



STEPS TO SUCCESS



How to make your dream
novel a reality.

BETHANY HENRY

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How to make your dream novel a reality.



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Foreword

Steps to Success: How to Make Your Novel a Reality is designed to walk us through the process of writing a novel from beginning to end. The idea is that even a large project like writing a book is manageable when it's broken down into smaller pieces.

Steps to Success was first published as a series of blog posts before it was compiled and expanded upon in this book. As always, personal preferences and experiences differ. This guide is based in part on my own experiences as well as from authors I have worked with and/or learned from along the way.

Best of luck to you and your writing! And if you have a friend you think would benefit from this guide, please share it with them! It's always wonderful when we can be moving toward our goals and dreams together.

Acknowledgement

Special thanks to all the readers on my blog where this series first started. Keep reading, keep writing, and keep being awesome, my friends.

Step 1: Getting Started

So you've decided you want to write a book.

Congratulations! I'm excited for you! That declaration is the first step of a glorious and complicated (and gloriously complicated) journey.

So where do you begin?

Some people immediately grab some paper and throw words on a page. After all, if you're a writer you should be writing, right?

Well... yes and no.

Most people's first drafts fizzle out after the initial excitement fades and the story idea is no longer shiny and new. Characters fall apart. Plots aren't what they seemed to be. And suddenly we're left five chapters into our story wondering what happened.

Just writing isn't enough.

We don't want to set ourselves up to run out of steam half way.
We don't want our story to breakdown and collapse.

Instead we want to *set ourselves up for success*. We want to bend the odds in our favor. We want to get all our ducks in a row (or at least some of them!) so that we can be working toward a finished book instead of a disorganized jumble.

Instead of jumping into our story immediately we can help both ourselves and our story by taking some time to prepare well.

A little bit of planning can go a long way.

Writing a novel is doable. You don't need to be a creative arts major at a fancy school or a tweed wearing individual who only uses a typewriter. (Though for the record, I have nothing against tweed or typewriters.)

Please *please* just be yourself.

Because you can do this.

So let's break it down a bit. Where do we start? What needs to be accomplished before jumping in to start our first draft?

1. Decide To Write

Check this one off the list! If you're reading this now (and I'm assuming that you are...) chances are you've already decided you want to write a novel. This is the start of your great adventure!

2. Evaluate Your Goals For Writing

This is your chance to do a bit of soul searching because your **motivations for writing** will influence what your end goal will be.

For example: If you want to write in order to share stories with your children at bedtime, your end goal may be to compile some short stories and print them out for your family.

If you want to write in order to sell your work and financially support your family it may require a different approach.

There are dozens of reasons why you may decide to write and there aren't specific "right" answers you need to be coming up with. But it is worth taking at least a few moments and think about why you are seeking to start this project.

Great novels don't get written by accident. It's going to take work and time and a even more work. *So it's important to know why you are undertaking this project.*

You don't need to have your five year plan all settled at this

point or make any decisions regarding self published, traditional publishing etc etc. But it's worth it to take at least a few minutes to clarify your thoughts regarding the direction of the project you're starting.

3. Brainstorm

Now that we've given some thought to why we're writing it's time to think about *what* it is we're writing.

Maybe you already have an idea for your novel. Great!! *Write it down.*

Our minds are tricky and treacherous places filled with memory loss and confusion. Because of this, it's incredibly important to write ideas down as soon as possible and be careful in what notes you throw away. I hate it when I had a perfect idea that I can't remember the next day! Learn from my mistakes and don't let that happen to you

If you don't have a story idea already in place, that's totally fine! Now is the perfect time to think about what you may want to write about. What stories excite you? What questions do you want to explore in your writing? What characters or concepts are bouncing around in your mind?

You don't need to have everything figured and fleshed out at this point, just a basic idea is fine. A starting point basically to bring us to...

4. Freewrite

Take your shiny new story idea and write about it.

What do you like about it, what does it make you think of, what questions does it make you ask yourself? What characters are there? How do these characters change? What does the world look like? What could make things harder for your main character? What lessons do the characters need to learn? What are their motivations, their dreams, their struggles? What makes them imperfect? What makes the world interesting?

Take ten minutes, an hour, whatever time you have, and just write.

See what questions you can answer or what new questions you come up with. You don't need to have everything tidy and figured out at this stage. The point is to dig a bit deeper into your idea and see what direction the story may go in.

You may see certain themes cropping up or noticing ways characters or plot elements may work together.

Hurrah for you! You're creating fodder to strengthen your story and give it richer depths. Freewriting is a great way to find out what ideas we really resonate with and find interesting.

Note: If you find you're already bored with your idea after this exercise then you may want to either find a way to tweak your concepts a bit or you can always revisit the brainstorming step

and come up with something else you're more passionate about. Writing a story can be a decent time investment so we want to make sure it's a good fit.

5. Things You Like/Summary/Pitch

It's time to finish the starting stage of writing your story.

Take your scattered thoughts and themes from your freewriting and see about pulling them together to some sort of cohesive storyline.

- Who is/are the main character/s and what do they want?
- What/who keeps them from getting what they want?
- What world do they live in?
- What flaws do the characters have and how do they change over the course of the story?
- What antagonist/problem needs to be overcome at the conclusion of the story?

Ideally at this point you'll have the bare bones concept of where you want to go with your novel. (Though I promise you'll have time to change it later on as needed!)

See if you can summarize your rough story idea into a few sentences or a short paragraph. This can also be called a pitch or logline. This summary will guide you as you move forward and give you something to look back at to keep your story focused and cohesive.

A good pitch will introduce your main character, the problem of the story, and the story's stakes. For example, "A idealist waitress is forced to work with a cynical conman in order to save the city from terrorists."

Obviously that's a pretty simple story blurb but that's all we need for now- a simple starting point that can guide us as we move forward.

* * *

And there you have it folks! In a few steps you've examined your goals for writing and what you want to write! These may (and probably will) change a bit along the way but you have a solid start to build on.

Give yourself a high five and be proud! You're off to a fabulous start and looking great as you begin writing your book!

* * *

Check out the original post here: [Getting Started](#)

Step 2: Developing Content

Hopefully at this point you have a rough idea of what you want to write about.

(If you don't yet have a general idea of your story and characters, scoot back a chapter to Step 1.)

Keep those ideas in mind because we're going to dig a little deeper and transform them from vague concepts to solid content.

Developing content for our books is all about asking questions about its story elements and creating a solid foundation for our book to stand on. The 3 major story elements we'll start with are plot, character building, and worldbuilding.

Everyone has a different writing style, so this is by no means the only way to do things. Instead I'm just showing you one way that you can use or adapt as needed for your own personal use.

We're going to be flying through a few big concepts here so be prepared to cover a lot of ground. Never fear, there's more information and resources available [on my blog](#) and elsewhere

if you're looking for more guidance, but this should give you a place to start.

So hang on to your hats and dig out a pencil. It's time to fire up the creative thinking and problem solving side of your brain.

1. Plot

Plot simply refers to what happens in our story. It's the main events that occur during our book.

Why is this important to look at now? Because we want to make sure that something is actually happening in our story and that these events make sense. We want our story to be interesting and enjoyable for our readers. Having a good plot can help that happen.

