

Writing Your First Novel Transcript

This is a transcript of the audio seminar, edited slightly for easy reading!

You can find the audio version at www.writershuddle.com/seminars/june2012

Hi, I'm Ali Luke, and this is the June seminar for Writer's Huddle – writing your first novel.

When I surveyed the founding members of the Huddle, back just before I re-opened the Huddle in April, I found that about three-quarters of you, at least that responded to the survey, were keen to know more about writing a first novel.

That's what we're covering in this month's seminar, and that's also what the book of the month relates to, which is *Write a Novel and Get It Published* by Nigel Watts. If you head over to [the book group forum in the Huddle](#), you can join in the discussion on that.

Ali's Novel-Writing Experience

I thought I'd begin with a bit on my own experience of writing novels. **I have written, in a sense, four “first novels”, because they’ve all been attempts to re-start at writing.** They've been attempts at quite different stages of my life, and particularly of my writing life.

It's only really the fourth novel that I wrote that I felt happy enough with that it was ready to publish.

Novel #1

The very first time that I tried writing a novel was when I was fourteen and I was in school, and I think there was some writing competition that had maybe given me the initial idea. I decided to run with that and have a go at a novel.

I think it was probably novella length in the end, which I'll come onto later, but I did the best I could at the time, but looking back, reading over it again years

later it really wasn't that great, but **it gave me some of the building blocks that I needed for a novel, it gave me a sense of how to construct characters, how to work the plot, how to make scenes and so on.** So, I put that aside.

Novel #2

When I was at university as an undergraduate, I then wrote another novel. This was, I guess, what you would consider genre fantasy, you know, fairly straightforward medieval setting, magic, that kind of stuff.

It grew out of a short story: I felt that there was a lot more in that story that wanted to be unpacked, and again it became a novel.

I worked on that, and I re-drafted it, and I edited it, and I actually got to the stage of submitting it to agents, but no agents took it. In retrospect I felt like it wasn't the very best I could do, **although again it was a very good learning experience.**

Novel #3

So then my next attempt at a novel was just for fun, and also to try and get me back into writing because at that point I had a day job, out in the real world after uni, and so I did NaNoWriMo, which is national novel writing month, in November of 2007.

I "won" NaNo, which meant I completed 50,000 words within the month, but I guess **my heart wasn't really in it.** I was trying a chick-lit style of novel, and it wasn't really my thing, so I didn't really take that any further. I abandoned that one unfinished, and certainly nowhere near a stage where I could publish it and send it to an agent or anything.

Novel #4 (Lycopolis)

Then, my first published novel is the one I worked on during my MA at Goldsmith's. I did an MA in Creative Writing, and that gave me the time and the support that I needed and the structure to really work on a slightly more complex novel, and one that really engaged me, and tied in quite a lot of the themes that I'd perhaps been trying to explore in some of my earlier work.

I self-published *Lycopolis* in ebook form last November. I was happy with the standard, I had it professionally edited and so on.

That's my experience with novels. **It's been a slightly messy journey** – and there are lots of authors who do just write a first novel and publish it. I know Joanna Penn, a friend of mine from thecreativepenn.com, she wrote her first novel, *Pentecost*, in NaNoWriMo two or three years ago, and she published that first novel.

Obviously Jo had had a lot more experience of writing once she got to that stage than I had when I tried some of my earlier novels, and **I'm sure, for most people in the Huddle, you already have more experience than I had in those really early days**. Hopefully you will find that your first novel is much better than mine, and you can really take that forwards towards publication.

How Long is a Novel?

Before I get too far into this, I thought it would be good to touch on just how long a novel is, because this is a question that I get a lot.

I would say a novel should be at least 50,000 words. That's what NaNoWriMo sets as the target, and I think most publishers and most readers would consider 50,000 words to be a short novel. Anything shorter than that is technically a novella, although there are lots of shorter books that we would think of as novels, so *Animal Farm* by George Orwell is 30,000 words, which is really short for a novel, but it's still a great work of literature.

