

## Conditions of Enoughness

**If you don't declare what satisfaction or enough is for you, you will never be satisfied.**

If you only decide something is enough based on other people's reactions or opinions, you will never be satisfied.

If you keep changing your conditions of enoughness, raising the bar on what you declare is enough, you erode your ability to move forward with your writing, your self-trust in your ideas and abilities, and your growth as a writer.

Making weak or impossible-to-keep commitments - *I will rise at 4 am every day and write for four hours* - fuels the critic by giving him/her ammunition.

**Conditions of Enoughness can change all that and more. They include four elements:**

- 1) Name what is enough in simple facts. *I will write tomorrow.*
- 2) Include a time element or frequency of some kind. *I will write tomorrow for thirty minutes or I will write 1000 words tomorrow.*
- 3) Ensure they're dependent on ONLY YOU on an AVERAGE day. *I will write for fifteen minutes tomorrow while waiting for my mom at the doctor's.*
- 4) Declare you are satisfied when your conditions are met — even if you don't feel satisfied. *I wrote and I declare I am satisfied.*

### **1. Name what is enough in simple facts.**

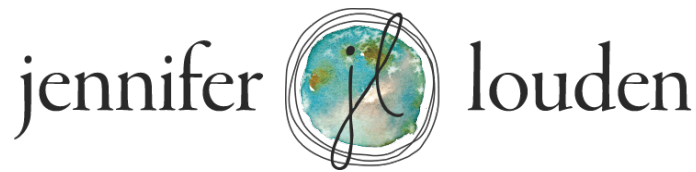
When asked how he managed to write so much, the poet William Stafford famously replied, "I lowered my standards." The first thing we tend to do when we care about doing something — or when we think we *should* care — is to try harder. To try our best. To excel.

But what if that striving actually gets in the way of achieving what you desire?

The more you care about what you are attempting — to help your child find a college that is a perfect fit or writing a book that you are proud of — the louder this "trying hard, doing your best" confusion can get. This is where element one of the COEs begins: With the question, ***"What is the simplest thing I can do?"***

The answer is often very obvious, and surprisingly hard to believe. The Squirrel part of us doesn't want to get started or take positive action; it wants to keep fretting and planning *because that's safer*. Asking, "What is the simplest thing I can do?" draws you out of the snare of the mind's endless permutations and back to what you can do, right now.

I call that hamster-on-a-wheel, crazy-making routine that keeps us from forward motion, "The Squirrel." It's like a rabid squirrel, scurrying hither and tither in our brains, digging for acorns, digging up acorns, scampering up drainpipes and down tree trunks, never resting but always in motion. It appears to be making progress, but in actuality, it's merely keeping us busy so we



don't get anywhere. Insidious!

Then you add measurable facts to the mix. You can see it, hear it, taste it. An objective viewer would agree that yes, you've done it.

Imagine you are - I know what a wild idea - writing a one act play or a short story or a chapter of a novel. Argh! Hair pulling! Teeth gnashing! So hard!

Take a deep breath. Ask yourself, "What is the simplest thing I can do right now to move toward my writing goal, *and how will I know I did it?*"

Asking yourself about "the simplest thing" chunks down your big, overwhelming goal to the smallest possible step. Lots of research shows this chunking down is one of the key elements in getting big things done — making steps so small, the part of your brain where fear and resistance live rolls over and says, "Okay, that doesn't look *too* bad."

**For example:**

- I will read one one-act play this week and makes notes as I go on what works for me or what doesn't.
- I will do free writes writing into scene on my story.
- I will dialogue with my character.
- I will write five hundred words.

If you did any of these things, *you would know you did it*. It's measurable. It's a fact.

**2. Include a Time Element.**

- I will read one one-act play this week and makes notes as I go on what works for me or what doesn't *before 5 PM Friday*.
- I will do three ten-minute free writes writing into scene on my story today *before yoga class*.
- I will dialogue with my character *after dinner tonight*.
- I will write five hundred words *four days this week*.

For how long...

How often...

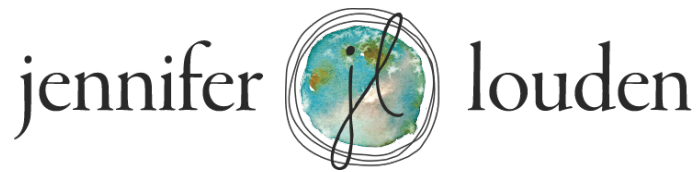
By when....

How much....

These are all examples of time elements. There are many more. The idea is to have a container **so you know when you are finished, not just the big finish, but along the way.**

Notice what happens to these declarations of enough when you add a time element. *You have an even clearer way of knowing you did what you declared you would do. You have an even better way of recognizing "enoughness."*

We live in a temporal world. You may feel hemmed in, restricted, and harassed by time. Yet you can use time as your ally, to create a cup to pour your longings and aspirations into, as a lens to focus your strengths, and as a meditation gong to mark the beginning and end of a time of heightened awareness. What if time could be on your side?



When you omit time from your practice of “enoughness,” you pretend you aren’t human and that you don’t have limits. This leads quickly to all sorts of unhappiness and stuckness.

### 3. Ensure they’re dependent on **ONLY YOU** on an **AVERAGE** day.

- I will read one one-act play this week and makes notes as I go on what works for me or what doesn’t before 5 PM Friday. *Do I have time and energy to do that, no matter what?*
- I will do three ten-minute free writes writing into scene on my story today before yoga class. *Do I really have time?*
- I will dialogue with my character after dinner tonight. *Will I be without any distractions or do I need to ask my spouse to take the kids for twenty minutes?*
- I will write five hundred words four days this week. *How long does it take me to write 500 words? What days do I have that much time free?*

Notice that the above declarations do not involve anyone *else* having to do anything for you to be satisfied – yes, you may ask for support with kids or work or carpooling but that won’t stop you. Nor do they presuppose your having a perfect, interruption-free day, when you are bursting with energy, courage, focus, and can spend 15 hours writing.

When you plan for perfect days, you set yourself up to feel like a failure. Feel like a failure often enough, and you’ll begin to believe you are one.

**We think that by setting the bar higher, striving for more, pushing, is the way to success. It isn’t.**

### 4. Declare You Are Satisfied—Even If You Don’t **FEEL** Satisfied.

This is the trickiest step for most of my clients and students, and it is where the “art” part of COEs comes in. **Your brain has been conditioned to NOT be satisfied.** So when you declare, “I will read one one-act play this week and makes notes as I go on what works for me or what doesn’t *before 5 PM Friday*” and you successfully complete your task, your brain may kick in and say, “You need to study the entire works of Shakespeare before you can even start writing!”

If you tend to believe this critical hungry ghost voice, and you start down the rabbit hole of not enough, not good enough, not fast enough, all your good progress feels lost. It isn’t really lost, but it certainly feels that way! The wind leaves your sails, and overwhelm or “What’s the point?” or even boredom sets in.

For now, realizing that you are building a new identity—*the identity of someone who is satisfied*—that’s your assignment. How would someone who is satisfied be in her body? How would she hold herself? How would she look at the world? How would she breathe? What would someone who is satisfied say to herself about life? How would she assess the day ahead?

I can’t tell you how many people I have met who say “If I had only kept working 10 minutes a day, I would have a rough draft by now.” Work works.