A good place to start when developing plot is to look at our story ideas and see what problems need to be overcome. If we don't have any problems in our story, well, it doesn't sound much like a story, really.

Next we can look over and brainstorm the core elements of strong plot/story structure. We want to have at least a general concept of how this will look in our story.

By developing at least a basic idea of what our plot looks like now, we are ensuring that there will be meaningful action in our story (not just internal thoughts or unrelated events) and that this action will follow through to its conclusion with the climax

of the story.

Basically we're creating a roadmap for our story so we don't get too lost.

There are lots of various ways to look at plot but here are some of the basic pieces:

- Introduce characters, world, problems, and stakes
- Inciting incident, the problem meets the protagonist
- Main character is forced to act
- Learning more about problem/more problems occur
- Midpoint problem or turn, big crisis or discovery of what is going on
- Main character attempting to win
- Failure to win, raise in stakes
- Climax, hopefully a win, and conclusion

We don't need to have these *all* planned out in stone just yet. But having at least a working idea (they can be changed as needed!) of the inciting incident, midpoint, and climax is helpful to have a general idea of what we're writing toward.

Stay tuned: We'll look more at our plot when we outline (next chapter!) and when we revise (chapter 6).

2. Character Development

Think of the characters in your story, particularly the 2-6 main characters. This should definitely include the protagonist and antagonist; others optional characters who may show up are friends, love interests, mentors, sidekicks etc. (Less can be more here since this is the beginning of the brainstorming stages, feel free to leave out the side characters for now if you want.)

You don't need to literally draw your characters out on paper (Though kudos if you do! I love seeing writer's artwork so feel free to send some my way!) but we want to figure out a rough idea of who these characters are. You can take more time and figure out more details as you go along but there are a few important bits that we want to start with.

Motivation

This is the most important place to start.

- **What does this character want?** Do they want respect? Survival? Money? Freedom? What does success or this goal look like for them?
- **Why do they want what they want?** Two people could both want the same thing for different reasons after all.

These motivations will identify your character in a nutshell. *A character's motivation will drive the character's actions throughout the story.* (So yeah, it's kind of a big deal.)

And don't skimp on the bad guy/gal! **An antagonist should have just as strong a goal, purpose, and motives as the main character.**

Strengths

What is your character good at? Is she an expert archer? A doctor? A good listener?

We like characters who are good at something.

Again, the antagonist should be getting a lot of time here. No one is afraid of a weak villain so make them intimidating!

Weakness/Flaw

This is arguably more important than your characters' strengths.

The character's weaknesses can be used to make the story matter in significant ways. Is your protagonist prideful or lazy and can that cause trouble for them along the way?

Their weaknesses also make them human and relatable. And they give your characters room to grow and improve!

Which leads into the next area...

Character Arc/Change/Lessons Learned

People change in real life and our characters should too. A lot of time can be spent talking about character arcs, but the gist of it is that *characters aren't stagnant*.

Right now as we're starting out, looking at the character arc of the protagonist is the most important. Of course secondary characters and the antagonist should be dynamic as well but the main character will be driving the story here.

At the beginning of the story the protagonist has some sort of a problem. (This is what the story is about!) If they are able to solve the problem too easily the story is may be sort of boring. *If instead they are forced to change, if they must learn something new, overcome their past, or control their weaknesses, then the story is more dynamic and filled with meaning.*

Alright! At this point we should have at least a kernel of an idea of who our main contenders are in our story so let's move on to the next big component here:

3. Worldbuilding

Worldbuilding is designing, creating, researching, and setting up the backdrop and world of your story.

We don't need to sort out all these pieces today! But like we just did with our characters, it's helpful to have a starting point of

what our world will look like.

Think of the setting of your story as impactful as a character.

It will influence the characters and the plot and can add to the underlying themes and messages in your story.

As your story grows you can definitely revisit this and make changes as needed but it's helpful to have a starting point.

Figure out what is essential to your story. If you know your world needs to include water because you're writing about mermaids, that's a great place to start!

Other aspects of worldbuilding to think about include:

- technology
- climate
- economic culture/jobs
- religion
- people groups
- social classes

As you think about your setting, also think about where your characters fit in to this world. They should be immersed and influenced by culture.

If you have a few different ideas at this point, that's fine. Even if they're wildly different at least you have an idea of where you want your story to be taking place and you can revisit it as you go.

The important bit is to make sure your story isn't occurring in a vacuum of white space! As your story develops hopefully the world will too.

Note: Don't be afraid of looking things up (learning is great!) but be careful not to get captured in the researching blackholes as you worldbuild. It can be tempting to look everything up about the 1920s as you consider using that as a backdrop for your novel but I'd encourage you to limit this until you have gotten a bit further with your novel. Maybe make notes to yourself *research this later* and then move on. This will allow your story to actually get finished and by the time you get to researching you'll have a better idea of what you actually need to know.

* * *

How is it going so far? Do you feel like everything is coming together?

One of my favorite ways to collect ideas for developing characters and settings for my stories is to create secret boards on pinterest for them so I can collect images and research topics. I'm a visual learner so it's great to be able to look at the pictures and get an idea for my story. (Feel free to check out my non-secret [story scrap](#) board for inspiration if you're a pinterest fan!)

Maybe you want to keep a running list or document where you can collect ideas you like. Whatever works for you! Just start playing with concepts and characteristics and see what fits together well and what gets you excited.

After all, it's important to be having fun here. If we aren't excited about our story what's the point?

* * *

Check out the original post here: [Developing Content](#)

Step 3: Creating an Outline

Today we're talking about outlining and I can already hear the protests:

"Do I really need to outline?"

"Outlining is something I did in 5th grade assignments- aren't I past that by now?"

"It feels like homework/busywork."

"I know plenty of writers who don't outline."

I hear you.

And... you're correct! There *are* successful writers who don't outline.

We don't need an outline in order to write. **But most of us need an outline if we want to write quickly and well.**

For many of us with limits on our time, quickly and well is our favorite combo.

Basically an outline is a plan for your writing.

An outline can take many forms and I'm not here to be legalistic about it or insist your outline needs numbered bullets or a

certain wordcount. It could be three sentences written on an old napkin or it could be a color coded excel spreadsheet. It can take whatever form you like!

Benjamin Franklin is credited with saying, “If we fail to plan, we plan to fail.” In almost every area of life, plans are important if we want to [achieve our goals](#).

Having a plan/outline enables us to both write faster in our first drafts (since we already know where we are going) and faster in our revisions (since our work is coherent enough to be revised instead of needing to be completely scrapped or reworked).

Today we’ll explore 4 different types of outlines as well as a few key items we want to think about to ensure we’re setting our drafts up to be the best they can be.

Ready? Let’s go.

The Basics

At its core, every story should have 4 basic points:

1. A character with a problem
2. The character trying to solve the problem and failing
3. Things getting worse
4. Character using what they’ve learned/accomplished in order to overcome problem

Does that sound about right to you? Obviously there’s a lot of

wiggle room here for each story to be its own thing but these core items give a story its solid shape and framework.

If you're skimming through here and not so into outlining (Hi pantsers! I'm glad you're here!) I'd suggest you at least take note of this basic outline and see how it fits in with your writing. After all, it's only 4 points so it can't be all that scary.

