

## How to Write a Novel in 10 Steps

Turning an idea into something other people will read and buy involves ten steps in three phases.

### ***The art phase***

#### (1) Write the first draft

Sit down and do it. Don't show it to anyone else (although it's OK to get verbal help organizing your thoughts). Just gush out your vision, your fantasies, your emotions—your voice. Assume the draft will stink, so disconnect that inner judge and WRITE. Flag areas you'll need to research later. Keep going until you've completed a beginning, a middle, and an end.

#### (2) Rest

Put the manuscript away for a few weeks or months.

#### (3) Do your homework

While the manuscript is idling, study craft. Read how-to books, learn category conventions, educate yourself about the publishing process (both traditional and indie). Start a list of potential publishers, research the different types of editing, and define your audience.

Most important, *decide what you really want* and how hard you're willing to work for it. This will affect the choices you make and resources you need from here on.

#### (4) Re-read the draft

Dig out the manuscript and read it through. Guaranteed, you'll be shocked—both by how good it is and how bad it is. Do not show it to anyone else.

#### (5) Revise the draft

Take everything you've learned from steps 2–4 and work it into the story.

### ***The craft phase***

#### (6) Get feedback

Now show the book to people who will provide technical feedback. Three choices here, based on your personality and budget.

If you're a visionary sort who loves creating but hates fussing with details, you'll struggle with refining your work. If you're a more analytical sort who loves to build and organize, then you'll embrace revision as a stimulating and gratifying learning experience. Understand this about yourself before proceeding!

Choice one is to get feedback from a professional. That means hiring a developmental editor, who will analyze the book and work with you on its structure, character development, writing technique, etc., and guide you through revisions—perhaps making them for you.

Choice two is to pay for a non-editing professional evaluation, then do the revisions yourself.

Choice three is to round up amateur feedback via beta readers, and do the revisions yourself.

Beta readers could be your writing group, or any three (or more) readers/writers of any occupation who can evaluate a work and articulate their thoughts in terms of plot, character, credibility, emotional response, writing foibles, etc. They must understand the difference between constructive critique and insensitive criticism.

Avoid friends and family who may hedge because they don't want to hurt your feelings. Your feelings will intermittently get mashed no matter what you do, so it's vital to build that into your expectations and learn to manage it. The feedback process should be a clinical exercise about the work, not about you. Everyone involved needs to be cerebral.

While waiting for feedback, work on research points and start composing pitches and synopses. Learn about marketing.

#### (7) Revise the revisions

Apply only useful feedback to the manuscript. Pay particular notice to observations that upset you, especially in areas you don't want to change. Solving issues there might make a world of difference in the book's ultimate reception. Also consider any comment made by multiple readers, because that usually points to a problem. Learn to tell the difference between someone wanting you to write to *their* satisfaction, and someone trying to help *you* develop *your* story. You may have to compromise if you are working within genre conventions.

Repeat this cycle if necessary, until you're satisfied and critiquers start running out of things to say.

#### (8) Hire an editor

An independent professional copy editor or substantive (line) editor will help bring the book to completion. Fees and abilities vary widely, so interview candidates and pony up for a good one. The right editor is the person who will balance you out and help make the book the best it can be. The wrong editor will impose too much of themselves on the book, or miss important details, or simply rub you the wrong way. There are scammers out there, too, so select carefully.

While waiting for the manuscript to come back, continue updating lists of potential publishers, vendors, reviewers; studying submission requirements; finalizing query letters and synopses; building a website; establishing a presence in social media.

#### (9) Polish the edited manuscript

If all has gone well, final revisions should be simple and exciting. If you're still having trouble making the book come together, repeat beta/pro feedback as many times as needed.

(10) Hire a proofreader

When the book is as ready as you can make it, engage a trained proofreader to crawl through it one more time. No matter how many people have seen a book, something (or many somethings!) is always overlooked. The goal is to release as clean and professional-looking a manuscript as humanly possible. As the pros say: “It ain’t a typo until it’s in print.” Save yourself embarrassment and negative reviews by investing in quality.

***The presentation phase***

Many authors find that launching a book into the world is much harder than writing one. And it’s where the worst of discouragement will come. You need to believe in yourself, because you’ll be bombarded by other people’s opinions, often conflicting, and be surprised in good and bad ways. You’ll need to suppress your inner artist and apply all the administrative, business, and problem-solving skills you’ve accumulated through life.

So: Submit to the entities identified in your homework. Market, market, market according to plan. Hire whatever help you need.

Then release your inner artist to write the next book!

—Carolyn Haley, DocuMania

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