Around 80,000 words is about the average for a novel, that's probably the most saleable length – not in every single genre, but in the majority of genres.

Some novels are absolutely massive, so one of the novels I studied as an undergraduate was *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson, that's an 18th century epistolary novel, which means it's written in letter form. It's pretty close to a million words, so it's absolutely huge.

I would recommend that you don't aim for the million words end of the spectrum, but you aim somewhere around about 80,000 words, that you plan for that as your length.

If you've got a really big, epic story to tell, then maybe you'll write a trilogy or you'll write a whole series of books, it doesn't necessarily all have to go into one novel.

Novellas as Ebooks

On the flip-side, if you find that your idea actually lends itself to something quite short, it's a novella length work, then there are actually a lot more possibilities now, with ebooks becoming much more popular, for publishing things that are short.

So, traditionally, publishers were reluctant to take on novellas, because the printing costs and manufacturing costs and so on mean that it's not very economical for them to sell a short book at a price that people would want to pay.

With an ebook, of course, there are very few costs involved with the production of the ebook itself, so you can sell something shorter.

It will be interesting to see if short stories and even novellas will continue to become a more and more popular form as ebooks continue to rise in popularity.

How to Make Time to Start Your Novel

Given that three quarters of the survey respondents from the Huddle wanted to write a novel – and I certainly have talked to a lot of writers who want to write a novel – it's obviously something that many of us have as a dream or an ambition, and don't necessarily get started on, or at least don't get started on as quickly as we might have hoped.

One thing I have learned is that **there never is a perfect time to write a novel.** I'm always busy, there's always things going on in my life, there's always reasons to think "Okay, this is not going to be the best month or the best year, I should wait and start this at a different point", but really I think this is a subtle form of procrastination.

We can be excited about the idea of starting a novel, and intimidated by that idea, all at the same time. Maybe you've got a plot or a character or a scenario in mind that really intrigues and engages you, but you're worried whether you can do justice to it, whether you can really be disciplined enough to spend the time to write a novel and to edit it, and so on, and that puts us off even making a start.

Getting Started is the Hardest Part

Certainly what I've found in my fiction writing is that once I get into a novel, it's much easier to just keep going – though it's always tough to begin. You know, writing that first sentence can be really, really hard, but once I get going, and once I start to develop the novel, I'm interested in it, I'm keen to get on with it, I'll work hard on the other projects I've got going so I can get to my novel.

Of course that doesn't mean it becomes completely easy. There'll always be times when you have to push yourself a little bit, or you have to make the time in your week to work on your novel, but **once you get over that very first hurdle of getting started, it's easier than it perhaps initially feels.**

Set Milestones

Something you can do to help you along the way, when you're working on a novel, is to set yourself some milestones.

A milestone might be that you want to flesh out details on your characters by a particular date, or it might be that you want to reach the end of chapter five by a particular date, and so on.

The reason I suggest this, rather than set yourself a deadline of "I'm going to finish the novel by Christmas" or something, is because it's often very hard, if you're not used to writing fiction, and if you've never written a novel before, to have much idea of how long it's going to take. **It can be discouraging if you set yourself an ambitious goal and you fail to reach it, and it can also be discouraging if you set a goal that's a very long way off.**

By setting yourself some initial milestones, you can get a sense of how long the process does take, whether you need to press yourself to work a bit faster, whether you need to make your milestones a bit more challenging, and so on,

and you can just look at the next step, or the next couple of steps along the path, rather than feeling a bit daunted by the prospect of completing the whole novel.

Writing Habits and Routine

Then a part of this is getting into a writing habit and a routine, and I think novels are great for this. With some other forms, like, say, short stories, you might work on one short story, and you develop the idea and the plot and the characters, and you write it, and you edit it, and so on. Maybe you do that over the course of a month and a couple of months.

Then maybe a couple more months go by before you tackle the next short story, because you need to come up with a whole new situation, and a whole new set of characters and so on, unless you're writing a linked series or a cycle of stories.