Besides these basic story points, a few other items to be keeping in mind as we outline are:

- Our character arcs/development
- Setting of story
- Story themes

Structuring Our Story: 4 Ways to Outline

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it covers 4 popular ways to outline the [structure of your story](#). I frequently mix and match elements of different strategies at different times depending on what I'm working on. Find what works for you and use it!

1. The Scene List

This is pretty much what it sounds like. Events and scenes are listed out in chronological form providing a straightforward timeline of the story for the writer to then follow. This can often

be combined with other outlining strategies (such as those listed below) and leaves plenty of flexibility regarding how much detail and planning you want to go into per scene.

I've done this at times with various colors of sticky notes along with pictures... it doesn't *need* to be boring!

Pros: Straightforward, simple, and somewhat reminiscent of grade school.

2. The Three Act Structure

The three act structure is a popular storytelling technique that can be adapted to help structure most novels. It breaks the story into (you guessed it) three acts which not only makes the writing less overwhelming than dealing with a whole draft at once, but it also gives us a good idea of what should be happening at which point in the story.

- Act 1- Set up of story, establish character and setting, introduce problem and why it matters
- Act 2- Character is trying different things to solve the problem, things are getting worse
- Act 3- Final confrontation/climax, problem solved, resolution of story

There's a lot more info on this concept elsewhere, but this is the

general idea. To use this as an outline structure we can enter our story elements into the different acts.

Pro: Breaks story into smaller pieces to handle and provides framework for pacing of action.

3. Working Backwards

Yup, in this one we actually start at the end of the story and work ourselves back to the beginning. This is especially helpful for mysteries or if you have a complicated climax. Essentially the outline can look like either of the outlines above, you just start at the end to ensure all the bits and pieces you are envisioning will be accounted for.

Pro: Helpful for complicated endings or if you're one of the people who likes to know the ending first.

4. Hero's Journey

The hero's journey is a story structure that was recognized and written about by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell illustrated that a common character arc can be followed through many stories:

- Character starts in the ordinary world
- Character receives a call to adventure- there is a problem or challenge to overcome (They may attempt to refuse the call to adventure)
- Character has help or a mentor

- Character leaves ordinary world and encounters tests, allies, and enemies
- Character encounters setbacks and must try new ideas
- Character faces huge struggle
- Character overcomes struggle and is “reborn”
- Character returns home and must use what they have learned

This structure focuses on the main character’s personal arc which can be useful especially for stories with only one protagonist. By fitting our story concepts into the hero’s journey we can have a good picture of how our plot and our character development work together.

Pro: Good development of character arc.

Remember the Villain

Something to pay attention to when planning a novel is what the bad guy is up to. Ever read a book where the villain was kinda lame? I’m totally guilty of focusing on my hero and neglecting my villain. Yet the best stories I read are the ones in which the bad guy is good... and by good I mean really **really** bad

Just taking some time now to brainstorm your bad guys motivations will go a long way in helping them develop into a complex character.

Plot Hole Finder

This is one of the biggest reasons why outlining is so important, it is an excellent way of finding where our story is missing important pieces. How else would you know that you have a big plot problem? I'd much rather find out my problems *before* writing a 80k word draft so that I can brainstorm what to do about it instead of needing to rewrite everything.

We want to look at things like: plot logistics/coherence, character arcs and motivation, theme, setting, tension levels, consistent POV, and of course our villain.

We'll probably find areas that need some work (I know I always do!) so we can either add to our outline or just jot down things we'll know we need to keep in mind address later.

Either way we're on our way to a story that will ultimately be stronger and better than before and that, my friends, is a win!

* * *

After all that, how's your story looking so far? An outline doesn't need to be perfect but it will be a place to start from and to work with! Once we have a basic outline for our story written we can look at it to see what might need some work.

That's what's so great about outlines- we can keep adding to them and making changes as we flesh out our story concept.

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*Check out the original post here: **Creating an Outline***

Step 4: The First Draft

There's something so exciting about writing a first draft. There are new things being created, new words being put down on the page, new character developments and ideas.

In short, everything is new.

That's not to say the first draft isn't without its own set of problems and trials!

A huge amount of first drafts get abandoned before being finished. We run out of ideas, we get discouraged and decide we hate our story after all, we get busy and forget about it, or we just plain burn out.

Today we're looking at ways we can set ourselves up well to write (and *complete*) our first drafts.

After moving through Steps 1-3, we should have a decent concept of what story we want to write along with a rough outline. Feel free to revisit or linger on any of these steps as needed. There is no "right" way to do this and everyone's process will look a bit different.

However, we don't want to linger in the planning stages forever.

It can be all too tempting to brainstorm, plan, and worldbuild instead of actually writing. I'm totally guilty of this at times! But at some point we need to make the jump and say, "let's do this." Often the best time to start is actually *before* we feel "ready."

It's not going to be perfect. It won't be pretty. But it will get done.

As Jodi Picoult said, "You can always edit a bad page. You can't edit a blank page."

You with me? That's what the first draft is all about. So let's get started.

Review Our Story Summary

To start with, let's dig out that story summary you created in Chapter 1. We're looking for a few sentences that convey what you want your story to be about: the main characters, the major plot idea, and hopefully a bit of the story's theme or character arcs.

If you want to expand on this a bit further that is totally fine too, just find what balance of planning that feels good for you. You should also look over your story's outline. You want a solid overview of the story you are telling.

This is the starting point for your story and what you'll use to guide your first draft.

Make A Plan

Plans are important for getting things done. If we want to make progress with our writing, we need some sort of plan in mind.

Clarify Goals

- **Why are you writing?** What story do you want to tell? It's important to know what we want so we can know where we're going. It can be all too easy to be distracted and lose sight of what it is we are writing, especially in the middle of the process. Goals are important to combat the rabbit trails and the shiny new ideas that come out of nowhere.
- **How long of a story do you want to write?** This will be influenced by genre and audience. It's important to have a rough target to shoot for so you can know if the story needs to be expanded or cut down.
- **When do you want to finish your first draft?** Having a deadline (even a self made one!) is GREAT for keeping us on track with our writing.

For more information on the value and practice of setting goals, check these posts on [Setting SMART Goals](#) and [Goals and Grace](#).

Make a Writing Plan

- When in your day are you going to actually write? Where are you going to write?

It's hard for me to commit to a writing time: my writing desk consists of a milk crate to store my papers, my kids like to take my pens, and free time is pretty (extremely) rare. But *if we look for time we can find it*. If writing is a priority then we can do it, it just may take some planning and work. **So take a few minutes and plan it out if you need to.** It's not a rule that your writing needs to happen at the same time every day, but having a place to start is helpful.

- A basic writing plan for a first draft can be determined by deciding how long your project is, when you want it completed by, and then dividing up the work between the days available to write. For instance, Nanowrimo is famous for having people write a 50,000 word first draft in 30 days, which means the goal is to write 1,667 words each day. You can also set up the goal to measure time spent instead of wordcount, plan to write 5 days a week instead of 7, and make other adjustments, of course. This goal is for YOU!

