

TAGLINE

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Problem & Solution

Many writers who write for hobby have trouble writing as frequently and consistently as they wish, as well as managing the balance between writing and editing. For new writers, improving their writing quality often means tackling these two issues. Without any external pressure or support, these writers who are usually in charge of their own goals and deadlines often also succumb to lethargy and procrastination. We are creating TagLine to be the solution that gathers what writers need in a single word processor. Our design provides an intuitive way to create tags and notes while in the process of writing, allowing writers to continue their groove while simplifying both the editing and sharing process later. Furthermore, the dashboard visualizes the writer's successes and trials, as well as their ability to consistently meet their goals. This can be in the form of a visualization of "writing health" or a highscore of their progress to evoke an emotional attachment and a sense of accomplishment. Ultimately, TagLine is intended to keep writers writing.

Contextual Inquiry

CI Participants

We did four contextual inquiries with a focus on creative writers who also pursue other activities, like school or work, and can't dedicate their full time or attention to their craft. Our participants (under pseudonyms) included Winky, Professor Slughorn, James, and Dolores. We decided that observing people perform something as personal as writing often wouldn't be feasible or give us useful or honest data. Instead, during these inquiries we primarily followed an interview approach, basing the questions around concrete artifacts.

Winky is an English major at the University of Washington who writes short stories as well as poetry, since as far back as 2nd grade. We interviewed her at her apartment where she usually writes for two hours every morning, and got to see the writing she keeps on her laptop. Winky used to write very often a few years ago and since recently starting up again, she notes that constant practice makes writing much easier. Winky in particular also saves unused snippets from her drafts in a separate document to use in other writing.

Professor Slughorn teaches English and Creative Writing at University of Washington and has published works across a variety of genres from fiction novels and screenplays to newspaper columns. We interviewed him in his office in Padelford, mostly talking about his experiences with these and hoping to understand how he teaches writers to improve. He mentioned that he sees the computer as a tool just like any other, writing with programs like Word and Celtx (for screenwriting) because they're easy to use. Furthermore, he doesn't plan much before he writes, preferring to keep it in memory and editing as he goes.

James writes articles for the UW Daily but also writes short, creative pieces in his spare time. We chose to interview him considering that his experience in journalism could provide a different perspective. As a student, he writes on his laptop and we met him in Odegaard library. He typically writes for 30-45 minutes per day, but rarely returns to his past work out of embarrassment. James also noted that he used to have better organization in the past, but with priorities like college, he hasn't returned to his older work.

Dolores studies languages and writes purely as a hobby, focusing on science fiction works. She's a commuting student, and we questioned her about her writing in Odegaard library. She brought her laptop which she solely works on, showing us the piece she's been writing since August and the website she posts it on. She'd like to get feedback on her work, but it's difficult since her friends don't read her genre. Unlike the other participants, while Dolores doesn't outline, she extensively plans and researches the fictional language her characters use and occasionally draws the characters she imagines.

CI Results

Throughout our inquiries, we noted several common themes, from the tools they used to the tasks our participants wanted to accomplish. To start with, all of our participants write on the computer as it's the most convenient modern writing tool, and they often use Microsoft Word. One point emphasized by Professor Slughorn and corroborated by our other interactions was that every writer has a unique style and process to their writing. It seems that rather than targeting specific writing habits, we should focus on making writing easier and more convenient by building off of the modern editor. While it allows for easy editing, several potential problems and tasks were suggested by this setup.

Most of the participants don't outline or do much planning beyond keeping things in their memory. This has obvious pitfalls, but for our participants, writing frequently is often enough to keep their characters and plotlines fresh. Any notes they take are often temporary or loose, so they are not accessible digitally. However, for many of them this also means that it's often hard to return to work once they've been away from it for a while, either due to headspace or the quality of the work in question. Some participants want to reuse pieces of their past work, but since they rarely go through their older documents, these snippets can get buried in their drafts. Similarly, the Professor mentioned several friends who put in the effort to physically reorder huge works simply to check what scenes might be missing -- a task that cannot be easily done in the editor. Thus, while not every author strictly outlines, we did notice that many of them do this kind of planning and organizing. Across all our participants, there seems to be a desire to keep track of certain pieces of writing as important, or keeping track of details without needing to reread the entire passage or work.

