

# A Complete Guide to Novel-Writing

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**Abstract**— Fiction is a form of literature that describes imaginary events and people. Writing fiction is not a cakewalk as it is produced as a story that conveys an author's point of view and novel is a relatively long work of narrative fiction typically representing characters and action with some degree of realism. Hence, this paper provides a vivid account of novel-writing process i.e. How to write a novel, using a step by step procedure. It includes all the terminologies & procedures that an aspiring writer must know if he wants to produce a prize-winning novel. During the multi-step journey to authorship, one must follow a disciplinary approach & novel-writing tips in order to become an excellent writer. This paper not only focuses on DO's for novel-writing but also provides a detailed description of DON'Ts for the same that are equally important to be known for brilliant writing. So, this paper is a complete handbook of novel-writing that elucidates elements of a novel, pre-requisites for novel-writing, steps to an unputdownable novel & many more.

**Key words:** Novel, Novel-writing tips, Writing fiction, Elements of a novel, Novel specification document(NSD), Good writing, How to write a novel, Complete handbook to novel-writing

## I. INTRODUCTION

A novel is a long-reading text, a genre of fiction portraying characters & presenting a connected sequence of events. Storyline, imagination & originality are the salient factors that influence novel-writing process. Writing a novel is a complex process in which writers need constant inspiration. Some specific types of novels are: Mysteries, Thrillers, Science-fiction, Fantasy, Historical fiction, Romance, Horror etc. It is the foremost decision of the writer to select the genre of fiction. A good novel must possess high level of originality & entertainment value. Creating an outline & plot can be a good way to map out ideas & setting short term goals than can lead towards the larger goal of writing an entire book. The level of writing depends on the imagination & the amount of research done by the writer. The novel must convey meaning in a brief & clearly expressed manner so that it can grab the reader's attention. Writing a novel seems to be unsurmountable for some people, but if proper planning & step by step workflow are followed, then process can be easy. So, this paper is the absolute beginner's guide to writing a novel that provides an in-depth knowledge about how to write a bestseller or a prize-winning novel.

### A. Elements of a novel

A novel is a long-reading text with justifiable characters & events. There are some components of a novel which fiction-writers use to develop authentic content. These elements are the indispensable part of any fiction & cannot be ignored so as to generate a novel based upon the reader's expectations & the topic's context.

#### 1) Setting:

The setting is the background or the location of the action i.e. where the story is set. It comprises of four factors-

#### 2) Place:

Where the story is set? In this case, place refers to the geographical location of the story. State or city details must be provided vividly & in case of numerous locations, only the country name can be mentioned.

#### 3) Time:

If one is writing a historical novel, then the time will point to the period of history as the story is set in the past. Season, month & even time of the day must be specified in the starting chapters so as to grab reader's attention.

#### 4) Season Specification:

It is an important aspect of setting. Season details & environment conditions must be made crystal clear in the starting chapters of the novel.

#### 5) Lifestyle:

Lifestyle also helps the reader to better visualise the story. For instance- Lifestyle can be rural or urban depending upon the storyline.

### B. Characters:

The characters are the individuals that the story is about. Generally, in most of the novels, people & animals are the characters who take part in the action of the story. The author should provide enough information about the characters like their physical traits, personality traits, profession, behaviour etc. so that reader can understand their actions. The most crucial aspect about the characters is that characters must be justifiable, their actions & behaviour must be uniform throughout the story. All characters must stay true to the author's descriptions.

### C. Plot:

Plot refers to the series of incidents that make up a whole story. There must be a definite sequence of events in the novel from start to finish. It is the plot itself & the writer's way of representing it in the form of long text that capture reader's interest. The events in the chapters of the novel must be described in an interesting & innovative way.

### D. Theme:

Theme may be defined as the message or central idea of the novel. The whole story of the novel must revolve around the theme. It indicates what the writer wants to convey through his written work. The novel should be written in such a way that it can reflect the true message of the story. By the end of the novel, the readers must have a better understanding of the moral of the story through the setting, characters & events.

### E. Conflict:

A conflict in literature refers to any struggle between opposing forces. Usually, the leading character of the novel struggles against some other force. For example- In ghost stories, the protagonist of the novel mainly struggles against some supernatural force. Conflict is one of the most significant elements of the novel. Novel becomes so boring & featureless without conflict.