Commit To Self Care

- Taking care of yourself is important! Writing is hard work and sometimes it's easy to get stressed out or so caught up in our projects that we forget important things. Like, you know...eating and sleeping
- So let's keep that in mind as we prepare to start our first

drafts! Before we dive in it's great to have planned breaks and rewards for ourselves in place. These can keep us sane, healthy, and motivated. Maybe we take a break after every half hour or every thousand words written. Maybe we make sure we go to bed by midnight or take a shower every morning. What does your [self care](#) look like?

- Personal example: I like to reward myself with a fresh cup of tea after a half hour or so during my writing time. This gives me a chance to stretch my legs and it keeps me from craving too much junk food. I also frequently tell myself I can't read any fiction books for fun until I've met my daily writing goal. This makes reading a treat and keeps me from getting too distracted before getting my work done.

So what's your writing plan? When and where are you going to write? What do you want to accomplish each day/week/by the end of the month? How are you going to take care of yourself in the process?

Gather Support

While many people envision writing to be a solitary endeavor, it is actually crucial to have some sort of support system of other people in place. (Even for introverts like me!)

Having a support system can provide us with both accountability so that we don't give up on our writing when it gets hard, and also ongoing encouragement.

This encouragement can come in the forms. We can get support

from writing groups, classes, or teachers, but it can also be as informal as a friend or family member who we share our plans with and who will ask us about them. So far as online encouragement goes, I've met some great folks through [Habitica](#) which is an online platform where people work on their goals together. [Nanowrimo](#) also has some awesome forums.

There are wonderful people out there who will encourage you along the way! Telling people about our writing takes guts because we're putting ourselves out there but the rewards are so worth it. Even just having one or two supportive people aware of our writing project can help. Don't ever feel like you need to go at it alone.

Have Grace For Yourself

Before we start on our first drafts it's important to [remember grace](#).

It's great to have big goals and be working hard but it's also important that we remember to be patient and kind with ourselves. This is probably the most important aspect of self care. Because sometimes life gets crazy or your writing doesn't go as planned. And that's okay.

There is nothing wrong with taking a break or reevaluating how things are going.

Let's be kind to ourselves, positive in our self talk, and unafraid

of failure. We're embarking on a wild and difficult project. Let's acknowledge that and give ourselves praise for what we are doing instead of criticism for where we fall short.

The first draft is not a place for criticism.

So let's celebrate every day where we write and give ourselves kudos for every small victory!

Take Off Our Editor Hat

All words are good words and all progress good progress at this point.

We are accepting that our first drafts will not be perfect and that's okay. Once we finish our draft we can revise, finagle, and edit to make our masterpiece shine, but first we need to get it on paper. Finishing our draft is the goal!

So don't go back and read things if you don't have to, and for goodness sake don't delete anything. If you think of things that need to be changed, make a note to look at it later. You can cut things and revise once the draft is done. For now, it's time to write!

Have Fun!!!!

Outlines in hand, plans in place, it's time to begin a rush of words and the creation of our first drafts! A story is about to be created! Let's not be intimidated, but instead be excited about the places our pages will take us!

I'm excited for us. <3

* * *

Check out the original post here: [The First Draft](#)

Step 5: Rest

So you've finished the first draft of your story- Congratulations!!

That is a very big deal. No matter what shape your story is in, I'm so proud of you! Getting those words down on a page and creating the start of your story is a huge accomplishment.

Are you feeling excited? Proud? A bit exhausted and possibly delirious?

Finishing drafts is always a bit bittersweet for me- I feel successful and relieved to have completed my project but it's usually mixed with fear of what comes next and some anxiety that what I've written won't be good enough.

Let's not get bogged down by this fear and anxiety.

Whether our draft is great or lousy, full length or barely there, dynamic, flat, or completely scattered- *we completed our draft!* And that's a win, my friends.

So now that we've finished our first draft... what's next?

- First of all we should double check (triple check?) that we've saved our writing in a safe place. Maybe this goes without saying... but I'll say it anyway because it's an important habit to have.
- We should CELEBRATE!!! And maybe (definitely) brag a bit because we did it! We finished our draft! And that's awesome.

The next step in our writing journey is to stop and rest.

Yup, that's right: REST.

You may be all fired up and excited about your writing and want to just keep going forward but trust me on this. There are several reason why taking breaks from our writing is important and how it can ultimately help our writing (and our sanity).

Why is rest so important?

1. We need to rest so that we don't burn out.

We need to look after and love ourselves. Focusing on our writing and getting things done can be great! But if our self care is being pushed aside then it's not sustainable for long periods of time. If we want to be writers then we need to be finding ways to incorporate writing throughout our lives in a healthy way. Balance is key.

Taking some time regularly amidst our writing can give us important pauses to evaluate our own health and sanity. We don't want to be neglecting ourselves or other things important to us. That's why pausing to rest after our first draft is such a big deal.

A few questions to ask ourselves are:

- Are we getting enough sleep? It seems so simple but if you're anything like me, this one is really hard.
- Are we eating healthy and drinking water? At least a little bit?
- Are we having any "relax" time to journal, listen to music, read a book, take a walk, unwind etc?
- Are we getting time with family and friends?

This is a pretty basic self care checklist but everyone should [have their own things to check in on to see how they're doing](#).

2. We need to let our story sit alone for a while

Besides needing to rest in order to care for ourselves, we also need to rest in order to care for our stories. It may seem like a good idea to just charge forward and get the story finished as quickly as possible. Ironically, for many writers taking a break can actually help finish a story faster overall.

This is because taking a break helps us gain perspective and distance from our stories.

Ever see someone making an emotional mistake and think,

“They’re too close to the situation to see clearly?” *This is us with our writing.* We’ve built our world, created our characters, and spent all this time immersed in our story.

We can’t see clearly.

By taking some time away from our draft, even if it’s only a few days, we can regain some distance from our story which can help us see it in new ways. This enables us to see plot holes we’d overlooked, see new ways for characters to interact, and discover whether or not anything we wrote actually makes any sense. *crosses fingers*

It’s important that we are able to look at our own writing critically and evaluate it to see if it’s saying what we want it to say. We’ll be moving into doing revisions on our draft next (stay tuned!) but until we’ve stepped away from our writing for a time it is hard to have any sort of clarity in this.

Note: If you keep finding yourself thinking about your draft even after you’ve set it aside, maybe try jotting down these ideas on a separate sheet of paper and tucking it away. That way you don’t forget your brilliant new ideas but you’re still keeping the draft on hold until later.

What does rest look like?

Rest is easier said than done sometimes. I have a hard time giving myself permission to stop working (it sounds crazy I know) and so it’s extremely helpful to look at what rest is and

what it is not.

- Taking a break does not mean we're quitting. Instead we are investing in ourselves being intentional in making a [plan to return to our writing](#).
- Taking a break does not mean we're becoming stagnant and lazy. Instead this can be a great time for us to use our time wisely and [practice self care](#).

There is no set formula for rest.

- There is no magic number of days to set aside your draft. I've heard many writers recommend at least two weeks. I usually take a month or more depending on what else I'm working on during that time.
- We can still be writing. Maybe we want to look at a new project or dig out an old one. While we don't want to be looking over the draft we just finished, other tasks are fair game. (But not required.)
- There is no set tasks for self care to practice because everyone is different. While it is rejuvenating and restorative for me to drink tea, talk with close friends, and play ultimate frisbee (though not usually all at the same time), I bet you have your own, different things that make you feel like your best self. What makes you smile and feel alive? *Those are your self care practices. Make sure they are happening in your life.*

This time of rest can be such a wonderful time of experimenting with new writing ideas or picking up old ones. Often this is a great time to dig into a separate project you may be working on

or to brainstorm what to write next.