With a novel, once you get into it, it's obviously easier to pick up where you left off, because you've got a continuing plot, you've got characters who are continually developing through that plot, and so on, so, you know, it's easy to say to yourself, "Okay, I'm going to sit down three times a week, and write 500 words, or write for an hour", or whatever it might be.

I know many of you have been going through the [On Track](#) course in the Huddle, and that's designed to help you with things like this: setting milestones, getting into a routine and so on.

If you've not had a chance to look at the On Track materials yet, or if you've maybe done the first couple and then maybe got a bit sidetracked, then it might be a good chance to go back and look at those while you're thinking about, specifically, your novel.

You can find them at www.writershuddle.com/on-track and there's also a link to On Track in the navigation of the site.

Get Experience With Shorter Forms of Fiction

Obviously a novel is a big undertaking, and I know some people feel like they would like to *have written* a novel, and perhaps feel that the actual process of writing a novel is not quite for them, and maybe they struggle away for a few months or a few chapters, and it just doesn't seem to be going anywhere for them personally.

I would definitely recommend that before you tackle a novel, you get some experience with some other forms of fiction. That might be that you write some short stories, or you write some flash fiction, or you just tackle some exercises that relate to fiction, and so on.

Make the Switch from Non-Fiction

I think this is particularly the case if you're used to writing non-fiction. I know that I personally, and a lot of the people that I talk to, feel that non-fiction is a lot easier to write than fiction, because you don't usually have to do quite so much in terms of engaging the reader in the same way.

With non-fiction, people will often read for the information value, and it's a bit simpler to sell a piece of non-fiction to somebody on the ground that it will be useful than to sell somebody a novel which you're selling it on entertainment value, or that maybe it'll be edifying and morally uplifting or something, but that's a tougher sell.

It's tougher to write really good fiction than it is to write really good non-fiction, the standard is just much higher because people have higher expectations of it, because you're looking for that buy-in, and there's no obvious pay-off for them beyond the entertainment factor.

So, if you've not done any short stories, or any flash fiction, or any form of fiction before, or if it's been many years since you've done that, I would recommend maybe spending a month or two working on shorter stuff. **Then if you still feel like this is for you, and like you still want to write a novel, then absolutely go for it.**

Write Something You Care About

Also keep in mind that some people are naturally novel length rather than short story length writers. I've written a bunch of short stories, but I don't feel that any of them are really up to the standard that I would like them to be. They're okay, they're technically competent, at least judging on the feedback that I've had, but my heart perhaps wasn't quite in it.

For me, the novel is a more comfortable length and easier and more fun to write, but I still value the fact that I did tackle short stories, because it gave me some skills in the way that I write fiction, and it made me realise that I did want to write fiction, and so on.

So, when it comes to perhaps choosing your idea for the novel, deciding exactly what your novel is going to be about, maybe what genre it's going to be, and so on, I definitely recommend that you write something that you really care about, something that comes from the heart. **Don't just pick a genre that you think will be great in terms of sales, unless it's a genre that you read.**

So, it might be that you read several different types of books, and you really enjoy literary fiction, but you also like fast-paced thrillers for just some light reading, and if you're going into novel-writing with the hopes of publication and some money and so on, then it might be better to go for thrillers, because there's a much bigger market there.

On the flip side, if you're trying to write a novel because you want literary fame and prestige, and you want that recognition from the literary community, then obviously a thriller probably isn't going to get you that. Even if it's really well written, it can be hard for a heavily genre-based book to break out and become something that's respected in the slightly more academic world of books.

Don't Write Novels for the Money

In general, don't write fiction for the money. I can tell you that it's far, far easier to make money from non-fiction than from fiction. Now that absolutely doesn't mean that you should not write fiction. I think there are many reasons

why writing fiction is beneficial: it makes you a better writer in general, and it's simply rewarding and enjoyable on a personal level and so on, and for some people it's even a form of therapy.

But if your sole motivation for writing a novel is that you're hoping to become a bestseller, to make your millions, to be the next Dan Brown or something, then you'll probably want to re-think.

