

8 Steps to Writing a Novel

Step 1

Take your time brainstorming. Write down ideas about characters, plots and potential conflicts. Research facts. Daydream about your character's until you can hear their voices, see how they dress and know how they act.

Step 2

Write a one-paragraph summary of your novel (like the blurb on the back cover of a book, although it won't be as refined at this stage). It should include the hook that will make readers want to buy your book, e.g. the conflict keeping the main character from her goal.. Think about which character has the most to lose and what her goal is.

Step 3

Organise your ideas into a story overview, which will help you see potential conflicts, shortfalls and inaccuracies. Do this by writing about five paragraphs describing:

1. The story setup/background.
2. The first barrier to the protagonist reaching his/her goal. This might be caused by external circumstances.
3. The second barrier to the protagonist reaching his/her goal. This needs to be caused by the protagonist's internal struggle and attempts to resolve the conflicts.
4. The catharsis near the end of the story must be caused by the protagonist's internal struggle and attempt to resolve conflicts.
5. The ending.

Now you have six paragraphs that can be used as the basis of a synopsis. Study the overview for gaps in the plot, brainstorm ideas and flesh out the action/reaction sequences. Add to it as the story evolves.

Step 4

Start to develop character profiles as a point of reference, and I suggest you add to them as you write. When you mention the colour of your hero's eyes, make a note, so you don't change half way through the story.

This is not just a list of facts, but an exploration of speech patterns, mannerisms, behaviours, ticks, family history, past life experiences, motivation and goals. Everything that helps you understand how the character will act in any given situation.

I also find it helpful to write an overview of the story from the point of view of each main character, to help me understand the plot and character. You can then expand your overview using what you've learned.

By now you should have a good understanding of your plot, key conflicts and scenes.

How will he/she change by the end of the novel?

Step 5

If you want more structure, use the overview to make a list of key scenes.

Write until you have the first draft done. Keep your forward momentum and don't let procrastination get in your way. If you label each scene, e.g. Bill gets murdered, using one of the styles in the tool bar, it will make it much easier to navigate back and forth between scenes.

Step 6

Save new versions of your story regularly, so you can see how it progresses. If you don't want to break your rhythm by solving problems as you come across them, then just make a list of notes that you can go back to once the first draft is complete.

Step 7

It's a good idea not to look at the story for a while — at least a couple of weeks. This helps you to be more impartial and to determine how the story holds together as a whole. The majority of the writing process is rewriting, so make sure you spend a proportionate amount of time editing and polishing your story, to make it the best it can be.

Step 8

When you think you've finished, print a hard copy and read it with fresh eyes. (Keep your red pen handy, because you'll be horrified at how many errors escaped you on screen.) Re-edit and polish your work, being ruthless, until you are pleased that you have a saleable, professionally presented product.

Good luck!