

Writing



How to Write a Novel

A Practical Guide and Exercises to Write your first Novel

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Introduction

You've probably said at some point, "I should write a book." You have a great idea for a novel, but that's all it is right now. An idea. Now that you're ready to sit down and write it, where to start?

You stare at your blank screen and come to the realisation that all the ideas, all the words, have to become formulated into a cohesive manuscript.

The key to writing is "write what you know." And then once you decide to write what you know, you have to write. Famed author Roald Dahl once said, "I don't care if a reader hates one of my stories, just as long as he finishes the book."

This book will guide you through the steps you need to craft a cohesive structure, from developing your characters, organising your ideas, creating the elements of your story, and more.

It contains numerous examples that you can learn from and more than 30 exercises to

practise and progress step-by-step at your own rhythm, with your own novel.

Types of novels – categories and genres

When you think of types of novels, there are two broad categories – fiction and non-fiction. Within these categories are many genres, some of which can fall under each category. For example, a crime thriller can be a complete work of fiction or can be based on an actual true story.

However, even non-fiction stories can be interwoven with fictitious elements for the sake of moving the story along and keeping it engaging. This would be considered “creative nonfiction”, as true nonfiction novels have become less popular. As a writer, you can give

the accounting of a true story as it unfolds, with different versions possible from different points of view.

There are many genres of the fiction novel. Think about the ones you enjoy reading. When you prepare to write your novel, is your idea similar to these genres? Writers find that, especially when starting out for the first time, the genres they enjoy reading are the ones that are easiest to write.

Let's look at some genres.

Thriller/Suspense

A thriller or suspense novel is one that usually involves the solving of a crime. Within this genre are several sub-genres, including:

Mystery – offers a suspenseful accounting of a crime investigated by a detective.

Examples of the mystery sub-genre would be the *Sherlock Holmes* novels by Sir Arthur

Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie novels, *The Da Vinci Code* (Dan Brown), *Big Sky* (Kate Atkinson) and *The Guardians* (John Grisham).

Hard-boiled or “noir” mystery – a gritty detective story with a street-smart professional investigator and are generally set in a world of violence and corruption.

Examples of the hard-boiled sub-genre would be *The Maltese Falcon* (Dashiell Hammet), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (James Cain), *The Black Dahlia* (James Ellroy), and more recently, *Girl Gone Missing* (Marcie Rendon) and *Fake Like Me* (Barbara Bourland).

Psychological thriller – involves more of an emotional conflict between the main characters.

Examples of the psychological thriller would be *Silence of the Lambs* (Thomas Harris), *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Patricia Highsmith), *Mystic River* (Dennis Lehane), *Gone Girl* (Gillian Flynn) and *The Silent Patient* (Alex Michaelides).

Political thriller – the hero of the story has to fight political corruption to reach its resolution.

Examples of the political thriller would be *The Hunt for Red October* (Tom Clancy), *The Bourne Identity* (Robert Ludlum), *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (John le Carré), *The Terminal List* (Jack Carr) and *The Kremlin Conspiracy* (Joel C. Rosenberg).

There are many other types of thrillers beyond this list.



Exercise 1

Make a list of three other sub-genres of thrillers and describe what makes them a thriller. Then write an example of well-known novels that fit each genre and why.

Fantasy and Science Fiction

Often overlapping, there is a distinction between the two. Fantasy usually employs

magic and the supernatural as a primary plot element, theme, or setting. Science fiction uses plausible elements and the consequences of scientific innovation.

Well-known examples of Fantasy would be *Lord of the Rings* (J.R.R. Tolkien), *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Frank L. Baum) and the *Harry Potter* series (J.K. Rowling), while Science Fiction includes *The Time Machine* (H.G. Wells), *Dune* (Frank Herbert) and *Recursion* (Blake Crouch).



Exercise 2

List out the elements of a fantasy novel you've read. For example, in the Harry Potter series, some of the fantasy elements are wizardry, goblins, spells, witches, etc. Then select a science fiction novel and do the same exercise (alien life forms, travel at warp speed, etc.). This will better help you classify what falls into the fantasy genre and what falls into science fiction.