If you just do it for the money, you're perhaps less likely to even finish that novel in the first place, and I think readers and editors and so on can tell when you're heart wasn't in it, and you were just knocking something off in the hope of making some quick cash.

Develop Your Characters First

One of the questions I get about novels is whether it's more important to develop your plot or develop characters, which to do first, and how they relate, and so on.

I feel that character should always come first, especially if you're thinking about writing a series of books. So, maybe you're writing a fantasy trilogy, for example, or you're going to have a whole series of police procedurals, character is what matters to readers.

I expect if you think about some of your own favourite novels, some of the books that you read maybe years ago, as a child, as a teenager, as a young adult, that the things that really stick with you are the characters. You might remember the names of the characters, you would know how that character behaved, what they were like, and so on, whereas you've probably forgotten some of the details of the plots, some of the plots may have been slightly more incidental to you.

That's not to say that plot is, of course, insignificant, but character is what we care about, as people. We care about people, and if you can't make the reader care about the characters, they won't read the book. You can have a really exciting, dramatic opening scene, but if it's all plot and the characters are all paper-thin, then readers will just put the book down, whereas if you have

characters who the reader immediately cares about, engages with, if they want to see those characters succeed, or if they're villains, they want to see them get their comeuppance, then readers will read on.

How to Create Characters

Building character is something that I sometimes see being taught, in my opinion, quite badly. If you go to some writing workshops, or read some writing books, and so on, you'll maybe find checklists for creating characters, and they'll have things like your character's height, your character's weight, their birthday, maybe their favourite foods, their quirky habits, and so on.

It can be quite fun to fill these things in, but to me that's not really what character is. Personally, it doesn't matter too much exactly how tall my characters are, or what they weigh, unless this impinges on who they are as a person, it doesn't matter when their birthday is, unless that's going to be significant in the story.

What matters to me, and what matters to us as readers, is, I think, who the character really is. When we talk about character in terms of a person's character, we mean, are they a good person? Are they somebody with strong values, are they reliable, and so on.

I think you're looking for that kind of thing when you build fictional characters, so when you develop your characters, you're asking yourself questions like, **what does this person hold valuable? What principles would they not break, and then also, under what circumstances would they perhaps lie? What would push them to do something which was against their values?**

You can look at things like a character's backstory, what really significant events have happened in their past? You can look at maybe their family dynamics, or their friendship groups, or the people around them.

You can think about their job. Don't just give your character a job because they have to have one, but think about what sort of job would they take and why. Are they unhappy in their job? If so, why did they get that job, and why can't they leave? Have they got their dream job, and if so, what is that dream job,

and does that mean that their work is perhaps taking over from other aspects of their life, and so on.

To me, all this is so much more engaging than just knowing that a character has a little quirky habit, or, you know, they've got a funny laugh, or they always dress in pink or something.

Obviously there are some small details that can become very telling, and which can really let us know what a character is like, but those details really have to arise from the deeper, you know, who that character really is within.

How Will your Characters Grow?

Something else you might consider when you're developing characters, is how that character needs to grow, and how they're going to change over the course of your novel.

Certainly your main character, and possibly several main characters, should have a character arc, which means that they change and they develop. It could be that they become somebody quite different, that they learn something new, and they perhaps find different values, or they find a new confidence or something like that. It could be that they become who they really were all along, but they can now express that, or that they've discovered that within themselves, but **there has to be that arc or that change for readers to really be satisfied with the story, and this arc or change comes from the plot.**

Develop Your Plot From Your Characters

The plot is what your characters do, basically. The plot obviously affects them, and who they are is going to change the plot, so **plot and character are entwined, you can't completely separate them.**

You may find that, while you have a clear idea of the characters up front, the plot emerges as you write, and it can be, sometimes it can be a mistake to try and plot too much before you begin.

Obviously with some genres, perhaps a mystery, or even a thriller, you might need to do quite a bit of plotting, because you've got a tightly woven, carefully

constructed story, but in general, I think it's good to let the plot emerge a bit from the characters.

