

Writing Without a Plan

By Jennifer Minar

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Writing without a Plan:
You Could Lose Your Sanity...seriously
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I was anxious to write a novel. And I was tired of putting it off. Spend time creating an outline? No way! I despised outlining in college. Write a synopsis? A what? No, I wanted to begin writing--actually writing. I'd waited long enough.

I took the project by storm. Committing to spend at least an hour a day in front of the computer, I tackled the project. Week after week the manuscript grew thicker. I had my good and bad moments.

I didn't write the book in a linear fashion. Instead, I let the characters decide what scenes to show me on a given day. The words flew across the pages. Hey, this novel writing isn't so difficult, I thought. It just takes motivation, some time, and WA LA!

Wrong.

Six months and 85,000 words later, I sat at my cluttered desk with a cold mug of coffee, and typed the last sentence. You'd think I'd be elated and want to make copies for my friends to read. But I was less than elated--I was miserable. I loved my characters, the story, and several of my scenes. But many were loose and disjointed--not to mention useless. The novel was chaos.

Nearly two years later, I'm pretty close to my final draft. But it's been a very difficult two years. After--sometimes during--each edit I've had to put the manuscript aside for a while. It made my eyes (and mind) bleed. I wanted to scream at it. It was killing me. The story just wouldn't come together. There were so many pieces, and they were everywhere!

Now, after more than a fair share of heartache, frustration, and time, the scenes are tighter, the characters are better developed, I know my character's features down pat (Carrie no longer has blue eyes in some scenes, green eyes in others), and the plot (though the novel is primarily character-driven) is clear of holes. Most importantly, all my loose ends are finally tied.

So...what lesson did I learn? Never write another novel.

No, that's not true. I learned there's no substitute for planning. I've already begun planning novel #2. I have a partial outline, a synopsis, character collages, collages of their homes and the cafe where

my protagonist works.

I know the characters better than I know some of my friends. The plot is defined and strong. And I'm doubly excited about sitting down to write it because I have a trusty roadmap that will guide me through the creative process.

I will never again get lost inside my own novels. Never again will I spend nearly two years editing any of them. It's unnecessary. Though some writers are comfortable writing without a plan, I'm not.

Besides, the synopsis has been kinda of fun. I know...I know. That sounds like a long-shot, but really, all the brainstorming I've needed to do to write it has taught me a lot. And it sure beats the endless process of editing. Not that I won't need to edit--editing is terribly important. I just won't need to spend two years doing so.

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