National Novel Writing Month's Young Novelist Workbook

High School

Fourth Edition

100% Awesome, NON-BORING workbooks. We promise!

Created by National Novel Writing Month

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Hello Author,

Here it is, almost November, and you've decided to tackle one of the most rewarding challenges ever: writing a novel in 30 days. Before you begin, we want to commend you just for showing up!

You might be feeling a little nervous, maybe slightly overwhelmed. After all, isn't novel-writing reserved for the elite? For the tried-and-true writers of the world? For those that have been in the trenches of fiction, their pens grasped mightily in their hands, and a Shakespeare quote at the tip of their tongues?

The answer, our friends, is no. The truth is that you don't have to be a famous author to write a novel. You just have to have a few ideas, some paper, and a pen. It's as easy as that.

Writing a novel is kind of like building a bike from scratch: when the pieces are spread out on the ground, the job seems impossible. But if you work piece by piece, before you know it, you're ready to hit the streets. By breaking a big job into smaller parts, you'll find that anything is possible.

If you don’t have any ideas about what to write next month, don’t worry. We've put together this workbook to spark your imagination before NaNoWriMo. We'll walk you through creating well-developed characters and settings. We'll show you how to create conflict, outline your plot, and write dialogue that will strike the deepest envy in writers the world over. Then we will be right by your side throughout NaNoWriMo with exercises that will help boost your word count, create plot twists, and get to know your characters better than you might want to.

Before you embark on your noveling adventure, we want you to know that whatever your word count at the end of November, you are extraordinary just for giving this a shot.

Good luck from all of us here at NaNoWriMo. May your words be many, your imagination be awakened, and your adventure be out of this world!

The NaNoWriMo Staff

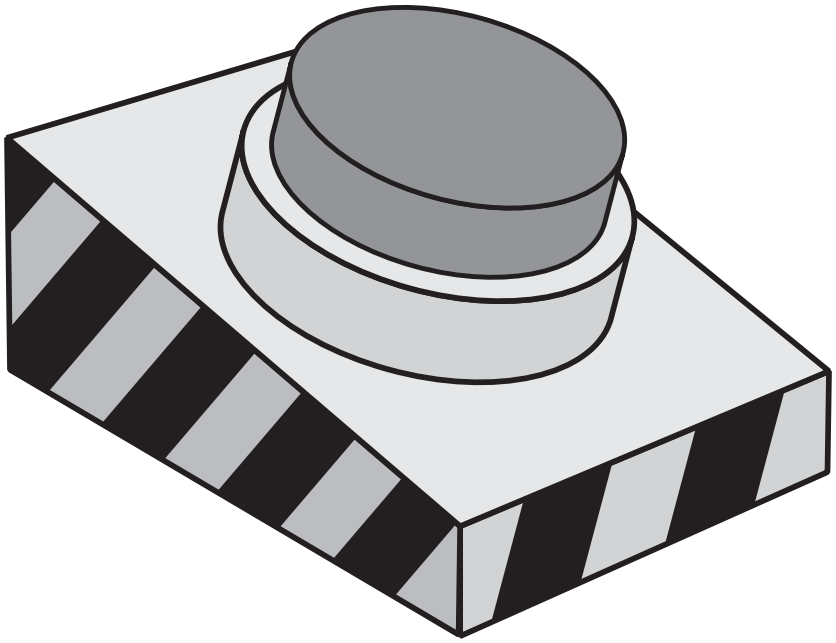
Planning Your Novel

Inner Editor Containment Button

Before you begin your month-long noveling adventure, you'll want to do away with your Inner Editor. What is your Inner Editor? They're the nagging, no-fun beast we bring along with us on all our creative endeavors. They sit on our shoulder and points out our typos and misspellings and every awkward sentence. When they're in a particularly nasty mood, they might try to tell us that we're embarrassingly awful writers, and shouldn't even be allowed to put pen to paper. They're helpful to have around when taking tests and revising things we've already written, but they'll slow you down in the worst way if you let them write your novel with you next month.

No matter how ridiculous this might sound, close your eyes and imagine your Inner Editor. Think about what they might look like. Is your Inner Editor holding a dictionary? Chasing after you with a ruler? Once you get a good picture in your head of what they look like, open your eyes and push the button below.

Warning: Pushing the button will vacuum your Inner Editor right out of your head for the next 30 days. They'll be transported from your brain into an Inner Editor Containment Cell, where we'll put them to use proofreading the NaNoWriMo websites. We have lots for them to do! And we promise that after 30 days we'll give them back to you (so you'll have them around to help out with your novel rewrites).



Congratulations. Your Inner Editor has been successfully contained. It's time to move on.

What Makes a Novel a Novel?

Now that you've received the scary news that you're going to write a novel, you're probably wondering exactly what that *means*. Well, think of novels you have read for school. How are they all alike? What rules do they all seem to follow?

Work with classmates to write a definition based on the novels you know about.

A novel is

Now choose one of the novels you have read, preferably one that you really liked a lot or just know inside and out. Write the name of that book, and its author, here:

My Model Novel:

_____

by _____

For the rest of your novel-writing adventure, think of that book as a model you can use when you get stuck. You don't have to imitate it—and you never want to copy it, of course—but you can always look at it for ideas. Just think of that novel's author as your own personal novel-writing coach.

Now take out your model novel and fill in the blanks below.

1. Who are the important characters in your model novel?

_____

2. In two sentences, what is the book mostly about?

3. What is the main conflict in this novel?

4. Whose perspective is the novel written from?

5. What point of view does the author use (first person, third person, etc.)?

6. How does the novel begin?

7. Where is the story set, generally?

8. Name one thing you love about the author's style of writing (such as "It's hilarious." or "The words flow like poetry.").

9. What is your favorite thing about this novel (such as "The quirky characters." or "The suspenseful plot."?

Now that you've broken down the main components of your book and figured out what you loved about it, you're ready to present it to classmates with a book talk. Don't worry; a book talk is not a book report. You don't have to recount everything that happens in the book in excruciating detail. Instead, a book talk is like a movie trailer; it gives just enough information to leave the audience wanting more.

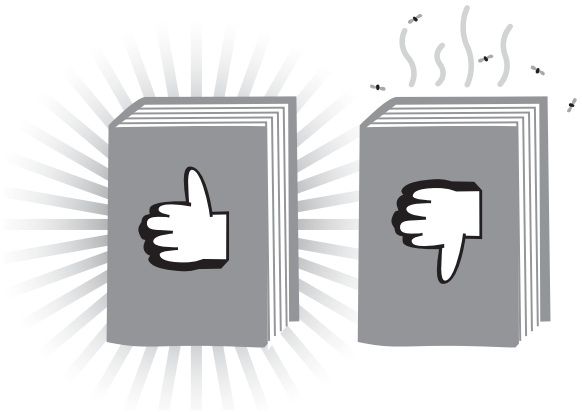
Take a look at this book talk, for example, about the real novel *Into the Great Wide Open* by Kevin Canty.