It may be the case that it takes you a bit of time to really get to know those characters, and perhaps some of the things you write surprise you slightly, and they weren't quite the directions you expected to go in, and so on. **You might want to plot quite loosely to begin with, and then gradually develop that plot as you work on the novel itself and you do the actual writing.**

Conflict Within Your Plot

One very important element here is conflict. **Conflict is when a character's needs or desires or dreams are thwarted.**

It might be something like, they want to get a new job, and they're applying for jobs, and they get rejected. It might be that your character has a conflict with a person in their life, so they desperately want to win the approval of their parents, but everything they do seems to be treated negatively by their mum and dad.

Conflict is what drives your plot, and it's what gets your characters to change. It's in moment of real struggle and crisis that we see who characters really are, or that we see them actually develop, you know, really gain some new skills or some new strengths.

One way to look at conflict is quite nicely divided up by Nigel Watts in *Write a Novel and Get It Published*. He groups conflict into three parts: **there's internal conflict, interpersonal conflict and external conflict.**

Interpersonal conflict is between two characters. Perhaps you've got a villain who's stopping the hero getting what they want, who's actively opposing them. Or it could be a bit different from that, it could be that you've got two characters who want the best for each other, but just don't see eye to eye. In the example of somebody trying to win the approval of their parents, it's not necessarily that those parents are horrible, it could just be that those parents want something very different for them than what they want.

Internal conflict is inside a character, so it's the conflict between, perhaps, wanting something new and being afraid to step out of your comfort zone, or

the conflict between knowing that telling a lie would make life easier, but also not wanting to lie. These are the conflicts that can be quite well explored in novels, and are perhaps a bit harder to explore in other forms.

Although I'm not a big fan of tons of introspection, and lots of musing on these problems at great length, you do want to have definitely some level of internal conflict within your characters, and show how that impacts on them, and on the people around them.

External conflict comes from the environment, so not from people, per se, but from something a bit more impersonal than that. That external conflict could be the weather, so it may be your characters are somewhere isolated and there's a big rainstorm and the power's out, or there's snow and the roads are blocked, or it could be that they're somewhere very hot, and they're struggling to survive in a harsh environment

External conflict could be almost anything. It could be something, in contemporary fiction, like the state of the economy, so maybe your character loses their job, and it isn't because they've got a horrible boss, which would be interpersonal conflict, it's just because there's a recession.

Wherever your character has a goal, or an ambition, or a desire, you, as the author, need to look for ways to block that. Obviously there might be times that your character does succeed in something that they're going for, but you can't make life too easy, you need to have there be continuing struggles.

If your characters win every battle they fight, if they get what they want too easily, then for one thing the reader won't be all that engaged, and for another, the character won't perhaps seem like they've come that far. If success is effortless to them, then their achievements don't mean as much as if they've really really worked for that success.

How You Tell Your Story

So, another decision that you'll have to make, once you've thought about things like your characters and maybe some of the conflicts that will be

involved in your novel, is how exactly you write that novel. You've got a few choices here.

First Person vs Third Person

You can tell a novel in the first person, which means *I*, so “I walked down the street”, or you can tell the novel in the third person, which means *He* or *She*, so “Camilla walked down the street”.

(In short stories, you'll occasionally see the second person being used, which is the *You* form so I could write a story with “You walked down the street”, but that's a very difficult form to make work, it's hard and weird to read, and I certainly wouldn't recommend it for a novel.)

First Person Narratives

Obviously, if you choose first person, you're limited to one point of view, and you can only tell us things that this character knows. Now, this can be really effective and powerful, and if you've got a really strong, likeable narrator with an interesting voice, or even a slightly dislikeable narrator, who still has an interesting and engaging way of telling that story, then first person can work very well.

Third Person Narratives

Some readers prefer third person. I don't think I've ever seen readers complaining about a novel written in the third person, saying that they prefer first person, but I have seen the other way around, so you might decide to opt for third person if you don't care either way, just because it is slightly more popular with readers.

If you write in the third person you've got more options on what information you reveal, whether you switch viewpoint from one character to another, and so on.