Besides the editing process, all of our participants had something to say about how a writer is motivated to start writing. Often the start of a work is sporadic, but if they get into the habit of writing, regular writing becomes a form of brainstorming. Winky said writing regularly made her feel good and Professor Slughorn mentioned that the hardest part of getting started writing is actually sitting down and getting work done. This problem also applies to returning to older work, and when presented with the possible design of tracking and visualizing their progress in word counts over time, the reception was positive. Tracking writing progress and being able to set goals could help flagging writers when faced with writer's block.

Task Analysis Questions

1. *Who is going to use the design?*

We are targeting our design towards more inexperienced writers who write creatively as a hobby. We decided this because experienced writers have usually developed their own methods of brainstorming, preparation, and tracking, all customized for their individual habits. Notably, the most experienced writer we spoke with stated that he did not use any extra tools at all as they wouldn't provide him any further utility.

2. *What tasks do they now perform?*

Currently all of our participants do not begin with outlining, but rather just start writing when they have an idea and continue to either completely rewrite chunks, or edit as they go. All of our participants mentally keep track of their plot and characters, essentially developing a mental outline. However, most of our participants do plan to some degree, whether it be by taking notes of their surroundings to use later, or organizing their research in an excel spreadsheet. Finally, many of them write regularly in order to maintain and improve their writing quality, and all of our participants write on the computer with mostly Word due to its simplicity.

3. *What tasks are desired?*

One feature that received positive feedback was tagging areas of written text with a keyword and being able to go back and search a larger body of text for those keywords. Many also mentioned wanting to get into the habit of writing regularly, potentially tracking progress over time. Another common theme among writers was that they would not come back to past works of writing either out of embarrassment or a lack of organization. Thus, while no one explicitly mentioned their desire for it, they all seemed to want something that would enable them to revisit their past works more easily, perhaps by flagging the best ideas or sections of their writing to return to later.

4. *How are the tasks learned?*

Writers seem to prefer familiarity in how they work. The writers we talked to used Word, meaning they rely on the patterns they learned early in their education. Many of them avoided complicated technology, preferring to take notes on paper or with images. Being that they do not seem receptive to new technology related to writing, any new tool or task must be lightweight or compatible with what they currently use.

5. *Where are the tasks performed?*

Most writers were comfortable writing in their rooms or coffee shops. Noise was a concern for some, but not all. Preferred location is likely dependent on the user, considering that with portable laptops, it is reasonably easy to write anywhere especially if their notes and research are also portable.

6. *What is the relationship between the person and data?*

With data, writers can judge their progress in writing quality or quantity which can be motivating. This kind of data would be wanted whenever the writer finishes writing, which could be at multiple machines. Likely, it would be sharable, as this may motivate writers to continue reaching their writing goals especially if shared among writing peers.

7. *What other tools does the person have?*

Many writers felt comfortable writing in physical notebooks and transferring their work to Word documents only when necessary, while other writers wrote entirely on the computer for convenience. A few also used calendars to schedule in time for writing every day, or phones to take images with for ideas.

8. *How do people communicate with each other?*

Surprisingly few people collaborated with other writers to edit each other's work. This speaks to the theme of embarrassment of one's own past work and the highly personal nature of writing. However, many writers do desire feedback, or feel more invested in writing when their friends are aware that they do so. One participant posts her work online for feedback, but had not actually received any.

9. *How often are the tasks performed?*

These tasks are performed every time the writer sits down to write or plan, which varies from person to person, but is usually at least once a week. Many will write daily, or in chunks of time such as frequently for a few months before not writing at all. Generating ideas can happen continuously.

10. *What are the time constraints on the tasks?*

The writers we talked to and plan to focus on aren't people with the largest amount of free time. Keeping tasks shorter is preferable so they can focus on actually writing. Otherwise, it's pretty much up to the individual writer when and how long they want to write, edit/markup, or keep track of data.

