How to Write a Novel

Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter One: Novel Writing 101

- The Beginning
- The Middle
- The End
- Stories within your stories
- Narrative within your story
- Setting within your story
- Creating conflict

Chapter Two: Molding Your Characters

- Why do they exist?
- Can you somehow… categorize them?
- Can you still make them unique?
- What are they called?
- Are there others? Who are they?
- What is their backstory?
- What conflicts do they have?
- How rhythm affects your characters
- The words your characters use

Chapter Three: Growing as a Writer

- Avoid using adverbs
- Show, don’t tell
- Use imagery, but not as a distraction
- Punctuation is important
- Use the right tense at the right time
- Spell-check

Be consistent

The discipline of writing

Carve out a writing space

Read more

Keep writing

Set smaller goals

Chapter Four: The Final Stages

The emotions behind writing

Edit, but take measured breaks

Make lists to organize information when editing

Ask others for help

Feedback vs. feelings

Getting published

Traditional publishing

Digital publishing

Conclusion

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Introduction

I would like to thank you for choosing this book, ‘How to Write a Novel.'

The title of this book is quite self-explanatory in that it is designed to help you write the story you have always wanted to write, through explaining the various elements of effective storytelling through the course of its several chapters. Before we get started on that, however, I would like to applaud you for taking your first step towards novel writing; acknowledging that you even want to do something about the story that you have in your head. I understand that this can’t be easy, mainly when the idea of novel writing seems to stand out scarily and appears to present pictures of people sitting in dingy rooms, furiously typing away on their rusty typewriters with no sense of time or anything else – just writing.

This stereotypical image associated with writing can often put people off the writing process because they begin to fear the amount of work related to it. However, this book is designed in a manner that allows you to be able to consume small parts of writing processes without it becoming an overwhelming experience for you. Quite often, aspiring writers tend to think they lack the expertise required to be able to write a novel-length story successfully – but that’s where you’re wrong. Armed with enough dedication and information, there is no reason you shouldn’t be able to do this!

Through the course of this book, various chapters will outline and attempt to answer any questions you might have had about the various aspects of storytelling. It doesn’t matter if you are a beginner – we begin right with the basics, and go all the way to novel completion, with the additions of suggestions regarding editing and publishing as well. Chapters focus on a wide range of topics, from dialogue use, to world building and structuring your narrative – giving you everything you need to get started on that novel you always wanted to write.

Be open to learning on this journey towards becoming a more efficient and thoughtful writer – and you will be surprised by what you discover about yourself (and your writing) by the end of this journey. First, however, happy reading!

Chapter One: Novel Writing 101

Congratulations, you have now decided to commit to the process of novel writing. This, in itself, is a crucial stage to arrive at, as it requires a recognition that you want to write a book – and that you want to tell the story in your book well. Like I previously mentioned, through the course of the chapters in this book, I will guide you through the various processes and techniques associated with novel writing. In this chapter, we start with the basics – What kind of novel is it or story that you want to tell and how should it be structured? What are the elements associated with it, and how is it supposed to flow, when looked at from a structural perspective? What are the elements you want to specifically focus on in your novel? *How* should you tell your story? All of this is discussed in the following chapter

What does a novel need to have? You might have heard the common response to this question: a novel is required to have a beginning, middle and an end. Quite obviously, this is going to seem like a deliberately frustrating response to you, because it does not aid your writing process at all, and does not give you the sense of direction you need to get started. However, I'm going to tell you that this response is just about right – while perhaps in need of some elaboration.

All stories require their storytelling arc to be successful, and it's easiest to envision them regarding their beginning, middle and end. This helps you get a sense of the where the divisions in the story arc, and helps you plan it accordingly. It also helps understand where conflicts and other 'problems' within your story are expected to arise.

The Beginning

The beginning is expected to start off in a relatively reasonable manner, in that the daily lives of your protagonist(s) are depicted through this. Through the beginning, you help establish where your characters currently are and assist the reader in understanding what kind of settings, norms or social structures they are a part of. Through the course of your narrative of the beginning, you establish an idea of what 'routine' means in the story you are telling. This is important because, over the course of time, you will be breaking this routine to drive the story forward.

