

How to Write a Novel?

By Craig Lock

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Creative Writing Course <http://www.nzenterprise.com/writer/creative.htm>

We hope that the following short article based on my writing experiences may be informative and/or helpful. It covers a basic introduction to getting started writing that "great" novel that, I believe, lies within each one of us. You have permission to publish this article (formatted to 60 characters, approx) electronically or in print.

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"We share what we know, so that you may grow ."

HOW TO WRITE A NOVEL

By Craig ("get a proper job")* Lock

Well, I'm sure that's what the "rather straight" neighbours think of my "funny" occupation!

Writing is like sex in that it can be very nice when you are thinking about it, terrific when you are doing it, very satisfying afterwards...and you write because you have to. Exciting!

They say that if enough chimpanzees were put in front of enough word processors for enough time, eventually one of them would write Hamlet.

Me write a novel - Impossible!
Don't worry, I had the same thoughts six years ago!

People just don't think of writing seriously. If I had been going off to teach all day, it would have been different. They wouldn't interrupt your work if you were employed at a grocery store. That's considered serious business. It's because you work at home. People think they can interrupt writing."

--Jessamyn West

"I write because something inside myself, inner and unconscious forces me to." That is the first compulsion. The second is one of ethical and moral duty. I feel responsible to tell stories that inspire readers to consider more deeply who they are."

THE NOVEL

Firstly ask yourself: Why do you want to write a novel? Do you have a story to tell, a message to convey, or do you perhaps hope to inspire/challenge, entertain, be famous, reach out to others, reach into your own mind. Do you perhaps want a new identity, to reach your potential as a writer? I think that a person's motives often change as your writing proceeds.

It takes a great deal of effort to write, so PLAN ahead. Organize a few hours a day, when you won't be disturbed. WHOOA - hardly likely! The average length of a novel is 60000-100000 words. I've never counted mine. I keep my books short for two main reasons: number one, and most importantly, to tell a story as simply as possible with a message..and

2. for purely financial considerations. I lived without a cent of income from my books for two years, when I started out. So I hurried to get them out, to earn some royalties...and save my family from starvation. Or the embarrassment of the soup kitchen!

*

So be prepared to make the sacrifices. BIG ones! Are you prepared to work away on your novel every day (and evening, instead of going out and having fun?). I've had a lot of fun writing, even though I may have become a "hermit and social misfit" in the process! Oh well, we'll see if writing success changes that!

How do you eat an elephant, or write a novel? In small chunks. So set daily goals for yourself. If you write, say 500 words a day, a first draft of your manuscript will take 120 days or 4 months. If you write 1000 words a day, you will halve the time: it will then take only 60 days. So set daily goals - at least two hours writing. Then STICK TO IT.

PLAN THE NOVEL: Jot down plenty of notes. What characters do you want in it. Draw up a flow chart to help you develop a plot. Then draw up a chronology (big word) of the plot: eg. when were the characters born, where did they go to school, marry and other major events in their lives, etc? It's difficult to remember everything, when your mind is racing ahead. A chronology helps you to keep on track, like ensuring that the ages of the characters correspond with the events. Remember: It doesn't matter WHAT you write - just as long as you START WRITING.

But first there are some decisions to be made: Whether to write in the first, second or third person? Also from whose perspective? What tense? What is the structure to be? There must be a strong foundation, so that your novel does not 'fall down'. What is the climax? Stretch significant events central to the story and shrink unimportant ones. Describe events significant to the main theme in detail. Don't have too much description of a character, who appears only once in the story. Sort out the plot as you go along. I go for walks along the deserted beautiful beaches here and I daydream. Ensure that your novel has a RHYTHM of it's own and events move forward steadily in a logical sequence.

Find a comfortable place to write, although I think that an inspired writer can write anywhere. Tolstoi apparently wrote in the village square; because the expressions on the faces of the passing parade inspired him to write.

*

Here are some common pitfalls for first novels:
The four main ones are:

1. A lack of focus. In other words, there are often too many characters, issues and sub-plots.
2. Too little plot; so that the novel goes on and on, telling every boring little detail. Trivialities like, how many lumps of sugar in her tea-cup.
3. There is no sense of character.

and

4. Telling and not SHOWING.
Eg: Don't write "tamely": The dog felt affectionate towards his master every evening...instead of: "Bonzo bounded to the door, leapt up and licked Leo's face with his 'slobbering chops' every evening after the day's work

was done. It was their home-coming ritual." Far more "spicy and zingy"... don't you think?

*

SIZE (or LENGTH):

The length of your novel? Remember shorter novels are far easier to get published, than a long 'tomb' by an unknown author. Try to put yourself in the editor's shoes, when a new long book lands on his (or usually her) desk. Not easy! Did you know that the average first novel here in New Zealand sells only 1200 to 2000 copies and few NZ novels top 10000 sales. (Something to put on the back of chewing gum wrapping paper). No wonder Kiwi novelists are as poor as church-mice, then!

N.B:

Keep in mind the expression: 'It's not the size of the wand, but the power of the magician that counts.'

Finally, I believe that nearly everyone can write their own book. If that's your dream, what's stopping you? Just go for it.

YOU CAN DO IT

HAPPY WRITING THAT NOVEL

Craig Lock

"Whatever, you want to do or dream you can do, the hardest part is making a beginning. Once you take that first step in following your passion, the rest will follow naturally... and lead to who know's where."

Craig Lock

"Use what talent you possess: the woods would be very silent if no birds sang except those that sang best."
- Henry Van Dyke

Online Creative writing course

<http://www.nzenterprise.com/writer/creative.htm>

The various books* that Craig "felt inspired to write" are available at:

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