM.

I slept in until eight this morning (two hours over my usual wake-up), so I got started late.

I slept really well last night, which is unusual for me. But I haven't adjusted to the time change, and as I do every year, I

gave Benjamin Franklin a hearty round of cursing for his "Daylight Saving" time.

How 'bout we just let people who want to leap out of bed at six AM, my preferred time, do that?

And let the folks who want to sleep in until seven or eight or noon do THAT?

Anyway... back to the set-up. You can see that I'm allowing for the tracking of negative words, since sometimes I rip out a thousand or two at a time, and I need to know how that affects my progress. And need to be able to show that to the folks reading this.

I have Saturday and Sunday cleared because I need that two-day weekend to unwind, and if those days count on the deadline, I think I have more elbow room to hitting it than I actually do.

And I have the automatic calculation of the words I need to get each day set up instead of my preferred flat 1500, just because it's the only ways to get the automatic calculation... which is a lot more handy coming down to the deadline wire than the reminder that I want to hit 1500 words a day. That I can remember.

And... I like the words I got today. IN REAL LIFE, I got more than this, but the first part of what I got was adding an extra scene in Book Two that gives it a nice rounded-out ending.

And then I started with today's beginning, which starts out nice. Tomorrow, it's going to end pointy, with teeth.

But boy, doesn't the progress part of that progress bar look pitiful right now?



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**Today was the second of two
"writing cool-down" days.
Monday... BOOK THREE.**

By Holly Lisle

Today I answered more emails, and tried to get some writer T-shirts and other things up on Teespring, which has just completely redone their software, causing me to lose all the work I'd put up there over the past couple of weeks.

The upcoming merchandise – T-shirts and bags and a few other things – is all for writers right now. On very good advice from both readers and writers, I won't be offering any Ohio novel stuff until the series has fans who want it.

So this post is just to let you know I'm around, but that I'm taking the necessary break from the project before I go back to that third outline and set up the document in Scrivener and start writing.

I need to read it cold while I'm entering the outline sentences into each chapter. I'll be able to spot obvious problems then.

The sly, subtle problems, of course, will hide out until revision to cause the absolute maximum head-beating and swearing.



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Today I figured out three of the four primary problems to solve in Book 5

By Holly Lisle

I had a lot of “Monday stuff” to deal with that could not be put off, so I got started late on the Ohio Book 5 outline.

Today was figuring out secondary story arcs for my primary characters who are NOT my MC.

Tomorrow, I’ll work on my main character’s primary story arc for the final book in the series.

And then get as many line-for-scene Sentences as I can.



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Nineteen LFS sentences on Ohio #4 (out of 30)

By Holly Lisle

My entire body of fiction progress today has been 19 Story Sentences. In raw word count, that's (at max) 570 words (and I know a few of the Sentences came in a word or two under 30).

But each of those Sentences has been tough to get – each includes the protagonist, antagonist, conflict, setting, and twist for the critical action of one chapter of the novel.

In other words, I figured out just under two thirds of the structure for the fourth book in one sitting – which is pretty good.

Tomorrow, I'll have eleven more Sentences to go, including the last one... which has to both end the story and foreshadow the primary conflict in Book 5.

I know what that conflict needs to be. Have NO CLUE how I'm going to work that into the end of Four, though.

So tomorrow should be a lot of fun.



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Finished Book 3 Outline, Three Scenes into Book 4 – and the mysterious origins of the funny bits.

By Holly Lisle

As I've mentioned before, I outline. One 30-word sentence per chapter (knowing even as I do it that I will write extra, unexpected scenes; will write AGAINST some planned, outlined scenes; and will come up with some shit out of nowhere that suddenly has to be in the book, and that changes everything).

Mine is a messy, gory, grubby process that leaves a lot of bent and broken stuff in its wake – which is why I am the Small God of ferocious One Pass Revision.

But first, I outline.

And today I finished the Book 3 outline, and got three GOOD

scenes into book 4.

Things are twisting, shifty, getting messy and scary and grim in the main storyline – and the funny stuff never appears in the outline. The funny stuff only happens when I’m actually writing, when my Node Of Perversity observes that one character has a bad addiction... and then follows another character unknowingly feeding that character’s addiction to its logical conclusion.

