

Jenna's Top 10 Favorite Writing Tools for Staying on Track and Writing Productively



#1 - Scrivener.

Although I downloaded the free trial version of **Scrivener** ages ago, it wasn't until earlier this year that I fell head over heels for it. Here's the deal: It's a robust piece of software that will convert your writing across multiple platforms (Kindle, anyone?), help you organize your writing projects and research, and make you cry with its coolness.

BUT. In order to appreciate and utilize the Awesomeness That Is Scrivener, you're going to want to make some time to watch the videos about how to use it, or you just won't get it, and you won't find it worthwhile. Period. Don't say I didn't tell you.

\$45 Mac version, \$40 Windows. <http://literatureandlatte.com>.

(Note: These are referral links, so I'll receive a commission if you buy with them.)



Dropbox
Dropbox

#2 - Dropbox.

I shudder to think how I managed to write on multiple devices and backup my projects before I got my **Dropbox** account. (You ARE backing up your writing projects, right?!) I love that I can store my writing files in my Dropbox account and access them from my phone, tablet, laptop, and desktop computer, keeping them in sync and up-to-date at all times.

As a bonus, my files are stored offsite so if some disaster befalls my laptop or my home, no problem, it's all still there.

Free to \$10 per month. <https://www.dropbox.com>.

(Note: This is a referral link, which means I'll receive some free space on Dropbox if you use it to sign up.)



#3 - Backblaze.

That said, I'm a firm believer in redundancy in backups. I run **Backblaze** in the background

on my primary computer at all times so that my entire hard drive is constantly backed up, including my Dropbox folder with all my writing projects.

Plus, I don't store ANYTHING on my laptop (except a few screenshots and my son's Minecraft worlds) so I don't worry about losing anything if it goes astray. (And yeah, I tried Carbonite and Mozy and neither worked well for me.) Backblaze also offers UNLIMITED data backup, which has already saved me once when my hard drive failed two summers ago. The Apple Genius guy couldn't believe I was so calm when he said he'd have to replace the whole drive. "No problem," I said, "it's all backed up." :)

\$50 per year. <https://www.backblaze.com>.

(This is also a referral link.)



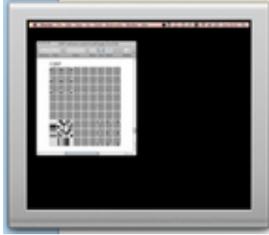
#4 - Timer.

I can't write productively without a timer. I use it primarily to start and end writing sprints. My favorite timer is the simple

Clock app on my iPhone, but I'm also fond of the sound of the Tibetan bowl chimes in the **Insight Timer** app you can get from iTunes.

For a while I even had a cheering crowd ringtone attached to the main timer on my iPhone, to celebrate the massiveness of overcoming the resistance for a day's writing. It might sound like a wacky thing to do, but using a timer while writing sets a certain kind of brisk tone for the process, and lets me know when to stop too (really important for avoiding creative burnout).

Both free. [Insight Meditation Timer here](#).



#5 - Isolator.

Another favorite for my Mac (and yes, this whole list is Mac-centric, sorry Windows fans!) is **Isolator**. It

blacks out everything on my screen except the dock (you can optionally hide that too) and makes me much less likely to be distracted by other programs (read: Gmail if I happen to have left it open!). You can choose to have it start automatically at login and set the degree of opacity (and color) of the blocked out background.

With a simple toggle in the menu bar at the top of my screen, I can eliminate distractions with one click. W00t!

Free. <http://willmore.eu/software/isolator>.



#6 - The Called to Write Coaching Circle.

My **Called to Write Coaching Circle** is another lifesaving writing tool for me. Not

only do I check in on the site daily to track my writing progress and get support from my fellow writers, I also use it to pace myself, set my writing goals, and write with other writers during writing sprints, which is a fabulous way to fire up my writing energy if ever it flags.

During my last big push on a recent script, I checked in multiple times a day and noted every eensy milestone I hit, which helped me keep on going even when the going got tough. (And it did!)

\$147 per 28 day session. <http://justdothewriting.com>



#7 - Numbers.

I use **Numbers** (the Mac version of Excel) to create spreadsheets for individual writing projects both track and organize them. While I've come to LOVE LOVE LOVE outlining in Scrivener, I also wanted a scene-by-scene spreadsheet for my last script, as well as a completion timeline for it, where I tracked my target number of pages per day, my actual number of pages, total page count, and the ever-looming deadline.

I love Numbers not only because I can use it to make a spreadsheet, I can make a *pretty* spreadsheet. I store the file in a project-specific Dropbox folder alongside my Scrivener project file for ease of access across all my devices.

\$20. <http://www.apple.com/mac/numbers>.



#8 - Google Calendar.

My **Google Calendar** is a huge part of my writing life. I use it not only to schedule regular-life things, like appointments, teleconferences, and client meetings, but also to map out my target and actual writing schedules. I like to have a "Planning" calendar and a "Main" (actual) calendar that I can compare side-by-side. If I need to make a shift in my writing schedule, I'll work on the Planning calendar first to identify how I want to shift my current schedule, compare it to the actual schedule, and then start the migration process. I also set writing "appointments" with myself that I treat like a regular appointment with another person. They're even better if match them to the scheduled writing sprints for my Writer's Circle program to create extra incentives and accountability to show up and do the writing.

Free with a Google account. <http://www.google.com>.



#9 - Byword.

Byword changed my life post-baby #2. (This is my favorite app for writing on my phone!)

I needed a way to write at any time or in any place and have it sync across my devices so I could easily access it, INCLUDING from my phone. (Scrivener is great on computers but doesn't yet have an iPad or iPhone app.) Byword is fantastic for this because not only can you write in an attractive, simple interface and save your files to Dropbox or iCloud, you can access them through the Byword app on your computers too.

If you're blogging, you can write in Markdown text and export HTML-ready content straight into Wordpress. Plus, if you want to get REALLY fancy, you can sync your Scrivener projects to an external folder and access the individual files from within Byword. Oh! And did I mention it has a night-reading mode (white text on black)? Another biggie for a mama with a little baby nearby.

\$12 computer, \$6 iPad/iPhone. <http://bywordapp.com>.



#10 - Weekend Read.

If you're a screenwriter like I am, you'll

also want to know about another low cost app called **Weekend Read** put out by John August (*Big Fish*). It "melts" PDF scripts into a phone-readable format and imports Final Draft files, and you can read scripts in night-mode too. My only complaint about the app is that there's no way to make notes on the script. This is a great tool if you want to read other people's scripts, but also fantastic if you want to read your own work and have a reader's experience of your script (a powerful way to get an objective look at your own writing).

Free. <http://quoteunquoteapps.com/weekendread>.

Okay, I know I promised you 10 but I just couldn't stop ... here are **5 more of my favorite writing tools as a bonus for you!**



#1 - Final Draft.

As a screenwriter, I still can't live without **Final Draft**, even though I'm doing almost all my screenwriting in Scrivener these days. Here's why: It's the industry standard for screenwriting format, and it's worth knowing that your page count is coming out *precisely* where you want it to be.

I've heard great things about Highland (also from John August), Movie Magic, and even the free Celtx, but even if I use those someday (and I'm sure I'll try them out at some point), odds are that I'll still pull my final script into Final Draft to make sure everything is as it should be. There's also an iPad and iPhone version that comes in handy for when you're on the road (or writing in bed!).

\$170 computer, \$10 iPad/iPhone. <http://www.finaldraft.com>.



#2 - Notability.

This is a new find for me and I'm **SOLD**. **Notability** is a great iPad app that you can use to take notes and make sketches and all sorts of other things, but what I love it for is the ability to make fast and easy notes on PDFs when I give feedback to other writers on their projects.

I can send back a marked up PDF with highlighter and scribbles all over it (it even has palm recognition!) along with email notes to a fellow writer. Easy-peasy. No more hassling around with the limited features in Acrobat. Whew!

\$6. <http://www.gingerlabs.com>.



#3 - Jot Pro.

Along with Notability, I use the **JotPro Stylus** to write on those PDFs. It's a handy, comfortable stylus with a pen-like tip (unlike those fat rubber jobs that make you feel like you're going to make gigantic lines all over anything you touch, even if you set the line weight to something negligible) and has a magnet in it to hold it tight to your magnetic iPad cover. Super handy.

\$19 old version: <http://amzn.to/1UXxRbV>.

\$30 new version: <http://amzn.to/1UXxNZC>.

(Both are Amazon affiliate links.)



#4 - iPhone.

It's probably super obvious by now but I love my iPhone for handy, on-the-go writing. I use the Notes app to keep lists of project ideas. I use Byword to write while I'm on the go. I use the Timer in the Clock app to track my writing time. I can even use it to email screenwriting samples from Dropbox while I'm out and about if needed.

I also find, however, that my phone can be a writing DISTRACTION. So I turn off all the sounds, keep it on silent, don't allow notifications from anything except texts, and keep it turned over while I'm writing. I even put it in airplane mode when I really don't want to be disturbed.

Cost varies. <http://www.apple.com>.



#5 - Wordpress.

Even though I sometimes blog in Scrivener or Byword, at the end of the day I still prefer to write my blog posts straight in **Wordpress**. There's less mucking around with cross-over formatting — though Byword does a BEAUTIFUL job of delivering impeccably formatted text, it just doesn't lay out the same way, and since a big part of delivering a good blog post is the white space (just like a script), you have to be able to SEE it in situ to properly gauge the feel of the finished product.

Free. <http://www.wordpress.org> for self-hosted blogs and <http://www.wordpress.com> for Wordpress hosted blogs.

Thanks for downloading my guide!



Thanks so much for reading — I hope you found my writing tools guide helpful, and that it inspires you in your writing life.

If you'd like to connect further, you can find me at www.CalledtoWrite.com or join me in my Called to Write Coaching Circle at www.JustDoTheWriting.com.

In the meantime, I wish you much happiness and success with your writing!