11. *What happens when things go wrong?*

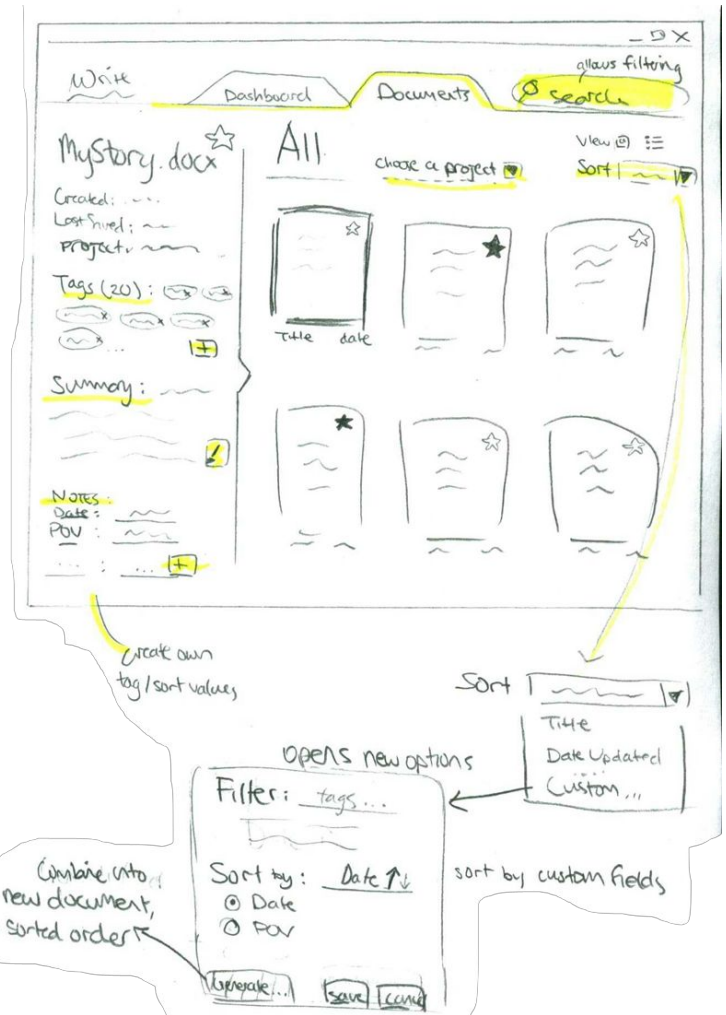
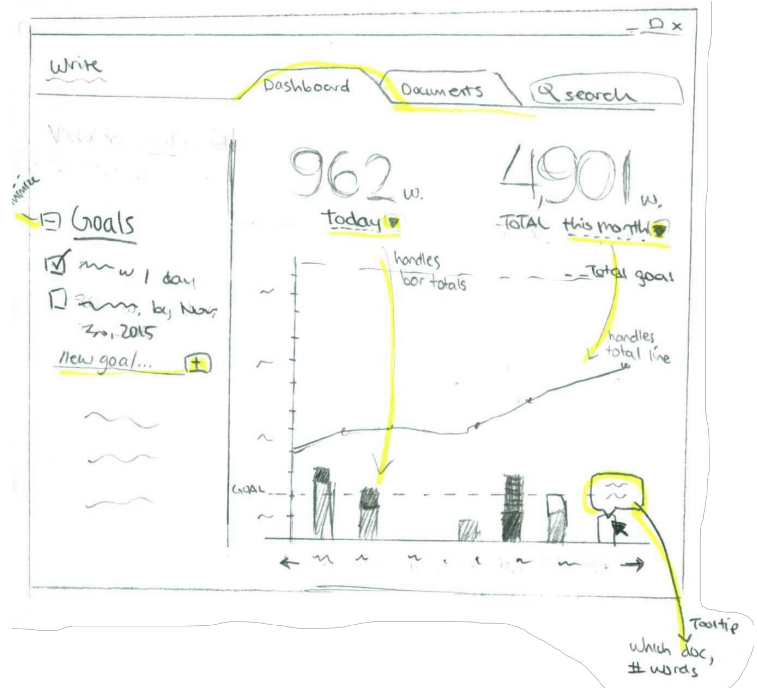
When writers go too long without writing they lose motivation and stop writing. They often don't come back to their writing and many of their good ideas are lost. Keeping track of these ideas or reminding writers to make time to write could help solve this problem. If visually seeing their lack of progress is discouraging, we could also use it instead to send encouraging reminders about past works they did progress on.

