

# Writing Your First Novel Worksheet

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