> Kenny Kolodny, the main character of Kevin Canty's novel *Into the Great Wide Open*, has some serious problems. His mom is in a mental hospital. His dad drinks too much and then has a stroke. Kenny doesn't have much hope for the future, that is, until he meets Junie Williamson. Junie lives in a fancy house with her very successful parents, and her life seems perfect—but Kenny knows it isn't, because Junie has a problem that even her parents can't ignore. For a while Kenny and Junie's adventures provide an escape they both need; sooner or later though, both of them have to face reality. Will they be able to do it together?

After reading this book talk, you know the basics of *Into the Great Wide Open*: its title, its author, its main character, and some important things happening in his life. But you probably have a bunch of questions, too. What is Junie's problem? Why do Kenny and Junie have to "face reality"? Perhaps you are curious enough to check out this book for yourself!

As you can see, a book talk simply gives the audience a "taste" of what the book is about, who its main characters are, and what the important conflict is.

Below, prepare your own book talk about the novel you chose as your model. Keep in mind that you will be reading this aloud in order to get classmates interested in your book!



Good Novel, Bad Novel

Of all the books you've read so far in your life, there were probably some that were ridiculously fun to read, and some that were just about as fun as visiting the dentist on your birthday. Before you start thinking about the novel you'll be writing, it's helpful to write down what, *to you*, makes a book "good" (interesting, exciting, fun to read, etc.) and what makes a book "bad" (boring, painful to read, etc.).

Good Novel

Let's start by making a list of books you love. Think about all the novels you've read that you couldn't put down no matter how sleep deprived you were or how much homework you were supposed to be doing. **In the spaces below write down the title and author of three novels you love:**

1. Title _____

   Author _____

2. Title _____

   Author _____

3. Title _____

   Author _____

Now, write a list of things that made these novels so amazing. You can be as general or as detailed as you like; include anything from “believable and well-developed characters” to “rock music” to “intergalactic space travel.”

Once you have finished this list, keep it with you at all times during November. Why is this list so important? Because, as you might imagine, the things you like reading are going to be things you are best at writing. As you write your story, refer to this list of ingredients, and consider adding them to your novel whenever you're stuck for ideas or story directions.

Bad Novel

In the spaces below, write as many things as you can think of that make a novel less fun to read. Think about all those books you’ve read (or started to read) that put you to sleep by the end of page one. You know—the books you’d rather eat mayonnaise straight from the jar than read again.

Now, write a list of things that made these novels so awful. Again, you can be as general or as detailed as you like; include anything from “cheesy endings” to “awkward dialogue.”

Just like the list of things you love in a book, keep this list with you at all times during November. It might seem strange that you would have to remind yourself of the things you dislike in novels, but these items are experts in the art of ending up in your story without you even realizing it.

Creating Well-Developed Characters

Most people think that an intriguing plot is what makes a story good, but the truth is that exciting plots are made up of original and well-developed characters.

Flat Characters vs. Well-Developed Characters

Flat character: Steve was a good kid. He got good grades and was never late to class.

Original, well-developed character: Steve Goodhold was a good kid. He got good grades and was never late to class. Little did everyone know that he spent his nights working as an internet hacker for a crime boss who he met through his older cousin, Peter.

Steve didn't need much sleep, which was a good thing. He slept maybe two hours a night, and spent the rest of his time stealing identities, wiring funds, and making more money than both his parents combined. He told himself he was saving for college, but the thrill of his secret life of crime was steadily eroding his interest in an Ivy League education.

Not only are characters with hidden depths and secrets more fun to read about, they're also more fun to write about. Though you'll end up writing about a bunch of different people in your novel next month, all of them will fall into one of three categories: **the protagonist, the supporting characters, and the antagonist.**

The Protagonist

The **protagonist** is the character with the starring role in your book. In most novels, the protagonist is on a journey to get what they want more than anything else in the world, whether it's fame, revenge, reuniting with a long-lost sibling, or something much more elusive, like overcoming poverty or cancer.

The Supporting Characters

Supporting characters are characters in a novel that have an important role in your protagonist's life. Some may be around for the protagonist's entire journey, some for only part. Supporting characters can be friends, close relatives, love interests, you name it. These characters also have dreams of their own, and their adventures will add even more excitement to your novel.

The Physical Antagonist

A **physical antagonist** is a living, breathing character in a novel that is standing in the way of the protagonist achieving their goal. This does not mean that all physical antagonists are evil monsters. Some antagonists stand in the way simply through jealousy, or misunderstanding, or by having a set of goals that differs from that of the protagonist's. If Julia is your protagonist and she wants to take Malcolm to the dance, but Helen asks him first, this doesn't mean Helen is bad. She's just another person who likes the same guy. Then again, there are those antagonists that are just plain evil. It's up to you to decide who's going to stand in your protagonist's way, and how they're going to do it.

OR

The Abstract Antagonist

Though a lot of antagonists are living, breathing beings, some are not. Some protagonists face off against illness, or grief, or the powers of a corrupt government. We like to call these kinds of antagonists **abstract antagonists** because they don't take actual physical form. If your novel's antagonist is not a living person/animal/entity, you have an abstract antagonist. It may be easier think of it this way: if your protagonist cannot physically kick your antagonist in the knee, they're probably *abstract.*

Physical Antagonist	**Abstract Antagonist**
A racist or intolerant character	Racism/ intolerance in a community or in general
A character who is working to make sure your protagonist lives a poverty-stricken life	Poverty or the economy in a community or in general
A character who is forcing your character to struggle against nature (e.g. someone who has left your character stranded in Antarctica)	Nature as an entity (e.g. a natural disaster or an extreme climate)
A character whose religious beliefs oppress your protagonist	A religion or all religions
A government official such as a dictator who has it in for your protagonist	A corrupt government
Your protagonist's evil boss	A corporation/ company
A character whose sole mission is to make sure your protagonist becomes ill (e.g. though poisoning or exposure to a deadly disease)	Disease/illness in general

It's a great idea for you, the author, to try and get to know your characters before you begin writing. We asked a team of scientists, mathematicians, and creative writing gurus from around the world: "What's the easiest way for writers to get to know their characters?" Hands down, the experts all agreed the single best way is to **fill out a Character Questionnaire for all your characters.**

Character Questionnaire

On a separate sheet of paper, fill out these questionnaires about your characters. We have four different sets of them.

Section One: Questions for All Characters

Try to complete this section for **every important character** in your book, but definitely for your protagonist. Feel free to skip questions that don't make sense for a character, or don't help you get insight into them.

Section Two: Questions for Supporting Characters

Complete this section just for your **supporting characters**.

Section Three: Questions for Physical Antagonist

Complete this section if you have a **physical antagonist**.

OR

Section Four: Questions for Abstract Antagonist

Complete this section if you have an **abstract antagonist**.