## II. PRE-REQUISITES FOR NOVEL-WRITING

There are some prior conditions that are somewhat required to start the novel-writing process. These are not the strict requirements but yes if one has these pre-requisites, then he/she has to put less efforts in the writing task. Four main pre-requisites for novel-writing process are described below-

- 1) **Good command over the language:** Language is the soul of the novel. The writer must have good command over the language (English). He/she should know the basics of that language i.e. grammar, punctuation, sentence formation etc. Moreover, he/she should also have a good collection of words in order to produce high quality novel. Weak language & unsuitable presentation skills can lead to grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, wrong sentence-formation etc. & these factors ultimately affects the piece of writing. Hence, one should be a careful user of the language if he/she wants to write a novel that can fulfil the reader's expectations.
- 2) **Love of writing:** It is one of the chief factors that influence novel-writing. It symbolises how much the writer is interested in the writing task. If there is no love & passion for writing, one cannot produce a good novel. So, it is regarded as the pre-condition for novel-writing.
- 3) **Thinking ability:** Strong & sharp thinking ability is required for writing as one has to think or imagine the incidents, events & then organise them in the desired sequence. Analysis, creativity, problem-solving, open-mindedness etc. all are critical thinking skills that are somewhat essential for brilliant writing.
- 4) **Good written communication skills:** When someone is writing a novel or book, then he/she is representing his/her ideas, thinking etc. So, it becomes very crucial that the way of presentation must be catchy & noticeable. Effective writing allows the reader to thoroughly understand everything that the author is trying to say. Tone, clarity, strong vocabulary, proper format all are equally necessary for brilliant writing. The more excellent the written communication skills, the better the writing is.

## III. STAGES OF NOVEL-WRITING

Novel-writing process goes through four stages. These stages symbolise a proper roadmap for writing a book in a more acceptable way. It follows bottom-up approach i.e. lower level to higher level. Every next stage is superior to its previous one. The brief description of all the four stages of novel-writing process is given below-

### A. Initial phase:

The very first phase is initial phase. In initial phase, a general outline is set i.e. what type of novel one is going to write. Brainstorming, deep thinking, discussions are carried out so as to get the particular theme or subject matter for the novel. It is just the informal way of collecting juicy ideas for the novel through keen observation & exploration. The end result of this phase is- Rough outline of the story.

### B. Dry run phase:

Dry run refers to the occasion in which practice is done before the actual implementation of something. So, in this second

phase, all the generated ideas of phase one are considered & evaluated to check whether they are appropriate & enough for building a whole story or not. The writer goes through all the abstract concepts & tries to integrate them into one. Setting, characters, plot & theme all are developed till the end of this second phase.

### C. Writing phase:

Final writing of the novel starts during this phase. Based on the setting, plot & theme, the writer starts writing the novel with utmost care. He makes proper use of his knowledge of the language, vocabulary, written communication skills etc. to make the novel engaging & exciting. This stage can take multiple days, months or even years depending upon the writer's calibre. The end result of this phase is- The coverage of entire storyline in the form of multiple chapters.

### D. Editing stage:

After writing stage, one is ready with the novel. But, it does not mean that it is error-free or there is no scope of improvement. Every task whether big or small requires testing. So, in this phase, the writer edits & make certain changes wherever necessary. The novel is checked against the novel specification document. Suitable modifications & error-handling techniques must be performed so as to make the novel ready to publish.

## IV. STEPS TO AN UNPUTDOWNABLE NOVEL

Novel-writing process is a time-consuming & extremely subjective process. There are some steps that make this process quite manageable & interesting. A well-planned writing process helps the writer to start & finish the novel with ease.

Given below are the components of the writing process that must be followed in a sequential manner in order to become a prolific writer.

### A. Put thinking cap on:

It is the very first step of writing a novel that is of great significance. At this step, genre is chosen i.e. what type of novel one is going to write: Science fiction, thriller, romance-based or horror. Through research & self-thinking, a general outline or the rough idea of novel is set. The writer makes the commitment & get motivated to design the prominent elements of the novel.

### B. Develop setting, plot & characters:

After thinking about the genre of the novel, one is free to start building the setting, plot & characters of the novel. Setting is the location of the action, atmosphere & environment. Plot refers to the actual story around which the whole book is based. Characters are the heart of the novel whom the story is all about. Creating characters is probably the main task of element generation process. So, at this step, these elements are generated by the writer & writer also sets a hint about the message/moral that he wants to convey.

### C. Making of Novel Specification Document (NSD):

Proper documentation has its own importance. Documentation reduces the chances of forgetfulness. NSD is a formal document that includes all the specific details about

the novel. NSD is maintained so as to follow a disciplinary approach & it helps the writer to keep track of the progress of novel in the subsequent levels/stages. Characteristics of a good NSD are- A good NSD must be consistent, unambiguous, modifiable, correct & verifiable.

NSD includes title, setting, approximate number of chapters, Number of characters, Genre, theme, Approximate time for completion, important incidents & writer's name. NSD also helps the writer to evaluate himself. NSD provides a brief account of novel details so that there will be uniformity & balanced portrayal of events because sometimes writer forgets about some details that he has developed at the initial stage. For instance- Suppose a writer forgets about a personality trait of a character what he has decided, due to this, he can give wrong or contradictory behaviour of that character in the subsequent chapters.

#### D. *Writing a first draft:*

After maintaining NSD, the next step is execution/actual implementation phase. At this phase, the writer begins writing the first draft of the novel according to the desired criteria. Writing a first draft is all about integrating ideas/concepts & getting a unified view. Much emphasis is not given on grammatical mistakes & punctuation errors. The first draft focuses more on incident-coverage, clarity, event-description & character-creation.