Proposed Design Sketches

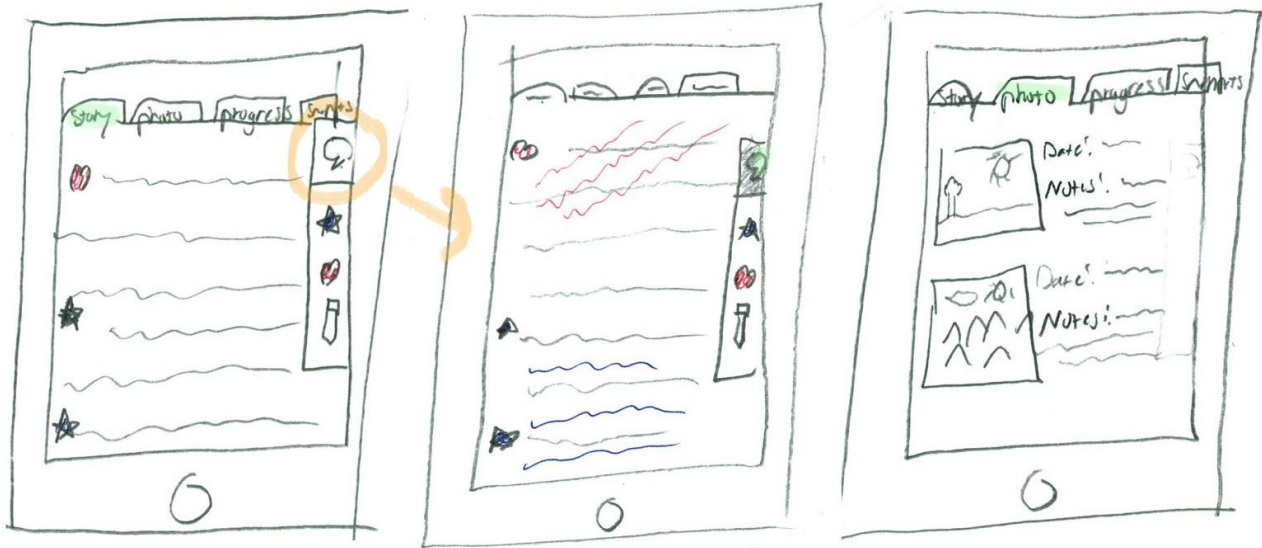
Design 1:

The first design is an application that acts as a library or gallery for documents. Given a root directory, it tracks when and what documents are created, their word counts over time, and allows writers to group and tag these stories. This allows writers to both easily summarize older works, tag snippets they want to reuse, or rearrange documents in their projects.

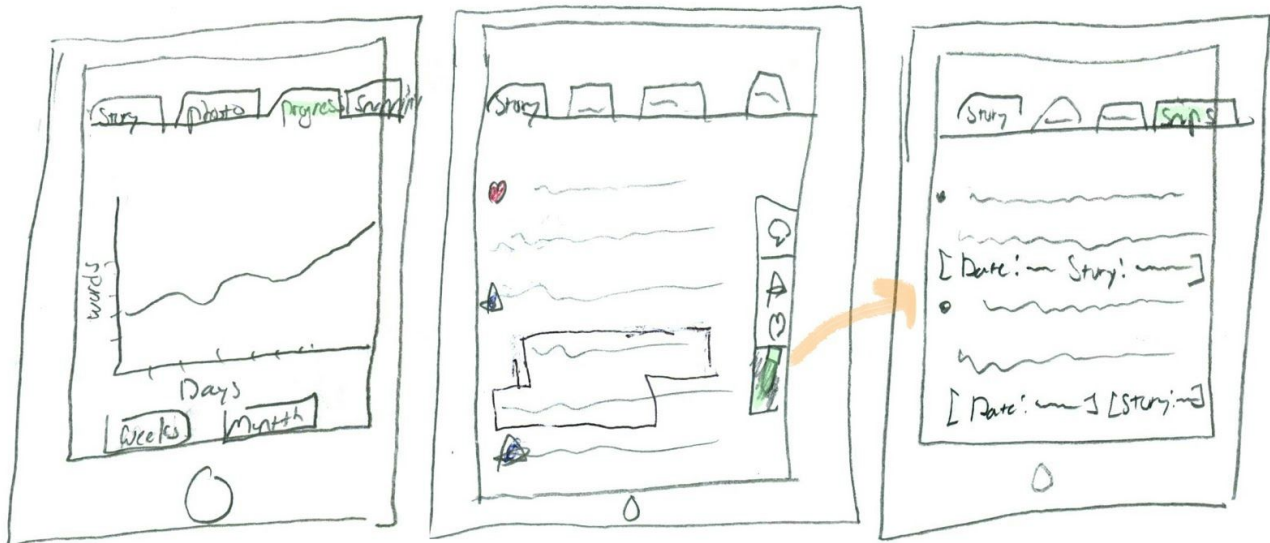
It has two main screens: a dashboard that displays the writer's progress on any goals they set, and the Documents view to search or sort their stories. As a writer reaches their goals, they could share their progress within a group of friends or challenge goals to others as further motivation.