The Middle

At the point between the beginning and the middle is where the conflict itself is introduced: it is usually an event or an incident that happens to the protagonist(s) or someone around them that creates within these characters a call to action. This can be a question, a realization, a journey towards self-

discovery, or a rescue mission – all of these incited by a specific action that occurred, that increases the level of conflict observed. Through the middle, the nature of this conflict rises in importance, and so – the focus of the middle is the development of the storyline about the conflict situation that you have decided to establish. The middle also gives you an opportunity to describe and detail several critical moments of crisis, all of which serve to highlight the story going forward, and prompt the protagonist(s) towards further forms of action.

This crisis-based description reaches its peak when you reach what is referred to as the 'climax,' the isolated event that changes things around completely. This may be a great war or even just a disagreement of some kind but refers to the moment where the most amount of growth is seen, leading to the establishment of the idea of resolution. It does not necessarily mean that the solution is found in this instance; it's just that a concentrated burst of action is seen at this moment. The critical moment pivots the story around and is often observed as being the moment your character (or their destiny) to be fulfilled or fully understood.

The End

Quite understandably, it is falling action that follows this pivotal point in your novel. Falling action follows the realization that the character has come to during the climax – and requires the character to act upon the same by using the knowledge or experience they gained during this process of growth. Given the nature of your story, it is during this part, the end, where the resolution to the conflict or crisis is achieved. Additionally, it is here that the answers to the questions or the epic journeys are received. The concept of closure, however temporary or permanent, is realized at this stage as well and this allows for the creation of a situation where life goes back to being the way it was from the beginning – along with the transformative journey your character experienced along the way.

Remember to modify this structure depending on the kind of story you're choosing to tell – and more importantly, do not divide your novel into very obvious chunks associated with the beginning, the middle, and the end. While you should use them as a means to make your writing process more manageable, you can't present it to a reading audience in a way that makes them feel like their reading experience was similarly disjointed. Thus, it becomes your job to present your story in a manner that is more compelling than obvious, and does not let readers notice these patterns in your writing – and instead, engages with them at a much deeper level.

Stories within your stories

In addition to the main story arc you're looking to follow in your novel, your story must include smaller stories within them, secondary to the narrative,

and referred to as subplots. These are important because they add depth and complexity to your story, thus enhancing your story in a manner that might not have been observed if you relied on the single dimension of a story. Having said this, you need to ensure that these subplots don't take away from the essence of your novel itself. Make sure you have a physical representation (such as a table) of how your subplots are going to be slotted within the broader framework of the story. Maybe they work within certain chapters but not others, maybe you want to drive both the main plot and subplot side by side. Keep trying to fit and reorganize your subplots within the framework of your plot, so you always have sight of the larger picture.

Given that you are now aware of how a basic novel is expected to flow, it's quite tempting to follow that exact trajectory to give yourself the plot devices you need. However, while the story arc described in the previous section can exist on a graph – your story shouldn't work that easily. Your novel cannot be a series of events strung together cohesively for the sake of convenience because it won't want people to know more.

Think of your story also in terms of the dichotomies of problems and solutions, of questions and answers. Your story needs to have a larger picture instead of just being isolated events. If you view your beginning as the point at which The Question is posed, it is the ending where I need to get my Answer. This needs to be established through character actions and motivations, and several other factors (later outlined) that drive the story forward. Additionally, you need to be able to weave elements of your story together cohesively. This is achieved through narratives and settings.

Narrative within your story

Narrative and point of view are essential in shaping your story. The perspective you choose to tell the story from makes a difference, as it contributes towards how much information is being made available to the readers, how much of the characters internal feelings and motivations readers are made aware of without dialogue, and so much more. For this reason, it is essential that you weigh the pros and cons of different narrative styles.

Adopting a point of view

As an author, you can either choose to adopt first, second, or third person points of view. Of these, the second person is not used as commonly because of its difficulty in establishing coherence and maintaining tense and grammar structures throughout. Within first and third person perspectives, you have several possibilities. You can have a first-person narrative with a major character leading the narration, or you can have a first person narrative with an observer telling the tale instead. In the third person, by comparison, you will have the choices of an objective narration, a narrative where the perspective makes you aware of every occurrence in the story (omniscient), or

one where there is omniscience, but limited to the space a certain character occupies (limited omniscient). Given that each of these presents different kinds of information to your reader, your choice of perspective depends on what information you want to make available to your reader, ranging from internal versus external conflict to considerations about character awareness.