Section One: All Characters

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. Height:

4. Eye color:

5. Physical appearance:

6. Strange or unique physical attributes:

7. Favorite clothing style/outfit:

8. Where do they live? What is it like there?

9. Defining gestures/movements (i.e., curling their lip when they speak, always keeping their eyes on the ground, etc.):

10. Things about their appearance they would most like to change:

11. Speaking style (fast, talkative, monotone, etc.):

12. Pet peeves:

13. Fondest memory:

14. Hobbies/interests:

15. Special skills/abilities:

16. Insecurities:

17. Quirks/eccentricities:

18. Temperament (easygoing, easily angered, etc.):

19. Negative traits:

20. Things that upset them:

21. Things that embarrass them:

22. This character is highly opinionated about:

23. Any phobias?

24. Things that make them happy:

25. Family (describe):

26. Deepest, darkest secret:

27. Reason they kept this secret for so long:

28. Other people's opinions of this character (What do people like about this character? What do they dislike about this character?):

29. Favorite bands/songs/type of music:

30. Favorite movies:

31. Favorite TV shows:

32. Favorite books:

33. Favorite foods:

34. Favorite sports/sports teams:

35. Political views:

36. Religion/philosophy of life:

37. Physical health:

38. Dream vacation:

39. Description of their house:

40. Description of their bedroom:

41. Any pets?

42. Best thing that has ever happened to this character:

43. Worst thing that has ever happened to this character:

44. Superstitions:

45. Three words to describe this character:

46. If a song played every time this character walked into the room, what song would it be?

Section Two: Supporting Characters

1. Relationship to the protagonist:

2. Favorite thing about the protagonist:

3. Similarities to protagonist:

4. Differences from protagonist:

Section Three: Physical Antagonist

1. Why are they facing off against the protagonist?

2. Any likeable traits?

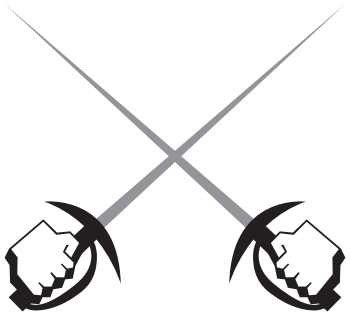
3. Weaknesses:

Section Four: Abstract Antagonist

1. What is your abstract antagonist? Is it a disease like cancer, a social ill like poverty, or something larger than life, like grief?

2. How is this antagonist affecting the protagonist?

3. Do other characters notice? How does this antagonist affect the other people in your novel?



Creating Conflict

Okay, so you know who your characters are. Excellent. Now it is time to figure out *what your characters are going to do.* **Most stories are ultimately about the same thing—the journey a protagonist goes on to get what they want.** Whether their goal is to win a trophy or cure cancer, the journey is never easy, and your character will encounter many setbacks along the way. Though they're painful for your protagonist, these obstacles are what will make your novel exciting to read.

Imagine a story about someone named Jay who wants a sandwich more than anything in the world. How boring would the story be if all Jay had to do was walk from their bedroom to the kitchen and eat a sandwich? That story is so uneventful it can be told in one sentence. But what if Jay is seriously afraid of the dark, the power is out in their house, and they have to walk down a dark hallway to get to the kitchen? And once there, they have to fight their bratty younger sister, Helga, for the last two pieces of bread?

Though it may be simple, this story has both **external conflict** and **internal conflict**.

External Conflict

The external conflict is the one between a protagonist and antagonist. In the above story, the protagonist (Jay) has a goal (to eat a sandwich), but a motivated antagonist (Helga) has her own agenda (to also eat a sandwich). The struggle between Jay and Helga over the last slice of roast beef is the external conflict in this story.

Internal Conflict

The internal conflicts are the fears and insecurities that a protagonist has to overcome in order to get what they want. In the story above, Jay has to overcome their fear of the dark in order to get the sandwich they want so badly.

If you have completed your **character questionnaires**, you already know a good amount about the major players in your novel. Now it's time to answer some deeper questions about your characters' hopes and fears in order to create the **conflicts** that will make your novel interesting.

Take out and review your character questionnaires, then fill in the blanks below.

Your Protagonist

What does your protagonist want more than anything in the world?

What are all the things that might block your character from getting what they want?

Do they have any weaknesses, fears, or faults that will also get in the way of their goal?

Physical Antagonist

Complete this section if you have a physical antagonist.

What does your antagonist want more than anything in the world? This can be as simple as defeating the protagonist, or something more ambitious like world domination.

What is your antagonist's issue or problem with the protagonist?

What is your antagonist afraid of? (Kittens? Fire?) Why?

Does your antagonist have a hidden weakness or flaw? What is it?

Abstract Antagonist

Complete this section if you have an abstract antagonist.

The antagonist in my novel is not a living, breathing being. It is _____

_____

If my protagonist does not battle against this antagonist, it will eventually (ruin their life? cause death?)

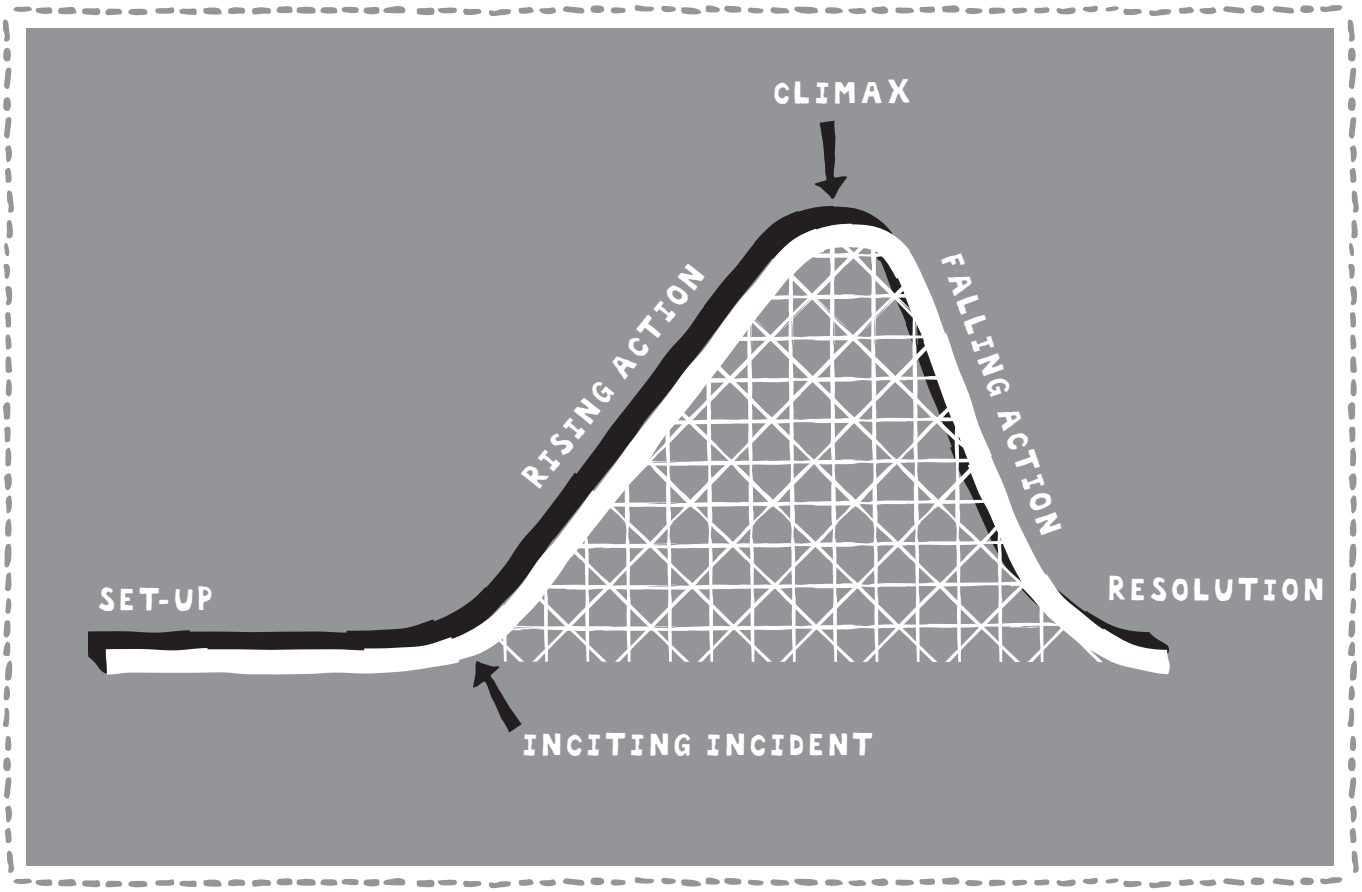
My protagonist is battling against this antagonist by:

Congratulations! You now have the two basic ingredients for an excellent story: **external conflict** and **internal conflict**. Know that your internal and external conflicts will overlap throughout your novel. Once your characters find out about each others' fears and weaknesses, you better believe they will use them against each other mercilessly as they fight to make their dreams come true.

Outlining Your Plot

Now that you've created some exciting conflict for your novel, you probably have an idea of *what* is going to happen in your book this November. You may know what kind of journey your protagonist will undertake, and you know what will stand in their way. Now it's time to take the next step and map out *how* everything is going to happen.

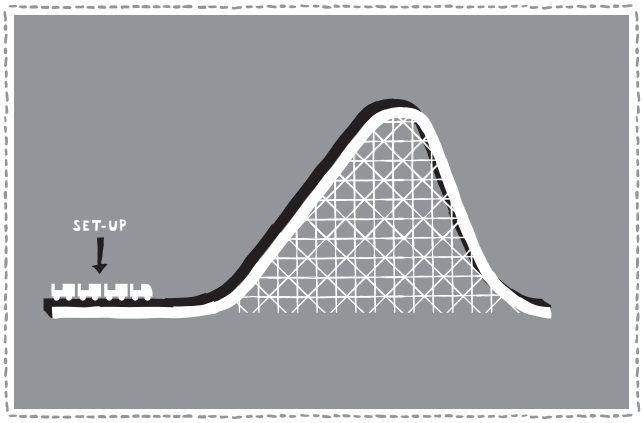
Writing an entire novel from beginning to end may seem impossible, but it is not as hard as you think once you have a plan. Trust us. Most stories have the same structure, and they break down into the same six sections that make up a **plot**. See the diagram below.



This diagram may look familiar to you. It is most commonly in the shape of an **inverted checkmark**, but we think a **plot rollercoaster** is much more fun than a checkmark, so we're going with that.

Even if this is stuff you already know from English class, read all the sections below carefully before you move on to map out your own plot.

Set-Up



Getting on the Rollercoaster

Though some novels begin with an “inciting incident”—which you will read about in just a second—many of them start by telling the reader a little bit about the characters, the setting, and the conflict before jumping into the action. Just like you'd want to know what kind of rollercoaster you're getting on before waiting in line, a reader wants to know what kind of novel they're about to read before committing time to it.

Example of a story's SET-UP:

Anthony Lovato leaned close to the kitchen counter and carefully swirled purple frosting onto the peanut butter cupcake he'd just baked, then plopped a single juicy blueberry on top. The perfect finishing touches to a perfect dessert.

Too bad no one else would ever see it.

"Tony? Where are you?" His mom was home early! Without thinking, Anthony crammed the whole cupcake into his mouth. His mom popped her head into the kitchen. "Oh, there you are. What're you eating?"

Anthony shrugged, trying to look casual. "Microwave burrito." He did his best to swallow and licked frosting off his lip.

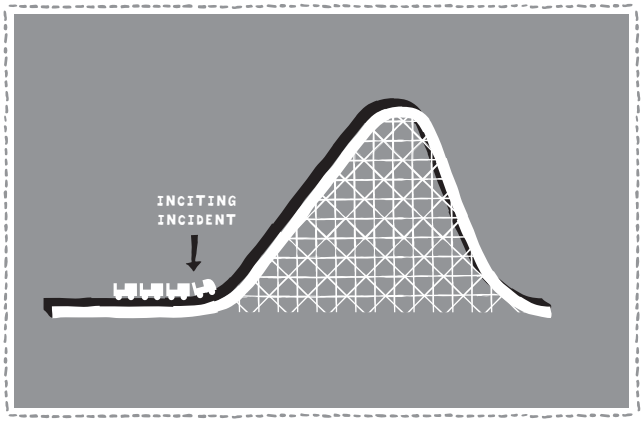
She frowned. "Well, just don't ruin your appetite. David's team won, so they're having a pizza party. David scored five goals! Can you believe it? Five!"

"Wow." Anthony tried not to sound sarcastic, but his mother gave him a look anyway. "I mean, yay, good for him." His older brother was a soccer star. Well, really, he was an any sport star: basketball, baseball, track... David was great at all of them, just like their mom was when she was younger. She went to college on a softball scholarship, something she never quit telling her sons about. Anthony knew she expected him to play sports, too.

The problem was, Anthony didn't care about sports. Like, at all. Ever since he was little, he'd loved to bake. He followed famous bakers online, drooling over their photos of cakes. He made up recipes of his own and tried them out when no one was home, or said he had to work on homework with his best friend, Annalise, and instead just baked in her kitchen. He dreamed of being a famous baker someday, but knew it would never happen. He cared about his mom too much to disappoint her, and besides, their family didn't have the money for classes or fancy ingredients. He would never be good enough.

Okay, that was a good **set-up**. We were introduced to the protagonist and story's main conflicts: Anthony wants to be a baker, but his mother wants him to play sports, and the family doesn't have the money for ingredients or classes (external conflict). Plus, it seems like he lacks some confidence, both in his baking skills and in his ability to talk to his mother about his real dreams (internal conflict).

Inciting Incident



Starting the Climb

The inciting incident launches your protagonist into the adventure whether they are ready or not. It can be a pretty scary moment for your main character. Once it happens, there's no turning back.

Example of a story's INCITING INCIDENT:

Anthony's best friend Annalise was waiting for him after school by their usual spot at the flagpole. They'd been friends since second grade, when his mom forgot to pack him a lunch and Annalise divided her entire lunch in half

with him, even the cookies split right down the middle. "What's up, Lise?" he asked when he saw her shifting from foot to foot.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you've got that freaky look in your eye like you're barely holding back a secret. And not a good one, either. An evil one."