Even if you're writing third person, I'd recommend that you try and keep quite close to the perspective of specific characters, so in each scene you have one character who's essentially the viewpoint character, although it's written in the third person. You don't tell the reader things that other characters know but

that character doesn't, because that makes it easier for us to engage, and then after a scene or after a chapter, you can if you like switch to another perspective.

Of course it is possible to have more than one first person narrator in a novel, you could switch between different first person narrators in different chapters, but again that is something that can be unpopular with readers, and can be hard to make work, especially if it's your first novel.

Present Tense vs Past Tense

Another choice that you'll have to make is whether you write in the present tense or the past tense.

So the present tense would be "Camilla walks down the street" or "I walk down the street", and the past tense would be "Camilla walked down the street" or "I walked down the street."

This one's up to you. **The past tense is sometimes seen as the storytelling form, and it's probably a bit more common, particularly in genre fiction.** In literary fiction sometimes the present tense is used.

The present tense can be very effective, it can work very well for certain types of writing, and it's perhaps slightly more often used with the first person narrator, so if you've got somebody telling the story as that story occurs, which gives a bit more suspense, because if they're telling a story looking back on their life then we know that, you know, they survive, and so on.

The past tense is maybe a bit more common with a third person narrator, and I **would suggest going for the past tense unless you have a really strong reason for using the present tense.**

Coming to a Decision

It may be worth looking at novels in your genre, if you're writing in a genre, or novels by people whose writing style you feel is similar to yours, and seeing what choices they make about first person versus third person, and present tense versus past tense.

It may be that you want to just experiment with writing a chapter or a scene in a different way. This can be quite useful if you're perhaps trying to find a character's voice in the third person and it's not quite coming through, you could perhaps try writing in the first person, just briefly as a way of getting yourself into that mindset, then rewrite that in the third person.

If you've started your novel in the past tense, you might find that you want to experiment with doing it in the present tense and see if you want to make that change.

Separate the Writing and Editing Process

When you sit down and you start writing, one of the key recommendations I would make for a novel is that you separate the writing process from the editing process.

There are two ways to do this.

Write in the Morning, Edit in the Afternoon

One is to write in the morning and edit in the afternoon. You might not do that literally, but you do the writing, you work on maybe one scene, and then quite soon afterwards, maybe on the same day, or the next day, or that same week, you edit that scene.

You edit each scene before you move on, and you get things polished up a bit, and obviously you might make more changes at a later stage, but you're fairly happy with what you've written.

Some people prefer to work in this way. They like to get things right before they move on, and they then feel that it's not such a big task to edit the whole thing at the end of the first draft, and if that's how you work, that's fine, stick with it.

Edit Your Work Before Workshopping

Another reason why you might do this, or at least do it for small sections of your novel, is if you're going to workshop something. You probably won't

want to workshop a literal first draft, because there'll be typos, there'll be sentences that just don't work, there'll be clumsy mistakes, and so on.

Even just a small amount of editing can help you get that piece of work, whether it's a scene or a chapter, into a state where it's suitable for showing to a workshop group, and they're not going to be distracted by all those little mistakes that you could have caught yourself.

Write the Whole First Draft, Then Edit

The other way, then, to edit, is to write the whole of the first draft, and then to edit the whole thing.

This is how I personally prefer to work. In fact, I split the process up slightly more, so I write and then I redraft, which means I pretty much completely rewrite everything, and then I edit, which is fixing typos and spelling mistakes and so on.

This works well if you like to see really fast progress, if you want your word count to go up quickly. It works well if you're perhaps somebody who writes a little bit by intuition and maybe you end up wanting to change quite a lot of stuff after you've done your first draft – because if you edit and polish every scene as you go along, and then you decide to cut out a whole sub-plot, or a whole character, obviously that's going to mean that you've wasted some of your work.

Really what matters is that you find a process that's comfortable for you, and that as much as possible you try to avoid editing while you're writing. So, you don't write a sentence and then immediately go back and start trying to fix that sentence, or you don't write a paragraph and then change your mind and delete the whole thing.