Setting within your story

For your story to have a proper setting, you need to establish it within the framework of a particular kind of society. This can either mimic or be one of the modern-day societies present in the real world or can be something you are choosing to create entirely from your imagination. If you decide to adopt a particular society as being the base for your story, make sure you do your research about it. This will help inform you how characters are expected to behave, how they're more likely to be, and even the kind of relationships they will share with others – all of which have a driving influence on your plot.

World building

You might also choose to create your society instead; in which case, you're choosing to world-build. World building opens up some of the restrictions that may exist with choosing to engage with an already-present society, but also requires more effort on your part. If you decide to create a culture or a world that is not based off a pre-existing one, make sure you think about all the factors that go into the existence and sustenance of an actual society or culture. Try to answer some, if not all of the questions that follow. What kind of environment do people live in? What is the social structure of this society? How does the economic system of this society work? What are the rules and governing bodies associated with this society? What value systems do they use in their norms, and what are the kinds of questions or conflicts they struggle with? How do they look, behave, think, or speak? What kind of technologies do they have?

Creating conflict

To write a novel that has a story or plot you can be proud of, you do need to induce some conflict in their life. I know this might seem like a mean suggestion to make – but how else would you possibly drive the story forward?

The focus of this section is on how conflicts are created, driven, or sustained, to use them as powerful plot devices that serve the overall purpose of good storytelling. Following are some suggestions on how you can create well-rounded conflict situations that will make for an enjoyable reading experience.

Use the genre to your benefit

The genre of writing that your story falls under can often inform what kind of conflict you want to create for the character – if not guiding you towards a

how as well. Given that your writing or your plot ideas so far have already established a broad genre that you can consider, this can be used to aid your understanding of how you want the plot to move forward. Given the nature of the genre, what kind of conflicts arise from the situation? If it is a fantasy world, do we want to talk about wild dragons? If you're focusing on science fiction, are we going to talk about large corporations? Evil scientists? What works for one genre might not work for the other, but you can use that very fact that to arrive at the conflict you choose to explore.

Always the tone of surprise

Given that you're using the genre to your benefit, what you also want to be able to do is push the boundaries of your genre a little bit. You don't want to explore tales that have frequently been talked about, that have the same story arc and the same conclusion that every other book within that genre does. You want to hold with you the element of surprise – that requires you to look at the genre differently. See what you can contribute to an already considered idea. Have that reflect on your character's actions, or in the way the conflict is presented to them. Make it an experience that is uncovered to the readers part by part, and laden with surprises, not one they're already tired of because they have come to expect it.

Creating tension

To put it simply, while conflict and tension are terms that are often used interchangeably, within the context of novel writing, you can assign specific roles to them. Conflict refers to the situational aspect, while tension refers to the emotional aspect. Thus, conflict is created in the situation, while tension is created in the writing. This can be in the form of internal thoughts, and depicting displays of emotion, but can also be achieved through crisp sentence structuring and through maintaining an air of mystery while revealing the story to your reader. This helps create a sense of urgency and understanding what the character themselves is going through.

Chapter Two: Molding Your Characters

Next, we move on to creating your characters, arguably the most crucial part of your novel. While many might say they have specific stylistic preferences for how they want the writing to flow, or how they expect the narrative to be structured, for the average reader, it is the aspect of the characters that stand out. This is what they're most likely to remember and want to connect to, so it becomes essential to present this to them in a way that will make them want to know what happens to the character – for your readers to have any investment in the storyline whatsoever.

When considering characters, you need to remember that your characters need to pan out in a certain way for them to sound less like a cardboard cutouts, or characters simply placed there with the purpose of driving the plot forward. What you need to do is create characters that are believable – could you picture this character as being a real person, or do they fall flat? Conversely, do they seem like the caricature of an actual person? Give your character attitudes, morals and values; add some depth and dimension to them so you can envision them as being real. To this effect, though it will be elaborated upon more in the chapter about dialogue, give your character a voice of their own. They aren't going to sound particularly inventive or real if they all sound like each other – make sure your dialogue reflects the differences in the people.

Additionally, give your characters something the reader can relate to. This does not necessarily mean that readers should be able to imagine themselves as every character. There is a need to craft out a character with intentions, experiences and a past that shapes and explains why they behave or think the way they do, even if it is a character people might not agree with. This realism makes the character more relatable, and thus, more likely to be acknowledged.

Keeping these in mind, here are a few questions you want to be able to answer for your character, to justify their existence within the framework of your story.

Why do they exist?

More often than not, if I asked any real person this question, it would prompt a possible existential crisis with the question of why one does exist and what their purpose is. When considering your story, however, you should be able to answer this question because your character cannot do anything within your story unless there's a rationale behind why they are present. Craft your characters accordingly.

Can you somehow… categorize them?

This does not just refer to simple categorization according to their age (child, teenager, adult) or something to that effect. Categorizing your character can go a long way in informing readers how they will act. Choose a personality inventory or type, or try to classify them using other similar means that will make sense within the world you created – it will make the writing process that much more comfortable through involving that category. It'll also serve as a derivative for making the other aspects of their personality clearer to you, and can thus be used as an effective planning device.

Can you still make them unique?

For that particular character to have been chosen as the focus of the story over others, there needs to be some reasoning behind it. There is a certain degree of uniqueness associated with those characters that stories are written about, else you run the risk of making them every other run of the mill character. Consider your choice of categorization in this too; maybe they meet the demands of the category in all but one crucial way – perhaps they have a particular trait that makes them stand out even otherwise. Give your character something special that is impressive within the context of the story, while at the same time, not being entirely unbelievable.

What are they called?

This might seem like a tiny thing to consider in the large scheme of your characterization, but your character's name does have a significant contribution to make in terms of shaping how you want to tell the story. Like in the case of Remus Lupin, a character from the famous series, Harry Potter, it can foreshadow some information about the character the readers can look back at and have an "Oh, so that's what this was about!" moment, and it can also help set a tone for the character. Names can also have cultural implications, depending on the cultural context that it is based in. While this is not to say every character name you use needs to have a secret meaning, the way you use these names does affect the overall pacing of the story and importantly, how these characters are perceived.

Are there others? Who are they?

Your character cannot exist independently in a vacuum. While the way in which you choose to tell their story may require alone time for a while, they still cannot exist in a society without other characters who serve to further or support the story in some form or another. Suffice to say, it becomes important to flesh out the supporting characters in your story too. Not only this, but you also need to make considerations for the kind of relationship shared among the multiple characters you're choosing to write about.

When writing supporting characters, be wary of the fact that you may revert to stereotyping them. While sufficient thought may go into making your

protagonist unique and unforgettable, this often does not extend to the other characters – but heed this suggestion carefully, take your supporting characters as seriously as you are taking the main one. Invest the same amount of time in making sure they are real too. Give them a distinctive voice, or a defining trait, make sure they don't run the risk of becoming a cutout placed there for the lead's benefit either. Make sure they make sense not only as a background character but when they get the limelight too.

Additionally, make sure that these characters make sense not only in the context of the plot but as realistic relationships or interactions your main character can have. This establishes a support system for your character, and a character with friends is always going to be more believable than a character that achieves everything on his own.

What is their backstory?

Just like the section on world building helped you create a focus for the kind of society and setting you want to place your character in, your characters themselves need to have some kind of background to them in order to appear more realistic. Your characters can't simply exist within the temporal space of your novel – things must have happened to them before. They have their own stories, a history of their identity and it's important that you shape this for your character in order for them to sound like they *belong* in the space of your novel. Given the interweaving between this and the setting, you will be able to create a character that does not sound like they have been dropped from elsewhere.

What conflicts do they have?

Yes, an external conflict situation often prompts your characters towards the kind of action they need to take to drive the story forward, but that is not necessarily the only form of conflict that is presented in your novel. Your characters themselves are supposed to read like real people, and because they are real (within your fictional world), you want to make sure they have internal conflicts – this humanizes them over making them mere cardboard cutouts. This gives your readers a reason to want to be invested in these characters. Common internal conflicts include what the character wants to do and what needs to be done, or the dilemma of personal principles over a matter of societal expectations.

Give your characters the space to be able to battle out these conflicts that they hold – present them with situations where you want to show your readers how your character would react. This would also help test your character's moral compass by creating situations where various aspects of it are checked. Another way to do it is by creating an impossible situation for your character and then asking, "What would my character do?" This helps you further flesh

out your character while also informing the narrative by moving the story forward.

In addition to these questions, there is one plot device that is crucial in order to establish not just the pace of the story, but how your characters interact with the story space around them: rhythm.

How rhythm affects your characters

How much your rhythm can affect your characters depends on the perspective you choose to adopt, but it does have a significant impact regardless. Rhythm is as crucial to tell your character's story as it is in a play. Think about it this way, if you were watching a play and each character moved and behaved sluggishly, something would not seem right to you. Similarly, you want to be able to channel a rhythm to your character that is their own, as this sets the tone for how they experience their emotions, how their internal thoughts flow, and even how they employ dialogue.

The words your characters use

Think about it this way – the words your characters use are the ones your readers receive to base their opinion on. Yes, your character's actions are equally important – but can you imagine a story where entirely no dialogue was used? (No, that was not a challenge for you to attempt to write a novel without dialogue.) Dialogue can be a way to drive the plot forward, by creating some conflict, by helping express to a broader audience within the story what the character's intentions are, by prompting some action, and in many more ways. Thus, it becomes essential to understand how you can create a dialogue that is both believable and effective.

Dialogue drives things forward

Given that dialogue serves as a vocalization of conflict that is present within characters or between characters, it is no surprise that dialogue needs to be written in a way that drives a story forward. We all have meaningless conversations sometimes, but that's because we have a lifetime's worth of time to be able to have them. Your characters, however, don't. They have a very short span of time within which their story needs to be told in a manner that makes your reader want to know more. So, skip out on the unnecessary dialogue and pleasantries – this will add to the word count of your novel, yes, but will not add substance to what you're looking to convey in actuality. Of course, this is not to say that all dialogue has to create conflict – but as a general rule of thumb, this works!

One way to ensure you're adhering to this rule quite cohesively is to hide the dialogue and check if the story continues the same way without it – if it has no contribution to the overall story whatsoever, you might want to consider removing it. It doesn't have to contribute to the plot directly – but even

through consideration of your character's motivations, morals, or changing their pattern of thinking, dialogue can be made useful, instead of some filler.

Focus on its flow

The strange thing about writing dialogue – and indeed, all writing in general, is that the amount of work you put in needs to guide the piece towards sounding more effortless. As counterintuitive as it may seem, this applies even more specifically to dialogue because you want the conversation to flow naturally. Your characters need to have a conversation that sounds plausible within that realm or universe you're considering. You might benefit from reading your dialogue out loud, either by yourself or with someone else joining you for some parts, to see if you would engage in conversation similarly. If not, work on making it sound more natural.

Dialogue tags are also relevant in this process, with the word 'said' being most commonly used. While the use of other verbs is perceived as being distracting by some in that it takes away from the actual dialogue, you need to be careful to ensure you don't overuse the word said. After a while, it does become obvious that your characters are saying things to each other, and unless there's a marked difference in tone, your readers don't need to be actively reminded of that.

In the same vein, also make sure that your characters don't sound robotic in how they respond. A parent lecturing a child would not warrant the child reacting with the same length of response – you're not obligated to keep the balance of dialogues between the characters in the conversation in the same ratio. As long as they have a reason for speaking as much or as little as they, their contribution is sufficient.

Not everyone sounds the same

This is something that people tend to forget as writers, as they are the ones giving the voice to everyone. Don't create a situation where you are loaning your voice out so much that all characters sound the same. Their personalities, where they're from, their place in the social hierarchy, the kind of interactions they have with others – all of these shape how your character will sound. And thus, just like two people, two characters will not sound the same. Focus on consciously establishing distinctive voices for your characters, may even make notes about how you want them to be different, so you don't forget what character owns what voice!

Chapter Three: Growing as a Writer

Now, we all know that the words your characters use are significant, as they shape the narrative, and move the plot forward. It helps facilitate a better understanding of the characters themselves, while also providing you with a useful device to move the plot forward. Having said that, the words that you use, independent of your character, also have an essential role to play – and should not be taken lightly. In addition to this focus on differential elements of writing and how to focus on them, this chapter also outlines suggestions that help you develop your writing skills in the long term. The first half of this chapter focuses on the technical aspects of writing, while the second half focuses on other sustained habits that are recommended.

Avoid using adverbs

The first element of better writing that anyone is going to talk to you about is using adverbs. Long story short? Don't. Writers often use adverbs as a crutch to paint a picture about the nature of a particular action, and while this can work in some forms of writing, it should be avoided when you're writing novels. Use imagery instead, to explain to your writers what you had wanted them to picture – it reads better, and doesn't sound quite as lazy. This is perhaps one of the most challenging rules to adhere to, given how easily adverbs slip into casual writing – but persist, notice and remove them.

Show, don't tell

The second rule of stylistic writing is showing, not telling. You don't want to present all the information to your reader in a factual manner, as this disengages them from your story and your writing – instead, invite them to do some of the thinking with you, and to go on the journey with your character. Do not assume your readers are dumb and need to be fed with all the information.

Use imagery, but not as a distraction

Third, create imagery to paint a picture, but don't make the image so bold that that distracts your readers instead. You don't want to make your writing too complicated – as the constant referencing required will detach them from the story, and similarly, you don't want to make your writing too flowery, as it will take away from the value addition of what you were trying to say. Consider reading your writing out loud to understand whether the sentences flow the way you want them to.

Punctuation is important

Let's start with the most basic thing attributed to grammar: punctuation. Effective punctuation is necessary for your readers to be able to imagine what you're trying to say the way you're trying to say it. It serves as a guiding light to your reader's mental voice, and should thus be treated with that level of respect and importance. Make sure you follow the basic rules of grammar; capitalization tends to be one that is often brushed aside for stylistic reasons, but unless it adds value to what you're trying to say, stick to the rules of the language. Similarly, if you find yourself struggling to understand punctuation placement for certain marks, for instance, semi-colons, take your time to learn the rules better. Two punctuation marks these rules become particularly crucial with are commas and exclamation marks. Use them as often as necessary, but use them correctly.

Use the right tense at the right time

Next, focus on your verb and tense use. It is important that you tense reflects what timeline you're choosing to refer to, and it is also important that you pay attention to whether all the words in that sentence follow that tense rule. Overlooking one word may often change what you're attempting to convey. To this effect, make sure you also focus on the subject-verb agreement to get the verb conjugation right with relevance to your subject.

Spell-check

Spell-check. This isn't going to be something I need to elaborate on but does need to be taken seriously. You don't need to comb through this while you are writing your first draft, but make sure to give it the deserved attention later. You might be surprised at how often common spelling errors (affect vs. effect; their, they're, or there) might occur when you're trying to get your ideas out.

Be consistent

Most importantly (and this applies to both stylistic and grammatical elements), be consistent with your writing. If your writing changes randomly depending on the month you wrote the section in, or depending on the flow you felt worked on that particular day, it can create narrative confusion among your readers, as they will struggle to understand why you're shifting between styles. You can choose to edit this after you're done drafting your entire novel as well.

Through all this, you might have no doubt realized that the craft of writing is important – we have talked about how best to craft your stories, your writing, and your words. Often times, it is this technicality associated with writing, or the art of writing (your creative process and vision) that is given a reasonable amount of focus to. The end product that one often sees in writing has led a lot of people to believe that these two are the key to unlocking successful writing. More often than not, this isn't the case. While weaving your words and

spinning tales around them is no doubt something you want to do, you do need to remember to focus on the discipline of writing too.

The discipline of writing

This is usually the least fun part of writing, as it requires committing yourselves to certain habits that make you a better writer – and while it might not be as fun as creating storyboards for your characters, I'm sure you can see why I stress upon it as being important. It adds that significant factor associated with writing novels by ensuring you complete the novel, and by helping you get to a place where the novel is something you are proud of. Thus, this chapter attempts to outline some writing habits you should adopt gradually, to engage better with it.

Carve out a writing space

In this context, I'm referring to both a physical and a temporary space that you need to establish for you and for others to take your writing more seriously. You need to understand that novel writing isn't a casual task, and thus, should not be treated as such. It is a task that involves dedication and effort from your end, and you know you are already invested in it, so the task becomes reminding those around you that you require this respectable space too. Be polite and let them know that a specific writing process is important to you and that they should try not to encroach upon this space if possible. This conversation can go a long way in ensuring you're comfortable with the space you're writing in.

Additionally, to establish a habitual relationship with your writing, make sure you allot a particular time slot for your writing every day, as this will inform how you treat your work – make sure you approach writing in small, manageable chunks instead of forcing yourself to set aside entire days for just that.

Read more

Read more. This works from several points of view. Reading not only makes you more efficient and competent in your art, but it also helps you understand the language of your writing, and of good writing better. Read whatever you can lay your hands on, and make sure this is a wide variety of topics, so you have more knowledge – you never know when a tiny little fact you read one time in one book might come in handy. Moreover, you will also notice that you become more successful in adopting various writing styles, and even refining the unique voice that you already had. Read also because it will help you look at other pieces with a more critical outlook, and identify how you can change that in the novel you choose to write.

Additionally, also read books that are specific to your area of writing – research is crucial to being a good writer. This is because you are no longer assuming details of what you're writing about, and are instead choosing to get

into the details of it and obtaining a better understanding of whatever you decide to write before you write it. This might seem tedious sometimes – but trust me, the effort you put into detail will not go unnoticed by your eventual readers.

Keep writing

This might seem like simple advice – but many writers tend to fall into the rut of critically examining the product they have already created, instead of focusing on what is yet to be written. This undue focus on the past can form a vicious circle that writers can't get out of, so you need to make sure that you remind yourself that your goal is to get a first draft of the entire novel out first before you start scanning the entire piece with a critical eye. And so, keep writing – try to look back as less as possible.

Set smaller goals

Unsurprisingly, given that I have focused so much on writing being a matter of discipline, you need to set achievable goals for your writing to be an activity you engage with steadily. If you were writing a blog post or something significantly shorter, this might not have been something that grabbed your attention so often, but given that you have chosen to undertake a novel – it becomes essential to set goals to create expectations for writing output. This can be in terms of word, page, or chapter count – but keep working towards these smaller goals!

Chapter Four: The Final Stages

After a nerve-wracking few weeks or months, depending on how committed you are, what length you're attempting to write, and how long it takes you to tell your story and to have the time to tell your story, you will finally have the first draft in your hand. Congratulations on making it this far – it is not going to be an easy task, and you should be proud of yourself for having done so much. Novel writing is a task which, in its initial stages, at least, requires a lot of work and very little reward. Your reward needs to reflect in the form of internal motivation, which can be very difficult to sustain if we're honest with ourselves here.

Having said this, now that you have written the story you wanted to say – and now that you've celebrated your achievement, it is time to go back to the piece and dive into it all over again, but this time, for different reasons; editing. Going into editing, I need you be aware of some things that work on a motivational or emotional level for you before we get into the actual practice of editing.

The emotions behind writing

Writing was something that you enjoyed doing, something that you worked hard on and something you should be very proud of. However, editing might not follow the same trajectory. Often, you might look at your work after having completed it and feel very dissatisfied with it – don't. This is not a reflection of your writing ability, but rather an insight into how tiresome editing can be. No matter how much your brain tries to convince you otherwise, what you managed to write in your first draft was good writing and you are not a terrible writer. Self-doubt might plague you regarding whether your voice deserves a place, let me stop and reassure you that it does. Your ideas are important. The story you're choosing to tell is essential.

Please make sure to remember the emotional aspect of what you feel about your writing, and recognize signs of self-doubt that may emerge and shut it down. Once you have done this, you can approach editing more technically.

Edit, but take measured breaks

However, to start with, do take a break from your writing – you will not want to read it the day you finish writing your novel's draft, and that's okay. What you want to do is be able to approach with a rejuvenated perspective, but while your idea is still fresh in your mind – balance your breaks accordingly. During your writing process itself, try to highlight specific sections that you think need more work, and then move forward. This way, you can approach your writing with an awareness of what the primary focus of editing is.

Make lists to organize information when editing

Organization helps; you might have noticed this by now in your writing process. When you're trying to organize information during editing, try and pick out patterns of what requires most work. Is it the pacing you're not content with? Is it the overall dialogue delivery that you wish was done better? Being aware of what needs most work allows you to direct a larger chunk of your attention in that direction during the editing process, and will help you create a product you're more satisfied with.

Ask others for help

This is going to work for you on multiple levels – you need a group of people who can work as your unabashed supporters, you need another that will help you along the editing process, and you need yet another group that will provide constructive criticism. You might find it easier to combine or divide groups two and three depending on your preference, but ideally, you want to be able to direct attention towards both the stylistic and grammatical elements when they're editing, and it might be helpful sometimes to split that into two groups to get measured feedback accordingly. As for your supporters, well, make sure they're cheering you on and are there for you every step of the way!

Feedback vs. feelings

At the same time, recognize that not all feedback you receive from your first set of readers needs to be something you incorporate – you might disagree with some of it, and you're allowed to do that. Constructive criticism is essential and should not be ignored, yes, but that does not mean that you need to change every element of your story to rectify the situation. As a writer, you have some reasons for using specific plot devices or narrative structures, and it's okay if you choose to stay true to them.

Along with this, you can also make use of online editing tools like Grammarly; however, these tools will not give you 100% accurate results.

Getting published

Once you're done with the editing process, you have finished putting in all the work you had to put in for you to be able to make your novel something you are proud of. However, while the fact that you've gotten this far and are this dedicated is exemplary, this isn't enough, in that you still have one important stage to go: getting your finished product, your art and your voice out there to the rest of the world. This task might get a little tricky because it is during this stage that you might begin to involve others within your process actively, and all of it becomes slightly less reliant on your intrinsic motivation. To aid you along in this process regardless, this section provides a brief overview of the different publishing routes available to you, and what the requirements and expectations from each of them can be.

If you are hesitant about getting started this process, do remember that all the work that you put into this novel is worth it. You have created something that is worthy of an audience, and it is only a matter of finding the right kind of outlet that will help you reach that audience. At the end of the day, you don't want to have a long manuscript that you occasionally pick off from the shelves, dust off and stare at. The world deserves to be able to enjoy your work.

Traditional publishing

Though the term may seem fairly self-explanatory, this avenue of publishing refers to the age-old design of getting published, in its involvement of agents and other third parties. This form of publishing requires you to submit your work to a literary agent, who acts as an intermediary between you and a publishing group. It then becomes the responsibility of this agent to find you a large publishing house that will be able to do your book some justice.

Specifications of traditional publishing

The publishers also take responsibility for the (re) editing and design aspects of your writing project, and will also be responsible for ensuring that your book gets distributed to all the important avenues – they now ensure that all the relevant bookstores have a copy of your book. Not only this, they also take responsibility for the digital publication and sales of your book. Given that the publishing house bears the costs of the printing, editing, design, distribution, as well as promotion, it is more likely that you will be paid a certain amount upfront for the manuscript that you submitted to them.

Other considerations

Given that the whole process from start to end might take a while (upscale of a year) to finalize, you need to be patient if you choose to go down this route. Additionally, this form of publishing would appeal to you if you want to see your books in an actual bookshop. However, you do need to note that this will mean that more often than not, the publishers will have the final say about essential decisions about your book. It is common for established novelists to choose this route, simply by virtue of their experience in the area.

Digital publishing

Digital publishing is taking the traditional world by storm today, and how. With the advent of social media, new and inventive promotional strategies have come forth that allow you to explore this option as a serious alternative to traditional publishing. Given that the way readers consume content and the kind of work they want to see is changing, this is an alternative you will want to read more about.

Quite often, the third-party involvement associated with traditional publishing can be quite a bit of a hassle – not only is finding a literary agent to

approve of your work a task by itself, the next stage associated with finding you a publisher does not necessarily get easier (or quicker). Digital publishing turns a lot of that over on its head through revolutionizing the way we perceive the book industry.

Specifications of digital publishing

For instance, digital publishing involves lower costs at your end and lets you retain a more significant portion of the profit margin. However; you will not get paid upfront and will not (quite obviously) get to see your digitized books making their way to the bookstores. However, it is an excellent way to reach out to a broad audience worldwide, a range of access you might not have had before.

Other considerations

To tap into this audience, you need to be savvy regarding your marketing strategies and be willing to be out there promoting your books actively. Thus, in this form of publishing, the uncertainty of finding a publisher is replaced instead by the uncertainty of selling your book efficiently. If you're confident enough if your abilities to be able to do this, this might just be the route for you!

Conclusion

With this, I conclude the guide on how to write a novel, designed to help you do exactly what the title states. I thank you once again for selecting this book, and I hope you find it useful in helping you write that story inside of you that has longed to have a voice for so long.

Through the course of this book, the chapters were designed to help you in both the planning and writing stages associated with a novel, often sequentially. I hope that the elements, styles, and techniques listed have guided you towards how exactly you can structure your own story to present it with the most effective narrative. While some of it might have seemed technical, know that being aware of these technicalities will make sure you incorporate them at least some level of your writing, which will further reflect on the writing output that you eventually create.

Following specific instructions about writing can often seem like a daunting task, usually because we all tend to associate writing as being relatively restriction-free. However, writing – particularly novel writing, given the length of the piece you are attempting to write – is also an exercise associated with discipline, and this is where this book attempts to inform you. When you become in the know-how of the nuances related to novel writing, you would automatically become a better and more thoughtful writing.

In the end, I hope that this book gave you the opportunity to do precisely that – think more about how you're writing and why you're writing in that particular manner. Being a reasonable critical eye for your work creates a space for insight to be generated to aid improvement. At the same time, do remember that you can often be your own worst critic – draw that line between unabashed appreciation for your work and being overly critical of it; strike the crucial balance. Having said this, good luck, and happy writing!