

Writing Your First Novel Worksheet

This is the worksheet for June's seminar, which you can find in audio and transcript forms at: www.writershuddle.com/seminars/june2012

Key Points from the Seminar

In the seminar, we cover several key things you need to do in order to work towards a first novel:

Decide How Long Your Novel Should Be

Around 80,000 words is a good average length in most genres. If you write a very short novel (under 50,000 words) then it'll be easiest to market in ebook form. A very long novel could be split into a trilogy or series.

Make Time to Start Your Novel

There's never going to be a perfect time to start. And once you make a start, you've crossed the biggest hurdle.

- Set milestones (not a final deadline) – think about the next couple of steps for your novel
- Get into good writing habits and establish a routine – the [On Track](#) materials in the Huddle can help you with this

Get Experience with Other Forms of Fiction

If you're mainly a non-fiction writer, or haven't written any fiction for a long time, it's a good idea to try short stories before tackling a novel. This will give you some of the necessary skills – and give you a chance to decide whether or not you actually enjoy writing fiction.

Develop Your Characters First

Characters are usually more important to readers than the plot. If you're working on a trilogy or series, it's especially important that you have a cast of engaging, interesting characters.

Don't focus on details like characters' weight, height, birthdays, quirky habits – think about who they really are as people.

Build Conflict into Your Plot

Your plot arises from your characters – and it also gives them the opportunity to grow and develop. A good plot involves plenty of conflict, which gets in the way of your characters' needs/desires. That could be:

- Internal (*e.g. your character is debating whether or not to lie*)
- Interpersonal (*e.g. someone is bullying your character at work*)
- External (*e.g. heavy rainfall has thwarted your character's plans*)

Decide How to Tell Your Story

You can tell your story:

- In first person (“I walked down the street.”)
- In third person (“Camilla walked down the street.”)
- In the past tense (*as in both examples above*)
- In the present tense (“I walk down the street.” / “Camilla walks down the street.”)

For genre fiction, third person, past tense is probably the safest option.

Separate Writing and Editing

Don't try to write and edit at the same time. You can either:

- Write each scene/chapter then edit it – you might write in the morning, edit in the afternoon (or the next day).
- Write the whole first draft then edit it.

Get These Four Things in Place, Then Begin

You need:

1. An idea that grabs you – a story you really want to tell
2. Your main characters sketched out
3. The first few scenes or chapters planned
4. The end (roughly) in mind

Exercise

#1: Look at your calendar and decide on a start date for your novel: when are you going to write the first few paragraphs of Chapter 1?

(Make sure you give yourself enough time to get the four key building-blocks in place first.)

#2: Post in the Huddle forums to tell us about your novel idea, and to let us know when you'll be making a start.

Further Resources in the Huddle

[On Track e-course](#) – if you haven't tried the On Track course yet, give it a go: it's designed to help you make progress with a big project, like a novel.

[Short Stories and Fiction Writing, with Em Newman](#) – this seminar, from May 2012, will give you ideas and inspiration for writing your own fiction.

[Getting Started With Fiction](#) – this mini-course will help you come up with ideas, create characters, develop your plot and conflict, and more...