She blinked innocently behind her neon pink glasses. "Me? Evil? Whatever do you mean? Tell me how that cupcake turned out last night." Anthony barely opened his mouth before Annalise waved her hands, interrupting him.

"Nevermind, stop talking, I can't hold it in anymore. Look." She pushed her phone to his face.

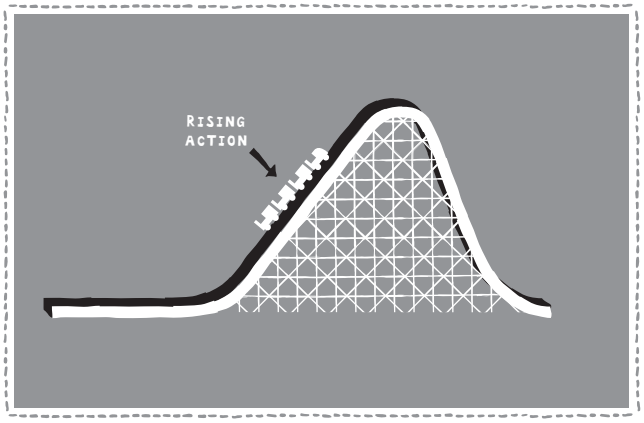
Anthony read the message out loud. "Congratulations, Mr. Lovato, you've passed the first round of casting. Please send your audition materials by this coming Friday. Best of luck from the *Teen Baker* team." He glanced up from the phone. "What's *Teen Baker*? I didn't enter any first round of casting."

Annalise grinned. "No, but I entered for you. It's a baking show for teenagers. There's a cash prize, plus when the show airs, you'll be famous. You're a great baker, Tony. This is your chance."

Anthony read the message again, and again. His stomach flipped each time he read his name. "I can't, though. My mom wants me to join the swim team, and that's gonna take up all my time." He bit his lower lip. "But I guess it's just an audition tape, right?" Annalise could barely stop from jumping up and down beside him. He sighed. "Lise, your evil must be rubbing off on me. Let's do it!"

If an **inciting incident** never happened, Anthony would probably just keep baking things in secret, pretending to his mom and brother that he likes sports. The **inciting incident** is what kicks the story into action.

Rising Action



Climbing the Big Hill

The **rising action i**s the longest section of a novel. It's made up of many events, each of them building up to the most exciting part of your story: the **climax**. It's where you develop your characters, deepen their relationships with one another, and lay out everything that happens to them before that big finish. Think of the **rising action** as the biggest hill on the rollercoaster—the higher you go, the more suspenseful it gets.

Summary of a story's RISING ACTION:

1. Anthony and Annalise film his audition tape in her kitchen. He uses a cake pop recipe that he invented. He's nervous, but forgets about it once he starts baking. The cake pops turn out great and they submit his materials to the show.

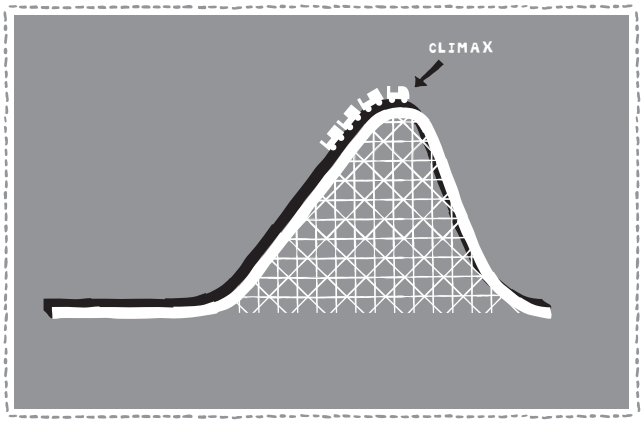
2. One week later, he gets the news: he's been cast on the *Teen Baker* show! They'll film each weekend for ten weeks, and then the whole show will air over the summer. He's too scared to ask his mom for permission, so he lies and says he joined the swim team, and he'll have to practice each day after school and on the weekend.

3. His first day on the set, he gets nervous all over again. Most of the bakers have taken classes, including Miranda Pierce, whose family owns Pierce Cakes and Breads. Anthony is the only one who's learned all on his own. At first, he does everything wrong, and he thinks he's going to get kicked off, but he pulls it together and barely makes it to the next round.

4. Each round, he gets better and better, but he still doesn't tell his family what he's doing. Eventually, he makes it to the final round. There are only two people left: him and Miranda Pierce. There's no way he can beat her!

5. Uh oh! Someone finds out about the competition and shares the news that he's one of the finalists all over social media. His mother confronts him and they fight about how he lied. She grounds him and says he can't go to the finals, but with Annalise's help, he sneaks out.

Climax



The Top of the Rollercoaster

The **climax** is the “gasp” moment. It's the moment at the very top of the rollercoaster, right before the high-speed drop. This moment doesn’t last long, and neither does the **climax** in your novel. It can be as short as one paragraph—just enough to make your readers hold their breath in suspense and ask, “What’s going to happen next?!”

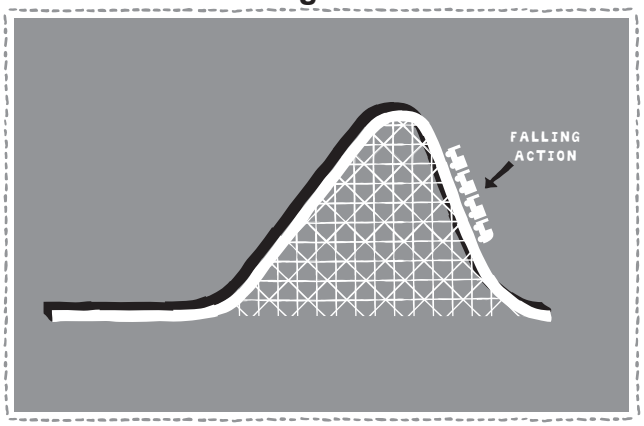
Example of a story's CLIMAX:

"Action!" called the director. Miranda Pierce waved and smiled as she strolled on stage. Anthony tried to breathe and lifted his arm to wave, but lowered it when he realized how sweaty he was. *Calm down*, he thought. *You can do this.*

Both contestants stood beside their cakes. Anthony’s was seven layers, each a different flavor, and shaped like the skull of a massive Triceratops. He'd spent the past three hours pouring his heart and soul into it (along with a ton of eggs, sugar, butter, and flour). The judges stabbed their forks into the top and lifted bites to their lips. Anthony couldn't stand it. He looked away, and there, in the audience next to Annalise with a huge smile on her face, was his mother. His mother came to the show! And she didn't look angry at all! He smiled.

The judges finished tasting. They huddled together, then nodded. The lead judge leaned over the microphone. "The winner is..."

Falling Action



The High-Speed Drop

The falling action is what happens next. It is the fast-paced, action-packed part of your novel. You’re finally speeding down the tracks of the rollercoaster with your hands in the air! Does the antagonist get defeated? Do the protagonist’s dreams finally come true? If so, how?

Keep in mind however that just because the falling action is fast-paced, it doesn't have to be over quickly. In some novels, the falling action actually takes place over whole chapters. What's important is that the action is paced to feel exciting whether it spans mere minutes or whole years of your characters' lives.