Which made me laugh my ass off, and made Matt, my editor (and husband), laugh so hard he snorted. That almost never happens, so it was a huge win.

But that’s all shit I can’t plan.

The PLAN is dark, and twisty, and dangerous, and filled with people I love getting deeper into muck they’re going to have a helluva time surviving.

I just have faith that Smartass Holly will show up while I’m writing that stuff, and make all the rest of us laugh.

No word count. It’s pointless in outlining. But finishing Outline 3 and getting partway into Outline 3 is GOOD progress.



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March and Monday blew in sunny... and exciting.

By Holly Lisle

GOOD, GOOD WRITING DAY!

To start with, I came up with the overall story sentences for the last three books in the series. These are broad, general sentences (no more than 30 words apiece) that just include both the good guys , the ambivalent guys, and the bad guys, and the big issue between them in each of the three remaining books.

Got that completely finished.

Next I started the detail outlining of Book 3 – first coming up with an overall concept for what the action of the middle book needs to be, and then outlining with 30-words-or-fewer sentences for each chapter. These sentences let me understand the single most important thing that needs to happen in that part of the book.

I'm shortcutting a bit, doing **just one sentence per chapter**, because while I almost always have two or even three scenes in a chapter, I've discovered that some of the very best scenes I get come spontaneous follow-ups in-chapter to the planned scenes.

I write best when I give myself a fair amount of elbow room. An absolute maximum of thirty words per chapter gives me that.

When I'm done with the Line-For-Chapter outline for book three, I'll start writing the third novel... because..

I know there is absolutely no point in outlining (even provisionally) for books 4 and 5, because my very best stuff in each novel arises from my spontaneous fighting against the outline, and no matter what I planned for 4 and 4, by the time I've written 3, I'll be able to do something better.

So, that was my writing day. Off to do all the rest of the stuff.

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Fighting with Myself – my next week or two, and the process of figuring out the rest of the series.

By Holly Lisle

Today and for the next few days, I'm going to be writing five provisional synopses.

What are these, and why would I write them?

The way I write, I have an outline – but it's very, very light.

Each chapter (which can include multiple scenes) receives one sentence of no more than 30 words to cover the movement of characters through conflict in that part of the story, following the PACTS formula.

PROTAGONIST

ANTAGONIST

CONFLICT

TWIST

SETTING

Or, in story sentence form, *Protagonist versus antagonist in a setting with a twist.*

This is great in that it allows me to never write a scene in which a character is sitting at a table thinking (frequently whining) about how *shit* life is.

This is bad in that my characters, in the heat of engaging in interesting action in exciting places, frequently decide to take the story into their own hands, and do things I didn't plan – and because my characters are both fragments of me, and fragments of things they pull out of the damned ether, their actions can sometimes shock the hell out of me while being worlds better than what I'd planned.

(Occasionally, they kill off someone I love... but I've already told that story.)

But back to the Story Sentence process, and two necessarily vague examples of how fighting my Line-for-Scene is making things challenging for Book 3.

1) My MC (main character) and her cat went out to meet with an adorable live teddy bear who was supposed to be important later. The teddy bear was lying to me about what he was doing

there, however. My main character saw through his lies, and dealt with him based on who he really was rather than who I'd believed him to be, and a major plot point to a part of the world I thought I understood went sideways.

2) In the very first scene of the first chapter, I'm suddenly writing about trying to save a guy I really didn't like when I first met him. It was a good scene, and I was happy with it. Then Mr. Unlikable showed me who he really was, and the price he'd paid to become that guy, and all of a sudden I fell in love with the little bastard. Was sitting there with tears running down my cheeks, knowing that he isn't a throwaway. Instead, he's a primary character throughout the series – and one of the most unlikely heroes I've ever written. So right at the midpoint of the novel where I met the real him, (and where – in general – you know what the story is about for 45,000 words or so) the ENTIRE focus of the second book changed from being about a different character to being about him. So all the shit I'd planned for that OTHER character is being moved around, and will have to be spread in pieces through the entire five books.

I will note that it's entirely possible to write to a strict outline and follow it.

I will also note that I have never successfully done this.