As a compulsive planner (and speaking with the experience of a lifetime procrastinator) **I'd highly recommend having a set date to return to your story.** This return date can be changed as needed (no worries) but having a plan in place to return to our writing is important to keep from letting life's busyness take over and push our writing aside.

So let's set aside our first draft, pencil in our return date, and sit back and relax. Rest is important and you've earned it.

* * *

Check out the original post here: [Rest](#)

Step 6: Revisions

Revising our writing can get a bad rap sometimes. After all, revisions are a lot of work! They can be confusing, hard, and none of us like to hear our work isn't wonderful just the way it is. It would be nice if we could all write perfect stories the first time around.

Unfortunately that's not really how it works. As Hemingway said, "The only kind of writing is rewriting."

Clearly this whole rewriting thing is kinda important! It's a vital part of the writing process.

While sometimes we have this idea that "writing" is all about the first time we put words on a page, instead the majority of the work happens later on through revisions.

Revisions are where we cut out the boring scenes, describe the vague bits, and tie everything together. This process is crucial for honing our work and bringing it from good to great. (Or even from terrible to great if your first drafts look anything like mine.)

This isn't always an easy process! Sometimes I'm overwhelmed by revisions because I don't even know where to start. Thankfully we're not alone as we figure this all out.

Revisions don't need to be scary.

After all, we've already come up with a concept for our story, we know what we want to say, and we've already put a draft down on paper. We have lots of material to work with!

We don't need to be intimidated by the vague idea we need to "make it better" without any concept of how to actually *do* that. Instead, we can tackle our revisions just like we tackled writing our first draft: we can look our work over, break it into manageable pieces, make a plan, and figure out where we want to start.

Revising is just another part of writing, there doesn't need to be anything scary or mysterious about it.

Hopefully you're entering these revisions after some time away from your draft (see Step 5) and are all excited to be working with your story again. So let's just start right in. As always, everyone's personal writing process will be different but this should give us a foundation to build on.

7 Basic Steps Of Revising

1. *Reread our story*

To start with we need to jump back into our story. Some people like to take notes while they read, others will read the whole draft and jot down their thoughts at the end. Whichever process works best for you is fine, we just want to make sure we are *writing down our thoughts and questions*. A lot of things will probably jump out at us both good and bad. We want to take full advantage of this read through and take note of both what we like and what we don't like about our story.

2. *Remind ourselves of our goals*

We need to take a moment to remember why we started our project (Step 1) and what we want this story to be about. Rereading our draft can be fun but also possibly a bit confusing. It's good to take time to center ourselves and remember what our original goals are.

3. *Compare the story idea we started with to the story we have*

Rarely does the story we write match up perfectly with the story we'd envisioned writing. And that's okay! What we want to do is compare the draft we've written with our original story concepts from Steps 1-3.

Does the draft do a good job of embodying our concepts or did new themes and plots emerge? Again, it's not a bad thing if our writing ended up going in a different direction than we initially imagined. Sometimes our best ideas come to us while we're

writing and sometimes we can't tell whether or not an idea is a good one until we have it on paper. This is a time to evaluate what we actually wrote.

4. Decide on a direction

Once we've evaluated our draft we should have a decent idea of whether it matches up to what we planned on writing. If it matches up well and you like what you've got, that's awesome! Keep up the great work.

However, if our draft doesn't look like how we originally envisioned it then we need to figure out where to go next. Maybe we want to stick with our original story concepts or maybe not. Often there are multiple good stories possible within a draft depending on how it's revised. We could revise our story to center more on a character's backstory and development or we could scrap the backstory and add more explosions to keep the plot moving.

Sometimes there isn't a right or wrong direction to take a story in.

Different genres, audiences, and story themes will all influence what a story looks like. What matters is that we choose the story that we want to tell.

Questions to ask ourselves at this point are:

- Does my core story match up with my writing goals?
- Do I like my story?

- What do I like or dislike about my story?
- Do I still like my original writing/story goals?

Again there are not always “right” or “wrong” answers here. You’re deciding whether you want to revise your draft to remain true to your original ideas or if those concepts should be changed. This may be a simple decision or it could take some time. Take that time and make sure you feel comfortable with the feel of your story and the direction you want to take it in.

5. Evaluate what needs to be changed

Now that you’ve confirmed which direction you want to take the story in it’s time to identify what parts of the story need to be changed to make it more like the story you want. There are several issues we want to make sure we are evaluating to make sure they are solid.

You may have already made note of these things during your read through but things to double check are:

- Plot structure: Look for plot holes, moments that feel contrived or fake, boring sections, or anything that just doesn’t quite make sense.
- Character depth: Evaluate character’s motivations, continuity, likability, and distinctness.
- Setting: Check to make sure your setting is descriptive and has depth but that it isn’t overly confusing, wordy, or boring.
- Wordcount: Keep in mind whether you’re at a good length for your audience/genre or if you should be looking to either cut it down or need to add to the story.

Note: Don't worry about fixing these issues yet! That will come soon, for now just identify issues you think need changing. As we revise our story it will be helpful to have a list of items to change, research, fix, or think about further.

6. *Brainstorm changes*

Now it's time to take our list of things to change and figure out how to fix them. Plot holes? Characters don't make sense? We're not sure if the setting is even there or if the entire story takes place in a bubble? It's time to put on our thinking caps and dream up some solutions.

We're still not fixing the problems in our story quite yet (though go ahead and fix those typos you found if they're driving you crazy).

At this point we're simply brainstorming how to change the things we want to change.

Remember, we don't want to shy away from making changes just because it will be hard! [Sometimes writing is hard](#) but we've made it this far and we're not giving up now.

A good question to ask is, *will our story be stronger by making this change?* If the answer is yes then we should probably suck it up and do the work to make the change.

Note: In a way this brainstorming stage is a lot like coming up with the original idea for our story in the first place and it can

be quite fun! Now's our chance to add in that cool plot twist you thought of, research the obscure eating habits of ancient civilizations, or finally figure out your favorite character's backstory.

We should be using this time to move through each item on our list from earlier and sort out what needs to be changed to make our story stronger. Once we've figured out what needs to be changed in our story we'll be well on our way to making those changes happen!

7. Make a revision plan

Maybe you don't get as excited about making plans as I do, and really that's okay.

The main idea here is that we want to break up our list of changes into manageable pieces and figure out where we want to start.

Some ways of doing this are:

- Break up our list of changes by chapter and go through them one by one
- Do multiple revisions of our draft, each time tacking a different issue such as character, plot, etc
- Make a list of changes and then just do them in whichever order you want

We will all have different styles of revising and that's great! However we go about making these changes, the important thing is that we're moving forward and bringing our story closer

to being the best it can be.