Example of a story's FALLING ACTION:

"The winner is... Miranda Pierce."

Anthony didn't lose his smile. He shook Miranda's hand and congratulated her, but when the cameras rolled away, all he wanted was a dark place to cry in. Suddenly, warm arms wrapped around him, squeezing him into a hug.

"You were amazing up there," his mother said, holding him tight.

"I'm sorry I lied to you." Her shoulder muffled his words.

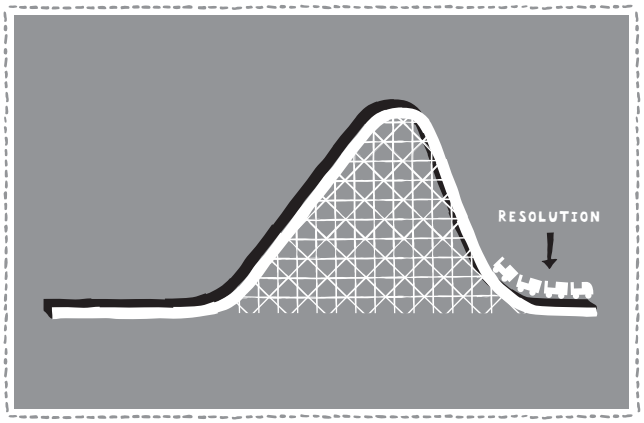
"No, sweetie. You're such a talented baker. I should've seen that from the beginning. Whatever you need, we'll find a way to make it work."

"Sorry to interrupt the family reunion, but I like what you did up there, kid." A woman peered down at them over the rims of her diamond-studded sunglasses. "I'm Moxy Ramone, I'm sure you've heard of me. Miranda's talented, but you've got guts and imagination. You bake things like no one else. I think you'd make a great host for my new TV show. What do you say?"

"I say, why are you wearing sunglasses inside?" asked Annalise.

Anthony elbowed her in the ribs. "Yes," he said. "I say yes."

Resolution



Getting Off the Rollercoaster

The resolution, which is also sometimes known as the "conclusion" since it comes at the very end of your novel, is how things work out in the very end after your protagonist gets (or doesn't get) what they want. It's also a place to show how your character and their life have changed. This change happens little by little as your protagonist faces their fears, defeats villains, and builds relationships with a cast of amazing characters. All these adventures will end up changing the way your main character sees the world and their place in it. Try to use the final scenes of your book to highlight those changes.

Example of a story's RESOLUTION:

"Shh, everybody. It's on!" Anthony's mom turned off the lights and squeezed next to him on the couch. Their living room was crammed with friends and family, all gathered to watch the debut of his Anthony's baking show, *Creative Creations*. They snacked on the peanut butter and blueberry cupcakes he'd baked for the occasion—enough to share this time.

Anthony smiled, took a delicious bite, and settled in to watch his show.

Now it's your turn to outline your plot. You don't have to describe everything that will happen in your novel—some things you won't discover until you start writing! This is just to help you get an idea about what will happen in the beginning, middle, and end of your book. Follow the directions below to get started.

(If it helps you structure your plot, you can fill in the blank "Plot Rollercoaster" on Page 28. To get an idea of how to use the blank rollercoaster, check out the example we've created on the next page.)

1. Describe your set-up.

In one or two paragraphs, describe a few scenes that will happen at the beginning of your book to introduce your characters, setting, and main conflicts of your story. Think about showing your protagonist in their ordinary life, before everything changes.

2. Describe your inciting incident.

In one paragraph, describe the event that causes your protagonist to begin their adventure. Think: "The moment everything changed was when..."

3. List events in your rising action.

Write a list of five events that build up to the climax of your novel. These are the steps that take your protagonist farther and farther away from their ordinary life, on the journey to get what they want. Keep increasing the conflict little by little. Throw obstacles in their way! Give them some hard choices to make! Add supporting characters to help!

4. Describe your climax.

In one paragraph, describe what will happen in the climax of your novel. This is the "Oh my gosh, what will happen next?!" moment.

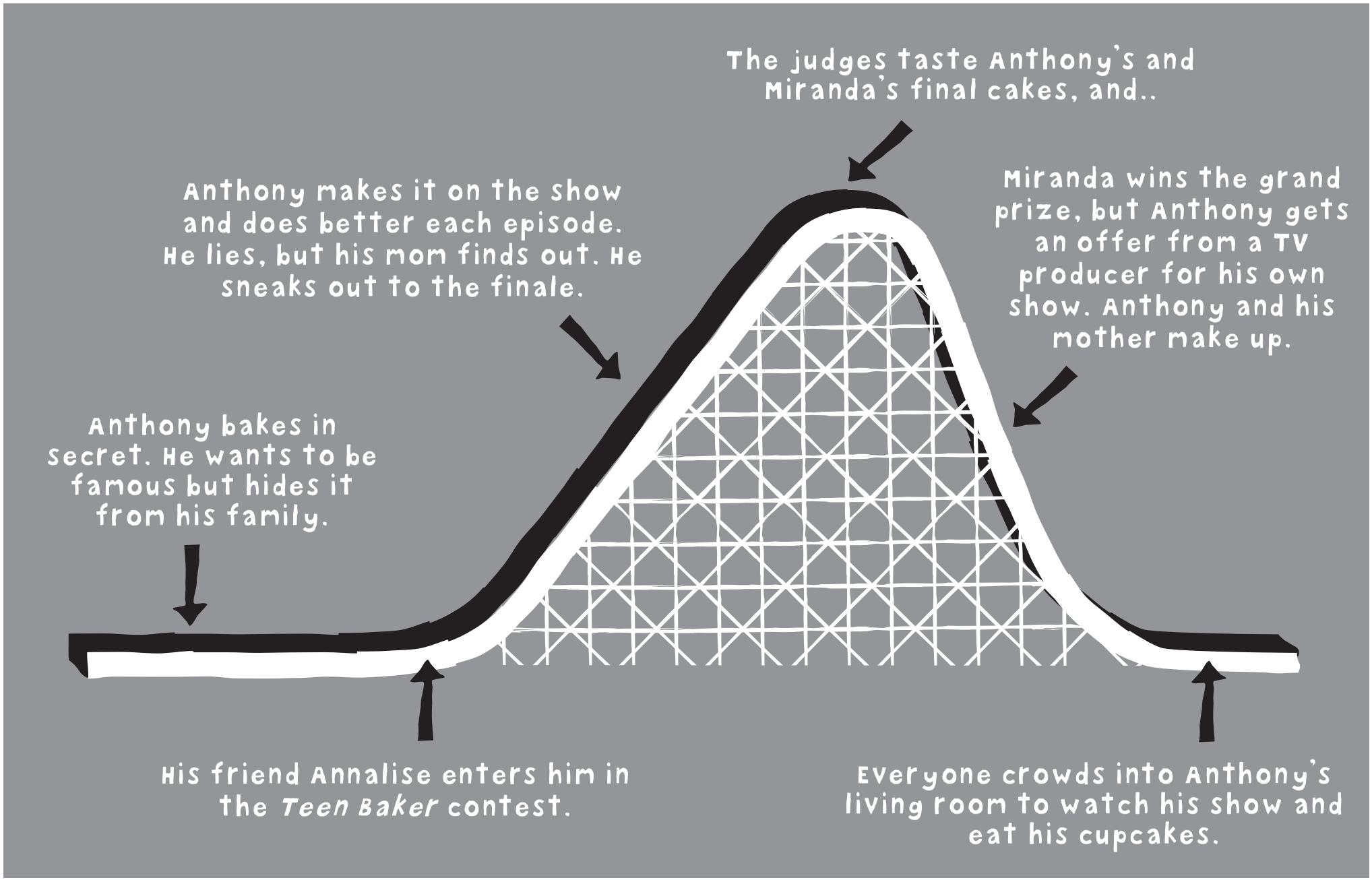
5. Describe your falling action:

In one to two paragraphs, describe a few scenes that happen after the climax. Does your protagonist get what they want? Does the antagonist get defeated? How?