I've always fought against the outline, because if I already know what's going to happen as I'm writing, in the back of my mind where the fiction lives, that story has already been told and there's no point telling it again.

However... I do have to have some big, planned events in place. Stuff that the rest of the story can build around.

For the rest of this week, and maybe some of next week, I'll be going through and building summaries of what I've done in the first two books, picking out those big planned events and deciding how to use them in the next three books so that they

fit...

Writing rough 200-word synopses for the next three books (with the understanding that this process is usually as effective as herding cats...

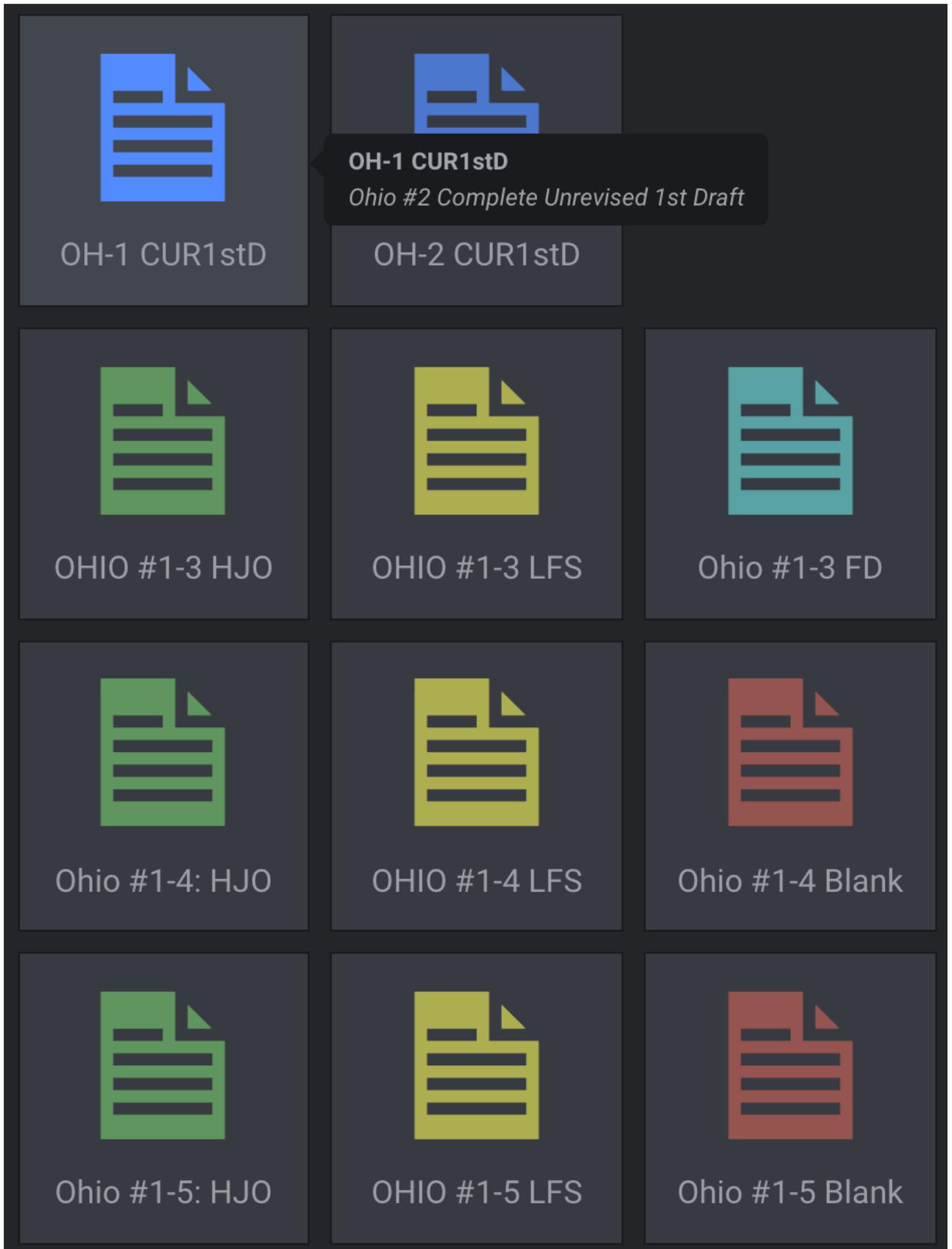
And then, when I think I sort of know where I might be going, I'll write 30 PACTS sentences (one for each chapter) into the line-for-chapter outline for Book 3.