Design 2:

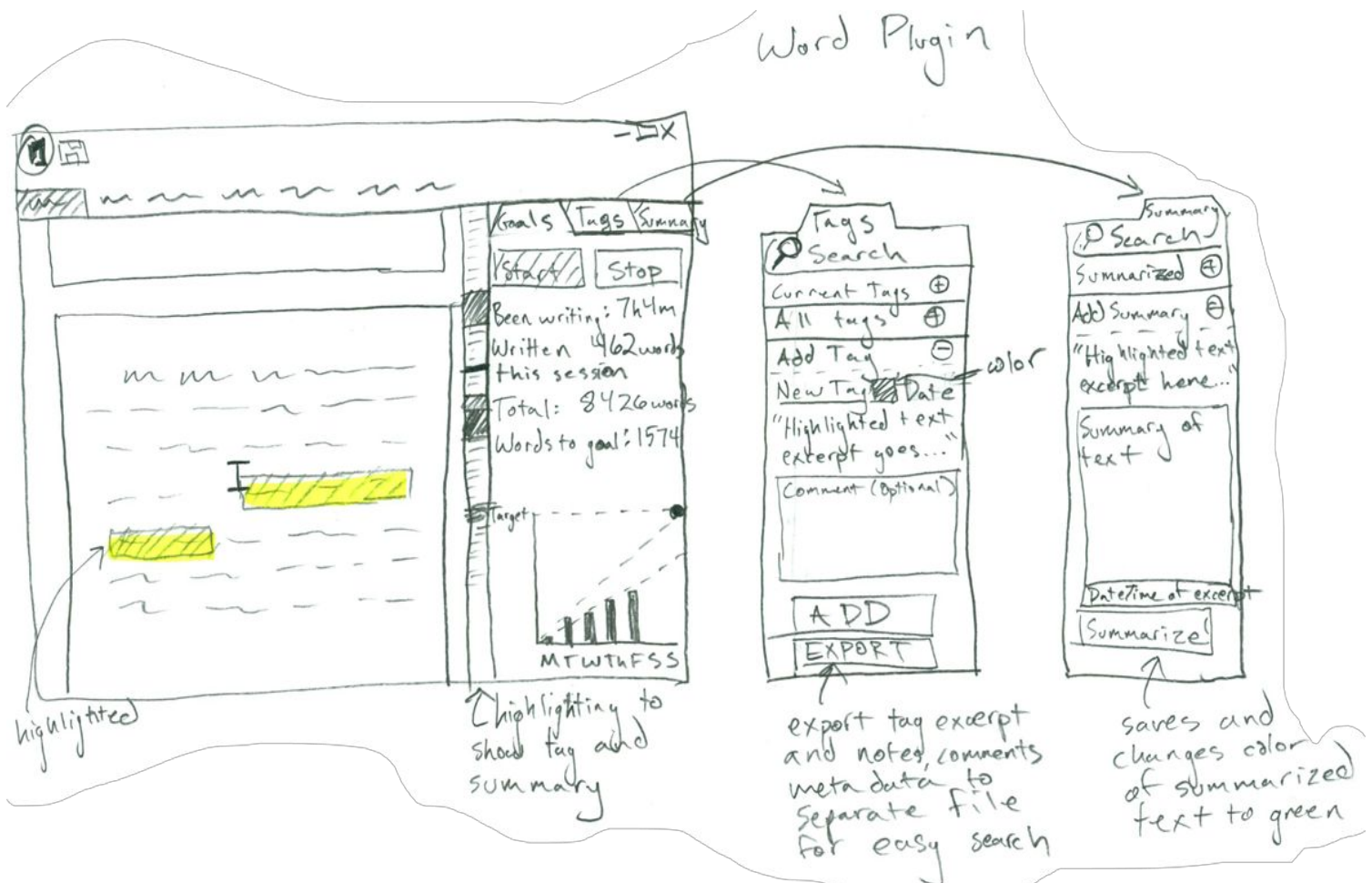


Our second design is a tablet application that simulates traditional writing by allowing the user to write and edit by hand, while still utilizing technology to track progress and ideas. This targets writers who want to be able to easily make notes while writing, group their notes and ideas with their projects, and keep this with them while on the go. There are four different states: one for writing, one for collecting photos or ideas for stories, one for saved pieces of writing, and another to show writing progress. Finally, there's also a sidebar that lets users fluidly tag sections and make comments while they're in the process of writing with a simple switch in color that can later be filtered.



Design 3:

This design is focused on capturing data during the writing process and within the story text. It would allow a writer to directly interact with the story they're writing from within the same, familiar text editor, acting as a plugin to the side of their normal work area (likely Word). The sidebar would include three tabs, one for tracking wordcount or writing time goals, and the other two for organizing, viewing, and creating tags and summaries respectively. Creating these tags would be as simple as highlighting a section of text, and from there a writer could rearrange their document or flag important snippets to reuse later. Using this design, a writer can easily organize and understand the details of their project.



Choice of Design

We chose to focus on a design that fulfilled the tasks of tracking writing goals and marking sections of text to return to. Throughout our contextual inquiries and critiques, these actions that aimed at encouraging continual writing and improvement seemed to be the most defined tasks that people were interested in. To properly develop for these two important tasks, we are merging our first and third design into a word processor targeted specifically at writers. The editor would allow for multiple document scraps to be tagged with details and metadata, allowing for writers to track issues with the piece or easily continue writing after a long break. Tags can naturally address several of our tasks, but also assist in the essential task of tracking writing progress, which would be viewable as another mode or dashboard in our design. With everything consolidated, this design tracks progress without the user