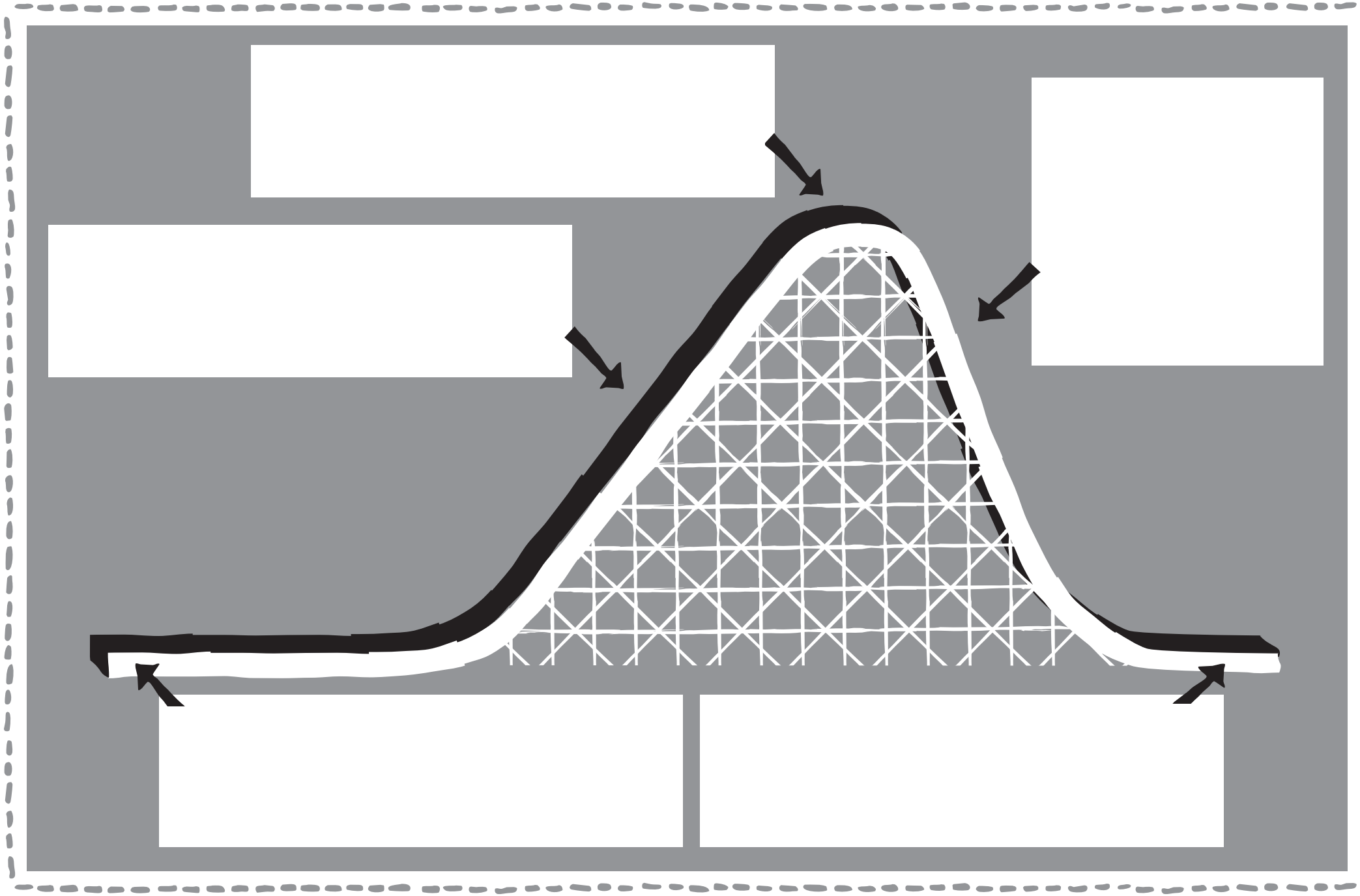
6. Describe your resolution:

In one to two paragraphs, describe the scenes that happen at the very end of your novel. Try to show off how your character and their world have changed. What is normal life like for them now?

Example Plot Rollercoaster



Plot Rollercoaster



FINAL NOTE ON PLOT!

As you probably know, not all rollercoasters have the same track. They all have different hills and drops, different speeds, different twists and turns, and loops and tunnels. The same goes for novels. That is what makes them different and exciting. Sometimes they begin with the inciting incident or work backwards from the resolution to the beginning. Novels are filled with flashbacks, flash-forwards, and unexpected plot twists. And novels don't have to have happy endings either. Just like life, sometimes things don't work out exactly the way you planned them to.

Not all novelists use the plot rollercoaster method, either. If you're feeling stuck or uninspired as you plan or write your novel, you may want to look into some of the other plotting methods listed below:

- ***Jot, Bin, Pants*** *(bit.ly/JotBinPants)*
- ***9-Step Plot Dot*** *(bit.ly/PlotDot)*
- ***"Save the Cat!" Beat Sheet*** *(bit.ly/BeatSheet)*
- ***Katytastic's 3 Act/ 9 Block/ 27 Chapter Outline*** *(bit.ly/27ChapterOutline)*

Exploring Your Setting

Part 1: Settings That Reinforce Characters

Now that you have a good idea of what the plot of your novel is going to be, it's time to really nail down some of the **settings**. The **setting** is where and when your novel takes place. Of course, many novels have more than one setting, ranging from the general (a city, country, or world 100 years ago) to the specific (a character's house or room during the Superbowl). What's great about setting is that you can use it to mirror or reinforce your characters.

For example, if you are writing about a mysterious person, you might place them in a dark, creepy mansion on a hill outside of town. Or, if one of your characters is feeling trapped in their life, they might live in a small town in the middle of nowhere.

Here's us just telling you about Jasmine:
Jasmine was having a hard time. She felt sad and lonely. Her older sister had just left for college and she missed her every day.

Here's us showing all that about Jasmine through the setting we put her in:
Jasmine used to think her bedroom was small, but ever since her sister left for college, it felt too big, like she could get lost inside it. She bounced on the bottom bunk, then climbed the ladder and stretched out on the top. No one told her to move.