There is NO DAMN REASON to try this process yet for Books 4 and 5.

Because Book 3, like Books 1 and 2, will turn out to be almost nothing like what I'd planned – but will be all the better for me having to fight the outline to come to the better fictional truth that's living inside it.

And SOME TECHIE STUFF for FICTION WRITERS

I use Freeter Pro to keep my projects where I can find them. The screenshot below is the current state of the Ohio Novels.



The two books at the top are Ohio 1 and 2, which are currently in Complete Unrevised First-Draft State.

With a series like the one I'm writing (which is unlike any series I've written before) I discovered that revising each book as I finished it was pointless. I'll have to know the ending before I can revise the beginning.

In this project, I'm essentially living in the non-magic version of the world, so I don't have to draw maps – but I'm discovering the physics of the alternate universe as I go – and while I know the magic rules for the story, and a lot of the critters, and some important characters, each of these is bringing new parts of the universe to me as I write.

I just met Crazy Tree yesterday. That was a shock, lemme tell you.

Having Freeter, however, lets me keep this whole project and all its interconnected pieces carefully labeled, and just one click away.

If you're a writer dealing with dozens of different projects, and you need to be able to find each of them (or each part of them) with one click, this is my favorite piece of software ever. \$29 bucks, no subscription. New version updates will require payment, but there hasn't been one yet. I love this, and recommend it: <https://freeter.io/> (NOT AN AFFILIATE LINK).



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Just finished Book 2 (in first draft, but STILL...) 1455 words today, 93,419 total

By Holly Lisle

Today's words went well. I love the ending I got.

I already know the revision on this one is going to be big – but everything in it now can wait until all five books are done in first draft.

Starting tomorrow, I'm going to begin outlining the third book, using the process I've used for the first two – something that, once I've done five books with it, I'll be adding in as an advanced level for How to Write a Novel. (Gotta figure out what the bugs are before I suggest anyone else try this...)

Today, though?

Today I got the right ending.

I saved the cat.

I made myself laugh.

And my little Ohio town just got a bit weirder.

THAT? That is an awesome writing day.



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My characters keep surprising me – and with 1436 words, I don't think they're done yet

By Holly Lisle

As always, I started by cleaning up the last stuff I wrote yesterday, just to get back into the flow, and realized that what I was writing happened during the Great Flood of 1913 – and got a fair few extra words building the relevance from that bit of backstory.

AND made myself cry while I was writing, which is pretty annoying. It's hard to type when your eyes are drippy and your throat is tight.

And then I landed back in my main character's present, tangled in with the hell of a mess she's just discovered in her past that's in the process of colliding with the hell of a mess in her present.

And which is all tangled up with her lawyer, who she's discovered has been lying to her in a big way.

Good words, good writing day, and I'm now over 90,000, and still have a ways to go.

I've given myself all five days next week to finish this, and I really want to hit that deadline.

If I have to, I can go maybe another five after that, but in the back of my mind, I'm already pulling out events from this book and the first one that are going to have to start dripping their fallout into Book 3.



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Nearing the end – 1521 words, a spiffy twist, and the REALLY fun stuff tomorrow

By Holly Lisle

I ran over my planned words today (1250) because I got hooked by the scene and couldn't make myself stop.

My MC got to spend some time with someone she'd thought was a hallucination, found out a bit more about how she's surviving in a town where things keep trying to kill her...

And the best stuff is still to come.

I have, I think, about four more scenes to write to get this book done, which will put it at, best guess, about 95,000 – 97,000 words.

That's a nice, meaty novel length.

And once that's done, I'll build the line-for-scene outline for Book Three.

I figure I should be working on that by next Friday (the 25th of February).

I love so much the way this is coming together. I wish I could be more specific. Wish I could give some snippets, maybe an early first-draft chapter or two like I used to.

But I can't screw up my pseudonym by attaching myself to it. I have to give this series a legitimate chance of starting out fresh, with a brand new author name and no publishing history at all.



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