needing to manually enter details, and also allows them to fluidly mark and tag their story as it is being created. Based on feedback we are also choosing to allow users to visualize their progress in ways other than a graph, as some writers are less data oriented and personifying this data may also be more encouraging. We may do this by showing met goals as unbroken links in a chain, or a character that has “writing health”. We also want to include an optional social aspect that lets writers share their progress or challenge goals to provide further incentive to write.

Written Scenarios

1. Tracking Progress

Penelope likes to write and wants to write more and more consistently and is using TagLine to stay motivated. Penelope has a weekly goal of five thousand words, and can see on her TagLine dashboard that she's built up a chain where each link represents her continuous success in meeting her goal. After 8 weeks, her chain is getting pretty long, and Penelope is proud of her chain. The 9th week, Penelope is distracted by her busy schedule and deprioritizes writing to work on her homework. At the end of the week, Penelope remembers her writing goal and spends all night writing to reach five thousand words. When she finally sees her progress on her dashboard, Penelope is relieved that she did not break her chain and elated by her progress. She then decides to set a daily goal from now on so she is further motivated to write everyday and can avoid future sleepless nights.

2. Tagging Sections

Fred is studying and sees something in a book that gives him an idea, but he's not sure whether the date he's thinking of is actually valid for the technology of the time. He wants to make sure that he gets the gist of his idea down before he loses the train of thought. Fred starts writing in TagLine, and when he reaches the section that he's uncertain about, Fred decides that he doesn't want to forget that the date seemed off. He uses the keyboard shortcut to quickly create a new tag at where he wrote the date, and notes that he needs to do some research. When he saves the tag, the line remains highlighted and Fred returns to writing the idea he had. A few hours later, Fred is done writing and he's forgotten the concerns he had. When he checks his tags however, Fred sees the date he used and recalls from his note that he needs to do some research.

Storyboards

1. Tracking Progress:



2. Tagging Sections:

