



# Write Like a Honey Badger

## Tracking Ideas and Workflow

By Founder and Instructor Amanda Castleman

Few writers relish organization... unless we're on deadline, that is! Then we urgently need to Marie Kondo the junk drawer and hunt down every long-lost orphan sock. But procrastination jokes aside, a bit of organization can go a long way.

Today let's examine three powerful tools:

- [Idea Hoard!](#)
- [Workflow tracking](#)
- [Follow-ups](#)
- [Some frequently asked questions](#)

### Idea hoard!

Software offers the sun, moon and stars when it comes to time-management and record-keeping. But for stashing story ideas, even a simple text file can work! I create one for each season, pruning away leads that have aged out or just aren't curling my toes any more.

Fellow instructor Flora Tsapovsky prefers a simple Google Sheet (check out more of her tips [here](#)). She squirrels away observations and leads, but also takes time to review the document periodically, which can spark new story ideas. It might reveal, say, a lot of chatter about moving to Missoula, Montana, and that a buzzy restaurant just launched there. Then you search the net and discover the area just won a Most Livable award. An article could be taking shape...

Her recommendation:

- Download [Google Sheets](#), a free app, to your computer, phone or both.
- Divide the spreadsheet by your beats: food, travel, health, cryptocurrency, trans rights, whatever!

- Make succinct but clear notes whenever an idea catches your fancy — brewers are putting oysters in beer, how SpaceX's Starlink is revolutionizing remote connectivity, tips for talking to people reluctant about COVID boosters, etc.
- Note where you found this info, including links where possible. This quick step makes pitching and researching much easier down the road.
- Check in with the spreadsheet at regular intervals, scanning and searching for connections.

## Workflow tracking

Super gonzo pitchers use Kanban project-management tools like [Trello](#), [Asana](#) and [Evernote](#) to name a few [popular among journalists](#). These have lots of whizzbang features like automatically adjusting a series of deadlines when a milestone is missed.

My freelancing has never required this level of firepower, though. So I stick with a to-do list, an online calendar and an income-tracking spreadsheet. This lets me quickly see if I'm en route to "make my nut" for a given month or if I need to drum up more work... and it's also useful at tax time. (In the United States, clients who pay more than \$600 a year to independent contractors must issue them 1099 forms by January 31st and send copies to the IRS. But don't worry if your boss forgot or you earned less from a particular outlet. Just report the income as "miscellaneous.")

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Client	Project	Invoice	Due date	Sent	Payday!	Amount	Paid	

Other writers have more elaborate spreadsheets, which integrate pitch-tracking, assignments and pay. And I can certainly see the appeal of having it all in one place!

Here are some common fields:

- Outlet
- Editor
- Email
- Pitch
- Date of Pitch
- Response Date
- Follow-up date
- Assigned?
- Secondary outlets

- Word count
- Deadline
- Rate
- Referral
- Notes
- Pub date
- Payment received date

Whether you spring for an app or use tools already available, we highly recommend some system for organizing your freelance business. Don't rely just on memory and searches!

## Following up

Why give yourself just one shot, when sales often happen at second or third contact?

Generally speaking, editors don't mind follow-ups. In fact, most welcome them, as they sometimes lose track of promising pitches. Yes, you may encounter the odd grouch who does not want letters "resurfaced." Note their preference and comply, of course. But don't let these edge cases deter you from trying elsewhere!

- For an urgent story — one requiring swift publication — follow up in hours or days. Add "time-sensitive" in your subject line and also in the body text. We recommend simultaneous pitching in cases like this, but if that's not comfortable, give editors a time or date when you'll move on and approach other outlets if you haven't heard back.
- Most editors appreciate follow-ups a week or two out for a regular (non time-sensitive) pitch.

Again, calendar reminders and spreadsheets — or a text document for each pitch idea — can help you track what's where and when action's needed. But you can also consider email reminder tools like [Boomerang](#) and [FollowUpThen](#)!

## Some FAQ

**Q: What is your policy for following up on a pitch/email that was never even opened (if you use a mail tracker)? Do you follow up sooner and give a nudge?**

A: I don't use mail trackers, as the "what-ifs" would make me spiral! But anyone who doesn't respond gets a straight-up resend.

**Q: How long do you usually wait to resend?**

A day or two for urgent timely pitches, a week or two otherwise. And here's a big virtual hug for the spinning-out feelings! Those are never fun...

**Q: What's the etiquette for a resend?**

I just hit "send again," which presents it as a fresh email! I've edited at newspapers, glossy magazines and an app – I know the pressure of wanting to be responsive, but losing control of one's inbox... and it has happened even more to folks since the pandemic began, due to cumulative stress, shrinking staffs and quiet quitting.

My logic: why underscore the editor's stumble when you're trying to make a sale?

And if someone gets tired of seeing the same email every week or two, I figure they can use their Adult Words to pass or explain they're not commissioning or whatever. But I've never had a negative reaction, just a few comments like "thanks for circling back, I meant to respond!"

**Q: I use an email tracker that tells me when letters have been read. An editor has looked at a pitch 23 times over three days. Is my staggering work of genius about to be commissioned? Are they showing everyone they meet how sucky my concept was? WHAT ON EARTH IS HAPPENING?!?!**

Here's why I don't use trackers — I can't take the heat! My imagination runs wild... and then frustration soon follows. But if you like reassurance that you're not just screaming into the void, these apps can show when someone has opened your emails. Except sometimes they glitch and report "read" when someone scrolls past, which could happen dozens of times in a day. Or maybe they let a toddler play ABCMouse and the kiddo has wandered into their inbox. Also ways exist to evade these app (learn more [here](#) and [here](#)), so you may not even be gathering reliable data.

In short, no one knows what's up except the editor. Don't torture yourself with maybes and what-ifs. Either follow up or move on!