

How to Write a Novel

Once you decide that you want to write a novel, the idea is to get your thoughts and facts together. Think about the storyline, think about the characters and the location.

1. First you need to come up with an idea. You can try reading other books, watching movies, listening to music, ect. for inspiration, or just wait until that perfect idea "hits" you. The best ideas come when you aren't trying to think of anything.
2. Write down all your ideas for characters, events, places, or anything else. Later you can reference this list when you are ready to begin writing.
3. Decide what you want your book to be about. At this point you just need to know the basics. Who will the main characters be and what will they try to accomplish.
4. Think of a setting for your novel. Choose the year, the genre, and other "beginning details."
5. Create your protagonist. Remember, the protagonist is not always the "good guy," they're simply the main character; they are the person your story is about. Make sure you create an original and believable character. To be believable, they need to have a past, fears, hopes, dreams, desires, family, job/family troubles, friends, associates, and a present.
6. Develop your plot. Is your protagonist trying to accomplish a goal? What steps do they need to take to get there? This is called the main conflict. What is the problem? Does trying to solve it create more problems? Plot advancement. Is your protagonist going to be a different person by the end of the book? Make sure your plot ties in with the theme of the book and leaves lots of wiggle room for things you might want to change later.
7. Create your supporting characters and antagonist. They should all have an important role in the book, or be part of the scenery. Don't include people that don't move the story along in roles with lots of action or dialogue. It's boring and weighs down the story. They need to be believable too, just like your protagonist. Even if their fears, wishes, hopes, desires, motives, and past are not revealed to the reader until the end or never, you still need to create them so the characters can revolved around them. Characters are people too, at least if you want to be a successful writer.
8. Rewrite. The story is really written during this part. Editing and rewriting is what makes the story good -- a first draft will almost always be bad. Just rewrite. There is really no limit to the amount of time spent rewriting, so just keep doing it.
9. Show someone what you've done. Friends or family can help, as can some online communities. Consider joining a weekly or monthly creative writing group to get some more feedback.
10. Keep rewriting. A great story is never truly finished, and as an amateur, you really don't have any time restrictions. If you don't have the patience to write a good novel, you probably shouldn't do it.

Tips

- Read plenty of books, this can help you learn the phrases that writers commonly use and how to express yourself.
- When possible, develop a rudimentary 'goal' (a potential ending); a theme (or themes); a rudimentary setting (temporal [time] as well as geographic); a rudimentary set of characters - including the protagonist (sometimes a 'hero' - i.e. the main character); one or more antagonists (those who hinder, or attempt to hinder the protagonist from achieving his/her goal); and the supporting characters (family, friends, co-workers, etc.)
- You can use tools such as Topical (or other types of) Outlining to help you develop the story line; and logically keep track of your continuity along the way. Maintaining logical continuity in your story is highly desirable and a hallmark of professional writing; nobody wants to read a story that has no logical progression, unexplained holes or gaps along the way.
- Write a basic framework of the main plot. This will help you to see the milestones, which encourages you to get your ideas down. Importantly, it will keep you on the 'road map'; it's very easy to turn down dead-end roads - introduce unnecessary characters or events.
- Consider using authoring software, if you do not have a good feel for going it on your own. This can be expensive, but can help the novice and professional alike in developing solid stories using some of the tried and tested formulas that have been analyzed in creating such software.
- It's not always the best idea to submit your manuscript in for publishing the second you finish it. Give yourself a while to consider revising, rewriting and polishing your novel. This stage may take a few days or weeks, but it's worth investing the time to include the right level of detail, flow, and overall writing quality. One problem that is easily overlooked is the appropriate 'tense' the book is written in - especially if events occur in the past as well as the present. The readers' flow is interrupted if the right tenses are not applied throughout your novel. Now you can step away for a bit, then come back and read it anew. There can be important elements that you'd wished had been included, modified or withdrawn. However, don't linger too long - revise it; spell-check it; grammar-check it; pick a time when you feel the manuscript is ready; let friends, colleagues and select others review it; get feedback; apply or don't apply that feedback; get an agent - have the agent submit it; OR go the "e-publishing" or "self-publishing" or "vanity publishing" or "publish-on-demand" (i.e. NON-TRADITIONAL) route.
- It's really up to you, the writer, regarding how long you should take to revise/rewrite.
- Consider joining an online writing community. This can provide support and feedback/peer reviews.
- REAL Publishers should pay you. REAL PUBLISHERS MAY PROMOTE OR ASSIST YOU IN PROMOTING YOUR WORK (If it's worthwhile and marketable). **The part about them paying you is true but most of the REAL publishers don't do much for the new author until you are a Steven King or another huge author, so you are on your own. There isn't much difference between them and a small press except the advance, if there is one.**
- Advances means just that. It is an advance on royalties. Which means, they get their money back BEFORE you get any royalties. So, do you want an advance or the royalties first?
- Many e-pubs are offering print versions of their books through the benefits of Print on Demand services. Also, with MOST NON-TRADITIONAL PUBLISHERS, be prepared to help promote your own work by setting up a blog and attending online chats, as well as other promotions AND other leg-work on YOUR part! **Most of the REAL publishers don't do much for the new author until you are a Steven King or another huge author, so you are on your own. There isn't much difference between them and a small press except the advance, if there is one.**

- Write your story the way *you* want. There are markets for all genres. You can search for publishers based on the keywords that you think describe your story best. Many publishers cater to a broad variety of tastes in readers and writers.
- Make your idea as original as possible; or make it a truly unique twist on an already-existing idea. Without realizing it, you could be taking storylines from books you've read or movies you've seen. Conversely, using other works as inspiration is a useful writing method - just be sure to avoid plagiarism and cliches as much as possible.
- Use writing advice that works best for you - different writers write differently. Regarding writing advice: "One size" does NOT fit all.
- You do not have to write about something you already know: you always can research and learn about things you wish to incorporate into your plot. Use the Internet, libraries, interviews, etc. as tools to assist in research.
- One method of developing a novel is to begin with the ending in mind: If you know the ending of the story, it can help you form the theme, the plot, the settings, and the characters; and it can help you more easily progress toward that ending.
- Develop your characters to be as multi-dimensional as possible - flat, boring, uninteresting characters can kill even the best story before it gets off the ground. Sometimes your characters will begin to develop in ways you hadn't expected. Don't panic! This can be a good thing, and it can add new and refreshing directions for you in your plot. Try to base your characters on real-life experiences and on what motivations and traits that you believe your characters would have in an equivalent real-life setting. Use your imagination fully; use your interactions with others as an initial basis. Also, don't be afraid to research various personality types for character material.
- Another tip that might prove useful is a "big picture" approach: Try to create the world (the overall setting and environment), and then build on it to create your novel. Base your characters around the world that you have created (geography, races, towns, cities, capitals, cults, factions, governments, etc.)
- Try to avoid throwing away ANY ideas! In writing, it's often a good practice to have MORE material than you actually need, so please try to retain ALL of your ideas (even those you may have considered tossing out earlier). At times, you may need "filler ideas" to finish out a sub-plot and move to the main plot along.

Warnings

- If you're interested in publishing your novel, edit it very thoroughly. Have friends look it over. Then research publishing houses that are likely to buy a manuscript like yours. Get an agent, and look up books and websites on how to get your book published. The best suggestion is to join a critique group, more than one if possible and get their feedback. This can be a way of editing too and it WORKS!
- Stay away from writing cliches and morals. Cliches are boring and not fun. Adding ironic twists and new expressions makes for an interesting book that more people will want to read. Most people don't read a novel for your moral opinion, they read for entertainment and escape, so don't pontificate or express your moral opinion dressed up as a novel. The exception may be "Christian" novels which have a limited readership.

Things You'll Need

- A clear mind. You can't do anything without clearing your mind.
- A quiet place to sit and work.
- Loads of stamina, perseverance, and the willpower to plow on and finish what you start, running with your idea to its conclusion rather than abandoning it midway through.
- A dictionary and thesaurus. You might need to look up words or you might need a different word to use. This will help!
- A computer, notepad or typewriter.