

How to Write a Novel

by John M. Wills

I had been writing professionally for several years when the urge to write my first novel finally became so strong that I could no longer ignore it. Until then I had shrugged it off, thinking that I was not prepared for such a daunting task. I had not had any formal instruction, nor really researched how to write a book. But the desire to finally organize the story rattling around in my head and create a finished product with it, finally won out.



Where to begin? I had no clue. I was spending a lot of time on the road with my job which gave me time to read. Being a logical thinker, I went to a bookstore to buy a “How-To” tome that would show me the footsteps that I would need to follow. Of course when I got there and looked at an entire section of books devoted specifically to “writing your first novel,” I was back at square one—too much information. I did some research on the internet. Have you ever Googled “how to write a book?” I found that there were hundreds

of titles that purported to explain the process. I finally decided on reading a sampling of a few internet summaries, and then purchased [The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Writing a Novel](#).

I poured over chapters explaining abstract ideas such as having the right temperament, creativity, plot engines and developments, characters and settings...I now was more confused than ever. I almost decided to postpone writing my novel until sometime later—except that I had already done that. I finally made a command decision: Just sit down and start writing!

And so that’s what I did. I had no outline, no written plot or characters, but what I did have was a story in mind that I believed people would enjoy reading, and more important, one that I was anxious to write. And so I began...writing...chapter after chapter. Learning as I went along—developing characters, multiple plots, tying and connecting people and places. It was a marvelous experience. I found myself getting so involved with my characters that they became real to me. I agonized over needing to kill one off, feeling guilty about it and trying to think of a way not to kill him. My wife thought that I was crazy, “John, it’s only a book. Get a grip!”

I continued with the process, getting deeper and deeper into wordsmithing like never before. When did I write? Just about every day, but it had to be something that contributed to the story, not just writing for the sake of writing. The time of day was really unimportant; I wrote when I had the time, be it day or night. I wrote at home, in airports and hotel rooms. I even wrote aboard cramped airplanes enroute to

jobs. It didn't matter the time or place. All that mattered was the story. When I was finished with the book I felt a sense of pride and accomplishment, but also sorrow—it was now over.

I discovered that my anxiety about writing my first novel was due in large measure to fretting about the mechanics. What's the process, how does one begin? Once I convinced myself that the best way to write anything is to simply start putting the words on paper, I was fine. And as the chapters increased in number, so also did my comfort level. When I approached writing as an enjoyable endeavor, rather than a task that needed to be done, the words flowed.

This memoir may or may not help anyone in their quest to write their own novel. And even though I have now completed one, and am hard at work on the second, I do not consider myself qualified to give advice on the subject. But here's what I do know... There are thousands of "How To" books written on this topic, and there are countless numbers of people that have written books. Did they all follow the same formula? I think not, and so I've decided that the best way to write a novel is to just start writing!