It may be the case that you write a paragraph, and then the next day you delete it, but you've given it a little bit of time, and sometimes you can see the strength in your writing better when you've got just a little bit more distance on it.

There's Never a Perfect Time

I'm not going to recommend that you start your novel tomorrow, or that you dive in straight away, but I am going to suggest that, if you've got a novel idea in mind, if something's been tugging at your sleeve for months, even maybe for years, that you do give yourself a specific start date.

Really seize the moment and take the chance to get on with that novel, because there never will be a perfect time, and you'll never feel that your writing is already good enough, or that everything has fallen into place in some way.

It's a great learning process, and you'll find out a lot about yourself, and you'll maybe grow some skills, like your writing skills, but also your ability to just sit down and focus on writing through the process of working through a novel.

The Four Things You Need in Order to Begin

So, what you need in order to begin on the writing is, I think, four things.

#1: An Idea That Grabs You

You need an idea that really grabs you, a story that you feel you need to tell, that's the first thing.

#2: Your Main Characters

Secondly, you need to have your main characters figured out, and you should have some notes at least about each of them.

This doesn't have to be a whole character questionnaire, but a sense of who these people are, where they've come from in terms of what's happened in their past. The reader wants a sense that those characters have existed before the story began, and a sense of where those characters are perhaps going to go, and which characters are maybe going to go into conflict.

#3: The First Few Scenes/Chapters Planned

Now, the third thing you need is to have the beginning of your novel, so a sense of where it all starts. What's the incident that kicks it off? What's the point at which everything changes and that story gets into motion?

It might be that you have the first few scenes or the first few chapters planned out, at least very roughly before you begin to actually write the first words.

#4: The End (Roughly) in Mind

The fourth thing you need is a sense of how your novel is going to end. That could be that you know the main character is going to triumph over the villain, for instance, and in many genres that is the case, and you maybe know just roughly how that showdown is going to happen, what situation is going to exist at the very end of the novel.

It's just good to know what you're driving for as you work through the middle of your novel.

So, those are the four things that you need, and I don't think it takes too long to come up with those things, I think you could do it within maybe a couple of weeks.

Obviously you'll perhaps want some time to think things out, or you might already have these ideas in your head.

Choose a Start Date

Look at your calendar now, look at the time you've got during the next month, maybe, during July, before the summer really kicks off.

Maybe find an afternoon, perhaps a Saturday afternoon, or a couple of weekday evenings after work, or whatever time it is that's going to work for you.

Block out that time to really sit down, to really think about some of these things, to think about, have you got your core idea in place? Have you got an

idea that grabs you, or, if you've got several ideas, you know, which one is really tugging at you to be written now?

Get your main characters figured out, getting the beginning of your novel figured out, and having a sense of the end.

So, set aside some time for that, set aside a few hours, and then find a date which you can put in your diary now, when you can say, *"This is when I'm going to start on Chapter One. However unready I feel, however much I feel that this isn't the perfect time, I'm going to sit down, and I'm going to write at least 500 words of Chapter One."*

Once you cross that first hurdle it all gets easier. If you can make some progress now, even if it's not the perfect time, even if you're going to be going off on holiday soon, or the weather is really nice out and you want to be in the garden – that's not the case here in Britain! – there never will be an absolutely perfect time.

Sometimes what we really need to do as writers is to say, "I'm going to make the time for this, this is important to me and I'm going to start."

So, if it helps, please come on over to [the forums](#), and tell us your novel idea, if you're willing to share that – or even just when you're going to sit down and actually do this, when you're going to sit down and plan and work on the very initial bits of your novel, and then get down to the writing.

Come and tell us, and let us help you to be accountable, and let us give you some support.

If for whatever reason, you don't feel comfortable using the forums, or you're not too comfortable using forums, feels free to just drop me an email and say "Hey, Ali, this is what I'm planning to do", so that at least one person in the world knows and cares about what you're up to.

So if, hopefully, this has got you thinking that you do want to get going on your novel, then **I wish you the very best of luck, I think it's a journey which is absolutely worth taking, and I know that you will enjoy it.**