Along with giving us a starting point, *our revision plan should also include some sort of a timeline that we want to follow*, ie: finish revising one chapter per week or work on revisions half an hour per day. (This is how we **keep our goal measurable and time-bound**.) It can be tempting to putter along on our revisions and fiddle with each comma and witty dialog exchange for days. However, it's it's important to keep our story moving forward! We can always go back and spend some more time on our witty dialog later

* * *

The next step is to get started!

Feeling ready to look over your draft and figure out what comes next? Excited to get started on some revisions?

Sometimes once we get moving we find that the revisions aren't nearly as much work as we thought they would be. Some writers even say that revising is their favorite part of writing. There can be a lot of fun and excitement especially in the brainstorming and rewriting process as we make our writing into something better than ever before.

Regardless, let's not let fear of revisions win the day.

After all, we're writers! We created these stories out of nothing. We can brainstorm plot solutions and entire new worlds as needed.

STEP 6: REVISIONS

And then once we break our revisions down into steps it's just a matter of putting in the work.

Revisions, here we come! We've got this.

* * *

Check out the original post here: [Revising Our Writing](#)

Step 7: Getting Feedback

Beta reading is the process of having other people look at our work and give critical feedback.

I know, I know. I hate asking for help too. And who likes receiving criticism?

Unfortunately, the solitary writer who classily churns out novel after novel on their vintage typewriter completely on their own isn't a [practical model to live by](#). Getting support and feedback from others is necessary for our writing to reach its full potential.

Today we're looking at why beta reading is important and how to use it effectively.

First of all, do we really need beta readers for our work?

It can be scary to let other people look at our writing. (What if they laugh at us??)

It can be a lot of work finding people who are willing and able to

take the time and effort to give us feedback. Then we have to be patient and *wait* for the readers to give us their comments. And lastly, figuring out what to do with beta reader feedback can be confusing, require hard work, and be downright demoralizing.

However, there are several reasons why we need other people to look at our writing.

The main reason we need beta readers is because we simply can't see our own work very clearly.

Essentially we're far too close to the subject to see what works or doesn't work in our story.

Taking a break and [setting our story aside for a bit](#) can give us some of this perspective. But having a few other people looking at our work can be incredibly valuable to get a fresh look and input into our work.

Beta readers can point out plot errors and missing pieces in our story that we won't notice.

Beta readers can give good advice on how to strengthen our stories and our writing, potentially pointing us in directions we may not have thought of.

Beta readers are our first test readers: they can tell us if our story is enjoyable, which parts are funny, and which parts are boring.

Having beta readers and getting feedback will make our projects better and will make us better writers in the long

run.

So we've decided getting feedback is important, but how do we go about this?

Should we just send our chaotic and rambling first draft notes to everyone on our facebook friend list asking for comments? (Hint: Please don't.)

Deciding when and how to ask for reviews of our writing is important to ensure the feedback we receive will be helpful.

Are We Ready For Feedback?

In order to make the best use of the people who are giving us their critiques on our work, it helps to have our writing at least somewhat put together.

Now don't freak out. Our writing doesn't need to be perfect. After all, the reason we're getting feedback is because we know we need to improve our work.

However, if our project is filled with obvious mistakes, plot holes, head hopping, and typos, then our beta readers will end up spending all their time telling us about issues we could have fixed ourselves. The feedback doesn't have a chance to be helpful because our writing wasn't ready for it. This can be frustrating for everyone involved.

Instead, we should try to have our drafts in a place where we feel

pretty good about them before giving them to our readers.

This way our readers can provide additional insights on our writing and not just end up telling us the 10 major issues that we already know about. Yes, this is more work for us in the short run since we need to look for and fix issues before giving it to our readers. But in the long run it will lead to the beta feedback being more effective and our writing being stronger.

What Kind Of Feedback Are We Looking For?

Some people like to receive early feedback to make sure their first thoughts and outlines are making sense.

Others like to hold off until their draft is as polished as they can possibly make it.

There isn't a "right" way to go about this really. Like with everything, we all have different writing styles and things that work for us. Our personal writing styles and preferences will influence when we ask for feedback and what questions we ask our readers to consider.

It's worth taking a minute to think about our own writing style and figure out when getting some feedback would be the most beneficial.

If we want our beta readers to give us major plot help then having them look at an early version of our story makes sense. However, if we wait until our story is more developed and polished, then

our readers can potentially provide more detailed comments about character development, themes, or subplots that could be improved. Either (or both!) can be helpful.

So to review, before we ask for feedback we want to:

- Fix any issues that we already know about
- Have an idea of what type of feedback we're looking for

This will help us to be prepared to use our beta feedback effectively.

How To Ask For Feedback

A first step to asking for feedback is to identify who may be available, qualified, and willing to read our work.

A good beta reader will be willing to read our work, provide helpful comments, and to return it in a timely manner.

It can be helpful to have multiple people giving us feedback since they can offer us different perspectives. I usually try to have between 3-6 readers of my drafts. This gives me enough feedback to be helpful but not so much that it is overwhelming. It also gives me a bit of leeway if one of my readers gets busy or can't follow through with giving me feedback for some reason.

Finding Readers

Friends and family members

This is often the easiest way to go about recruiting some beta readers.

Pro: Friends and family are often happy to help and support us.

Con: Since friends and family love us and want to support us, they may have a hard time giving criticism on our work. It's nice to hear our work is perfect but we should take this feedback with a grain of salt.

Co-workers, acquaintances, friends of friends

Especially if they are interested in reading or writing themselves, even distant acquaintances, co-workers, or friends of friends may be happy to look at our work for us.

Pro: These individuals may be more willing to give honest/critical feedback and they may be able to offer a different perspective than someone in our close circles. If our beta readers have writing experience themselves they may also be more observant regarding story issues to fix.

Con: If these are people we don't know well it may take more work to identify and approach those who may be willing to help.

Writing groups and forums

Whether in person or online, writing groups are a great place to find other writers who are willing to provide beta feedback.

Pro: Other writers can often provide detailed and helpful feedback

on our work.

Con: When meeting and sharing information with new people, especially online, it is important to be cautious and aware of safety/privacy concerns.

Asking For Feedback

Once we've identified a few beta readers to give our work to, it's finally time to ask for feedback. To do this we want to do a few things:

- 1. Ask our perspective readers if they're willing to give feedback.*

It's scary to actually put ourselves out there and start this conversation sometimes but people are usually honored to be asked even if they aren't able to help.

- 2. Give them a copy of our writing.*

Whether it's a hard copy or a shared file, we should find what's best for our readers and get them a copy of our work.

- 3. Tell them what kind of feedback we want.*

Do we want our readers' overall impressions or do we have specific questions or areas we know we need advice with? Good areas to focus on are plot, character, setting, and theme.

4. Encourage our readers to be honest.

Honest feedback is what is most helpful so we need to ask our readers to be candid with their comments and assure them that we are able to handle criticism. (And then we need to follow through with that promise and accept it graciously.)

5. Agree on a deadline.

Even if we don't have a publishing contract or firm deadline for our project, setting some sort of a deadline for feedback can help keep the project moving in a timely manner and it can help prevent miscommunications with our readers.

6. Thank them in advance!

Good beta readers are pure gold so we want to make sure to be properly appreciative!

7. Let It Go

Once we've handed off our work to our readers it's time to take a deep breath and give ourselves a pat on the back. We've done good work! This is a great time to pause and rest.

Receiving Beta Feedback

Once we start to receive comments back from our readers we want to keep 3 things in mind:

1. The most important thing is to not take comments personally.

This can't be emphasized enough.

We asked for honest feedback and that's hopefully what we've received. While it can be hard to see a list of things people didn't like or understand about our project, this feedback is to make our story stronger.

It's about our story, not about us.

If we're feeling discouraged after receiving feedback it can be good to remember that people are giving us feedback because they believe in us and that we can make our story stronger.

In order to make good use of the feedback from our readers we need to be able to take a step back from our writing and evaluate it as objectively as possible.

So hang in there! [I still think you're awesome.](#)

2. We need to make some sort of a plan.

A little bit of organization when looking at feedback can go a long way to keep us from feeling overwhelmed by comments and the potential work to be done next.

This could look similar to our [revision process after the first draft](#). With feedback we'll need to evaluate the issues raised, decide whether we agree with our readers, and then brainstorm

solutions.

Some comments received will be typos and small issues that are easy to fix. These can be handled in a straightforward manner. Bigger issues or changes we may not understand will take some more time and attention.

Basically it's important to have some method to going through the feedback we've received so that it doesn't bog us down.

3. Remember that we're the author.

Sometimes there's conflicting comments from readers or opinions that just don't like up with the way we want to tell the story. After receiving feedback we'll need to make decisions on how best to tell our story.

Feedback is great and we want to use it to strengthen our writing, yet everyone has different opinions and styles.

The decisions on what to change, keep, or improve in our story may be hard but we can make them. We are the only one who *can* make them because at the end of the day, these are our stories. Go us!

* * *

Working with beta readers can be exhausting and stressful. Essentially we're asking people to critique us in order to make more work for ourselves, which sounds a bit crazy. Yet all the work is worth it! Working with beta readers will make our writing better and that's what we're here for.

So let's not be afraid to put ourselves out there! The more we practice getting and utilizing feedback the better we'll get. And our writing will flourish as a result.

* * *

Check out the original post here: [Beta Reading](#)

Step 8: Editing

Ever stop reading something because of a spelling mistake? Find yourself twitching when someone misuses their/they're/there? Shake your head over a typo?

This is why editing is important.

The Importance of Editing

Whether we plan to submit our work to an agent, self-publish, or take our work down a different path: editing is vital. Mistakes will mark us as an amateur and cause our work to be disregarded.

Besides, we owe it to our work to make it the best we can! We've made it this far- now it's time to bring our stories as close to perfection as possible.

To start off: revisions and editing are not the same thing.

- Revising our novel (Step 6) is when we are clarifying and correcting the content of our writing. This includes developing our theme, strengthening our characters, and fixing our plot.
- **Editing is focused on correcting any errors in the writing itself. This includes spelling, grammar, typos, punctuation, and awkward or confusing sentences.**

Because revisions deal with the content of our story itself it makes sense to complete these changes first before doing major editing. After all, we don't want to fix every comma just to change the story around again.

But how do we know if our story is ready for editing?

Ideally, we've gotten some feedback on our work already (Step 7) and have completed at least one round of revisions to address any possible issues that arose. There isn't a magic number of revisions to complete before we're ready to call it done and move on to editing.

Basically we want to finish making any changes we've identified as issues in our story. We want it as strong as we can make it.

The thing is, *we may never be ready to let our story go*. Moving forward can be hard. I mean, I could probably keep making nit-picky changes and revisions forever. Saying it's "done" just seems so *final*.

Once we've gone through our story revisions and made the changes we wanted to make, it's time to let things go and move on to editing. This is where we'll stop changing the story itself and instead work on proofreading to correct any mistakes with spelling, grammar, typos, etc.

3 Strategies For Editing Our Stories

As we move past revisions and into our edits, here are a few strategies that can help us make our stories shine.

1- Find Books and Resources To Guide Us

Reading books is almost always my go-to for learning things. After all, other people have certainly struggled with what I'm working on so why not learn from them?

Here is a book on self-editing that I have found useful. You can always check out my [resources page](#) on my blog as well for more. These are affiliate links which means I may receive a small commission, but if that makes you feel weird you can just search for the books in google.

[Self-Editing For Fiction Writers: How To Edit Yourself Into Print](#)
by Renni Browne and Dave King

2- Get Connected With Others

Besides reading books, another strategy is to ask for help with our editing.

We've talked earlier about the importance of having beta readers who will look at our work and provide critical feedback. Hopefully we've been able to get some story feedback and advice to guide our revisions.

Having beta readers are also super helpful when it comes to editing our novel. If you know any readers who are great detail catchers and spell checkers, they can be prime candidates for helping with story edits. If they're willing to take time to look over our work, they'll be able to recognize mistakes we've missed.

Being connected with people who support our writing can also help us to keep going and to not get discouraged!

3- Self Editing

Along with reading books and working with beta readers, at some point we need to just sit down and do some serious editing ourselves. We want to make our work outstanding!

Yet sometimes it can be hard to focus on our writing in order to identify and fix mistakes. We get bored. We're tired. The words are familiar to us and so sometimes we don't even look at them.

Or maybe we get distracted and caught up in our story.

Here are some tips to help us see our own work clearly as we edit:

- Print out and read a paper copy
- Mark any errors that we find
- Read chapters out of order
- Change the font
- Change font size
- Read it aloud
- Have someone else read it aloud
- Read backwards
- Look up anything in question (spelling, commas, etc)
- Make notes of anything to follow up on
- Take breaks- this will help us stay focused and not burn out

* * *

And be excited to be editing!

Okay, that may sound a little geeky and far-fetched. But really, editing means our story is on the homestretch now! Let's keep moving forward and help it reach its full potential.

* * *

Check out the original post here: [Editing](#)

Step 9: Publishing

So you've written your book. It's revised and polished and beautiful. Good for you!! Cue fireworks! Celebrations! Accolades of all kinds! This is a **huge** deal, my friend.

After all the excitement dies down, you may find yourself asking, "So... now what?"

Just as there are many different writing styles and methods, there are many different options when it comes to publishing and sharing our work. Today we'll look at a few options on what to do with our stories once we've finished them.

Getting Published

To start off with, *you don't need to publish your novel if you don't want to*. That's a perfectly acceptable decision and doesn't make you less of a "writer." Being published doesn't mean anything magical in and of itself.

If you write then you are a "writer." You are meaningful, important, and spectacular whether or not you are published.

Publishing may not be for everyone. Getting a book published can mean a lot of headaches and work, so why borrow the trouble?

It really depends on your personal **motivation and goals**.

If your goal for writing is to hand the story to your neighbor, child, or friend for them to enjoy- all power to you. *You don't need to be published in order to achieve that goal.*

However, some writers very much want to be published. Reasons are endless, including wanting to make money, wanting to be formally recognized, and wanting to share their story with a larger audience.

It's worth thinking through our motivations for writing so that our goals can guide our publishing decisions.

3 Publishing Options: Pros and Cons

1. Not Publishing

This options is ideal for personal projects, family stories, etc, and for writers who aren't looking for recognition or financial gain through publishing.

Sharing our work without publishing it is exactly what it sounds like: we bypasses the complications of publishing completely by

sharing our work with others on our own. We can email a PDF to friends, we can put our book on our blog, and we can get a bound copy printed at the copy shop for our bookshelf.

Pros

- Fairly immediate results. We can finish our writing and immediately send it to anyone we want.
- Low hassel. We don't need to deal with rejection letters or deadlines. We control the process completely.
- Low Cost. Because we control the process of how we share our book, we can limit how much we spend for printing, design, etc. We may also have a smaller audience so that keeps our costs down as well.
- Decent quality product. There are many companies who will print and bind books on demand so our novel doesn't need to look like we're back in grade school (unless that's what we're going for). We can even get connected with artists to design cover art and more.
- This is an overall simple way to share our writing with those closest to us.

Cons

- Low credibility due to not officially published. A non published book will be seen as amateur art and is unlikely to help us be seen as an authority in our field.
- Low shareability. Non published books won't be sold in bookstores or on Amazon, for instance, so this limits our audience to those we personally know.
- Lack of revenue. Non published books won't make money

since they won't be sold in stores.

- Later difficulty publishing shared work. Publishers are looking for original and unique work, they don't want something that's already been shared on our blog or emailed to everyone we know.

If we we're thinking we may want to publish our story later we should be careful who we share it with now.

2. Self Publishing

This option is ideal for writers whose work does not fit into traditional genres, as well as those interested in marketing and business.

Self publishing is when authors do tasks traditionally done by publishing houses (editing, formatting, marketing, etc) in order to publish their own work. This has become hugely popular in recent years and there are many resources available to assist writers through this process.

Pros

- Higher control over our work. Writers control the self publishing process so they make the decisions regarding cover art, edits, price of the book, etc.
- Increased revenue possible. Instead of a low royalty granted by a traditional publishing house, self publishers keep a much higher percentage of the books' earnings.
- High production available. With self publishing gaining

greater respect and attention in recent years, resources are available to help writers produce their own high quality books.

- Relatively short turnaround to publication. Since the author is leading the publishing process there is typically less waiting involved.

Cons

- Self publication frequently has some start up costs, such as paying for editing and formatting.
- Some stigma still in place. Many readers continue to see traditionally published books as superior to self published work, regardless of quality.
- More work involved. With greater control over the publishing process comes greater responsibility. If we want a team of people to help get our book on the market then we'll need to find them and get them on board.
- Some business mindset required. Instead of just writing books, now we'll be needing to get working on marketing and self- promotion.

3. Traditional publishing

This option is ideal for people whose work fits into traditional genres, those willing to work with and jump through hoops for publishers, and for those not interested in marketing and business.

Pros

- This is historically the the most recognized type of publishing, sometimes seen as an end goal in and of itself.
- There will be a publishing team to help with our book.
- No upfront costs. Publishers will pay a writer an advance on their royalty earnings so we'll earn some money upfront.
- Greater marketing reach. Publishers have connections to get our book in front of a larger audience, including bookstores and libraries.

Cons

- It can be hard to get connected with agent and publisher. We must be prepared for lots of queries and submissions, as well as rejections.
- Low payout. While there are no upfront costs (beware publishers who ask for money), the royalty typical for a traditionally published book is quite low.
- It takes a long time. Even after being connected with a publisher the timeline to when we see our book in print is a long one.
- Despite a publishing team, we will still need to be involved in self promoting and marketing.

* * *

So, what publishing options makes sense for you?

Depending on your story and your goals, you'll want to think through the options available and decide what's best for you. Feeling stumped or overwhelmed? Chat with a friend or [shoot me an email](#), I'd be happy to help out as I can.

Also know that there are many paths to success. Hard work and persistence can pay off no matter which route we choose!

So choose what seems best for you and move forward with courage.

There is a lot to navigate and unpack regarding publishing. Feel free to check out my [pinterest resources board](#) for relevant articles.

Best of luck to you as you move forward toward sharing your story with the world!

No matter what you end up deciding to do with your story, I applaud and salute you. You are amazing, dear writer!

* * *

Check out the original post here: [Publishing](#)

Step 10: Begin Again

The writing cycle is the ongoing journey every writer is on and what we've been looking at in this Steps To Success novel writing series.

Some may say when we reach reach “publishing” in Step 9 that we've reached the end of the writing journey.

But really it's only the beginning.

The writer's life is a revolving door of ideas and projects, successes and failures. We send one story out to be published, we have another one in the works. Brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing- it never ends.

The writer's life is a constant cycle on repeat.

Today we're talking about the importance of continuing on through this cycle. To start with, we'll review where we've been... because it's where we'll be heading back again.

The Writing Cycle

- Step 1: **Getting Started** (*where we look at our goals and find our starting point*)
- Step 2: **Developing Content** (*where we dig deeper into what story we want to tell*)
- Step 3: **Creating an Outline** (*where we brainstorm the basic structure of our story*)
- Step 4: **The First Draft** (*where we make our writing plans and start our story*)
- Step 5: **Rest** (*where we set our writing aside to breathe*)
- Step 6: **Revising Our Writing** (*where we look at the revision process*)
- Step 7: **Beta Reading** (*where we get feedback on our writing*)
- Step 8: **Editing** (*where we look into editing our work*)
- Step 9: **Publishing** (*where we check out options for publishing our writing*)

Each of these steps is incredibly important, though all of our experiences with the process will be different. We may spend 3 days on our outline or 3 months.

There's no "right" or "wrong" answer here.

Rather, this is a road map to provide guidance but still allow room for each of us to work as we will. These are simply core building blocks that are common among many writers and can be used to create and strengthen great stories.

We may be completing this series but the fun doesn't end yet!

Depending on your writing goals and motivations, you may have more stories to write.

For many writers, it can take years and multiple books before signing with a publisher or reaching seller list. If we want to support ourselves financially it can take time before that's a reality. Maybe you just have so many ideas spilling throughout your mind that you couldn't possibly stop writing now.

The writing life never comes to an end!

This isn't to discourage you, rather it's to encourage you to stay strong.

Writing is a process. A gloriously never ending process.

As we send drafts to beta readers we can begin brainstorming our goals for our next project. While we wait to hear back from agents we can start outlining the next story.

And that's why I wanted to close this series off with a both a reminder of where we've been (we've covered a lot of ground!) but also a reminder of the mindset that will keep us stepping forward and lead to our success.

The cycle of writing continues on and we will not only carry on but we will *thrive*.

We will have [different seasons where our writing changes](#) but as we persist we will continue to grow, improve, and create marvelous stories.

* * *

And that quickly we've reached the end of the book! But the writing adventures are just beginning.

It's been a pleasure to journey through these steps together as we look at the process of writing a novel. No matter what you're working on today, I wish you the very best. And always feel free to [contact me](#) with any questions, let me know how things are going, or just to say hello.

I believe in you, dear writer! You are marvelous and brave and you will do great things.

* * *

Check out the original post here: [The Writing Cycle](#)



About the Author

Bethany Henry writes YA fantasy and blogs about writing and wellness at bethany-henry.com. She gets super excited about goals, stories, and new flavors of ice cream, and she spends lots of time reading picture books with her two little girls.

Sign up for Bethany's [blog updates](#) for more great resources and check out her [facebook](#) page and [pinterest](#) boards.