#### E. *Start final writing:*

First draft is just a milestone in novel-writing. Final writing requires utmost care & appropriate consideration. Content, language conventions, introduction, event-coverage all demands equal attention & alertness of the writer. Hence, after writing first draft of the novel, final writing is done & it deals with presentation skills, written communication skills, spelling errors, sentence- formation etc.

#### F. *Test the novel in accordance with NSD:*

After the completion of final draft, proper testing of the novel must be done considering the NSD. The ultimate objective of testing is to find & prevent errors. It is the process of verification & validation. It is the human-based checking of the novel that is conducted through walkthrough & review. If some errors are found, they are fixed & the novel is refined. This process must be repeated until the novel becomes error-free.

#### G. *Get feedback from others:*

It is the last stage of novel-writing. At this particular step when the novel is complete, the writer should try to get a feedback by disclosing the novel to the trusted person (Can be a friend or a family member) who can give a constructive feedback about the novel. It helps the writer to judge the novel with a reader's perspective. Using the suggestions, the novel should be refined & improved & the writer must be devoted to constantly re-evaluating his work through intense discipline.

### V. CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD NOVEL WRITER

Writing is a skill & becoming a remarkable writer is not a child's play. So, to emerge out as an outstanding writer, one must possess unique traits that every great writer has in

common. Some of those essential qualities or characteristics of a good novel writer are summarised below-

#### A. *Keen observer:*

A good writer is a keen observer of events, actions & processes. Writing process totally depends upon the writer's observance. Numerous ideas can be achieved through keen observation & exploration. A promising writer is capable of observing people, things, events etc. & those apt observations are reflected in their writings.

#### B. *Imaginativeness:*

Imagination is another important quality that leads to efficient writing. Everyone is not blessed with a vivid imagination. The action of forming new ideas or concepts is imagination. What one will write if he/she has no content or matter. Hence, it is a must-criteria for a good writer. An excellent writer is quite passionate, creative & good at forming new images or concepts of external objects.

#### C. *Managerial skills:*

Managerial skills include initiation, planning, organisation, decision-making & problem solving. While doing any project, management & control are very necessary to get the desired results. A good writer is able to schedule & divide his tasks in a better way in accordance with successful management process.

#### D. *Patience:*

Writing a good book/novel requires apt observation, documentation & planning. It is not a one-day task. Hence, an extraordinary novelist/writer is quite patient, he does not beat about the bush & takes enough time to express his ideas, feelings & emotions in his writings. He is able to accept minor delays without being annoyed or anxious so as to produce a better quality novel.

#### E. *Writing style & ability to size up the content:*

Writing style is the key factor in determining whether the writing is good or bad. It is the writing style itself that points out the differences between a good & a bad writer. Therefore, a good novel writer is known for his unique style of writing & takes care of the language conventions. Moreover, he knows very well that how to size up the content.

#### F. *Self-motivation & passion for writing:*

It is totally true that –“Writers are passionate creatures”. Life is not a bed of roses. Everyone has to face difficulties & problems in life. For a writer, it is a very challenging task to deal with difficult situations without having its negative impact on his writings. But, as exceptions exist. A remarkable writer remains self-motivated all the time, he does not need any external forces to get motivated & follows his passion for writing that ultimately leads to his bestsellers.

### VI. DON'TS FOR NOVEL-WRITING

Writing a novel is somewhat a tedious task. The writer should take care of many things while writing an exciting & enjoyable story. With DO's, there are also many DON'Ts for novel-writing process that must be followed so as to become a successful author. A confident & productive writer better knows the craft of writing & never makes such mistakes.

Some DON'Ts for novel-writing are provided as under-

- 1) Say NO to copy-paste.
- 2) Don't use unnecessary or irrelevant descriptions.
- 3) Don't write a messageless novel.
- 4) Don't write lengthy chapters.
- 5) Don't beat around the bush: Take enough time to write.
- 6) Don't underestimate the power of tone: Keep tone consistent from start to finish.
- 7) Don't underestimate the power of title of the novel: Title of the novel must be apt & justifiable.
- 8) Don't use enigmatic sentences.
- 9) Don't pay attention to what other people say you should be writing.
- 10) Don't get bounded within time-constraints in the initial stage of writing.
- 11) Don't forget to consider the privacy of the content.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Writing is considered a skill. Being a great writer requires additional qualities. A skilled writer uses innate creativity to create great literature & writing a novel is a lengthy undertaking. For writing a novel, one requires novel ideas. But, good writing skills & planned strategy can make this task pretty much simple. So, this paper has thrown some light on the essential supporting structure or framework of a novel & some useful information regarding novel-writing. Novel is the best choice to convey the message with clarity & ease using suspense, drama, comedy etc. Being a book-lover is an amazing thing & having a passionate conversation with someone about a book is one of the greatest joys in life. So, a novel must meet the reader's expectations & requirements.

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