She rolled to her side and looked around. "You're my room now," she said to nobody in particular, and the sound echoed around the walls. Her sister had taken the poster of their favorite band with her, and the space where it had hung looked sad and blank. Everything looked sad and blank. Her sister's dresser was swept clean: no necklaces or curling iron or teddy bears cluttered the wood. The closet was half empty.

"Good," said Jasmine. "I'm glad to finally have my own room. It's about time." She pulled the blanket up to her chin. It still smelled like her sister's vanilla perfume. She curled up into a ball and tried to fall asleep, but the room was too quiet, and it took a long time.

Jasmine doesn't even have to speak for herself; her room speaks for her!

For each of the following characters, try to come up with a setting that will reflect or reinforce what you imagine about them. You'll start by thinking about characters we made up, and then move into writing about some of your own. As you write, try to be as detailed as possible. Don't forget colors, sounds, and even smells.

A shy teenager who's starting to come out their her shell

A superhero who has lost their powers

A corrupt politician

An old, eccentric person

Your protagonist

Your antagonist

_____
(supporting character's name)

_____

_____
(supporting character's name)

_____
(supporting character's name)

Part 2: Settings That Enhance Mood

Settings are not only used to reinforce your characters, they can also enhance the different moods in your novel. A **mood** describes the emotional quality of something, whether it is a song, a painting or, in this case, a scene in your novel. **It might help to think of mood as the way you want someone to feel while reading your novel.**

> If you wanted to create a creepy mood for a scene in your novel, you could start with something like:
>
> **"A one-eyed crow blinked from the branch of a dead tree in the yard, while a three-legged dog howled at the moon."**
>
> These images remind us of dark, disturbing things, and show the reader that the scene of the novel is “creepy” without having to tell them directly.

For each of the moods listed below, write some details about a setting that would be appropriate in creating that mood. Think of details about how that place looks, sounds, smells, and feels to visit. Try to write two or three sentences for each mood.

Suspenseful/ Tense

Romantic

Comfortable/peaceful

Now make up three of your own “moods” and describe a setting that would go along with each one.

_____

_____

The last step is to apply your new skills to your upcoming novel. If you mapped out your plot using the previous worksheet, take it out. For the following plot points, describe a setting that would fit the mood of that scene.

Set-up

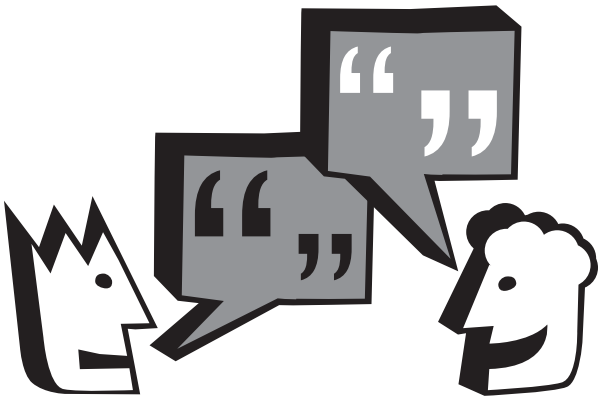
Inciting incident

The climax

A selected scene in your falling action

Resolution

Great, now you have settings that enhance the different moods that are in your novel-to-be. You may want to keep this page close at hand and use it as you write your novel next month.



Writing Really Good Dialogue

You're doing great! You've got some original characters, an action-packed plot, and some settings like no other. In fact, you're moving so fast we're having a hard time keeping up with you. Give us a minute so we can eat a delicious energy bar.

(Cue sounds of delicious munching.)

All right! Now all that's left is learning how to write dialogue. **Dialogue, as you probably know, is what happens when two or more characters speak to one another.** We experience dialogue all the time in our everyday lives.

Here's some dialogue you might've heard today. Notice how the author indents each new quote and places quotation marks after the end marks:

"Hey, dude. How are you?" Isobel said.
"I'm really good. Thanks for asking. And you?" Gabe said.
"Good, thanks," Isobel said.

Of course, this kind of dialogue is important. If we didn't say hello and ask people how they were doing, we might lose a lot of friends, fast. But in a novel, long scenes of daily dialogue end up being boring. Readers want to hear characters make interesting or exciting declarations, or challenge each other, or reveal the whereabouts of hidden treasure.

In a novel, dialogue should do one, if not all, of the following:

1. Reveal character traits and relationships.
2. Move the story forward.
3. Increase the tension.

It should also include indents and quotation marks in the right spots. You may have seen dialogue that does not follow this rule in other places, such as in a comic book or IM chat. When you write a novel, however, follow the rules so that readers won't get confused.

Here's a couple of example exchanges to illustrate each:

Dialogue that reveals character traits and relationships:

"What's the capital of Spain?" Jerry asked, pausing over his crossword puzzle.

Susan looked up from her book and rolled her eyes. "Madrid, duh."

"Why are you so sarcastic all the time?" Jerry slammed his pencil on table. He looked like he was going to cry. "I don't think I can take much more of this."

It's clear from this exchange that Jerry and Susan have some issues. Maybe Susan was playing around, or maybe she wanted to provoke Jerry. Jerry's reaction to Susan shows that he's got some negative emotions bubbling up. Maybe he's feeling sensitive, or maybe they've got a history we don't know yet. We've learned about how these two characters interact—and a lot about who they are—all through a few simple lines of dialogue.

Dialogue that moves the story forward:

The phone rang, and Jerry picked it up.

"Hello?"

There was a moment of silence on the other end.

"Is this Jerry Simmons?" a female voice asked.

"Yeah. Who is this?"

The woman paused. Jerry could hear her take a deep breath.

"Jerry, my name is Dana. I'm your sister."

"If this is a prank, it isn't funny," Jerry said. "My family died a long time ago."

"Not your whole family," Dana said.

Jerry hung up the phone.

Right away, we want to know who this Dana person is, if she's telling the truth, and why Jerry hung up on her. Basically, we want to know what will happen next. In fact, this is a great inciting incident. The discovery of a long-lost sibling is certain to move your story forward in interesting ways.

"Dude, totally!"

In your own novel, you might think about the ways an accent, some slang, or funny quirks of speech can really work to enhance and define your characters. A character that says "Shiver me timbers!" all the time is certainly a different person than a character that says "Dude, totally!"

Dialogue that increases the tension:

"Jerry!" Dana shouted. "We've got to get away from here! The building's gonna blow!"
"We've got to go back!" Jerry wiped the sweat from his eyes.
"Why?"
Jerry pointed at the roof. "Susan's still up there!

Talk about tense. Are Dana and Jerry going to save Susan? It's a matter of life and death here, and this little exchange of dialogue has us wanting more.

A note about *Said*:

At some point in your writing life, you may have gotten advice that sounded something like this: "*Said* is dead! Use other dialogue tags instead, like *exclaimed*, *gasped*, *cried*, *growled*, *hissed*." The list went on and on.

Well, lucky for *said*, it's definitely not dead. In fact, when you're writing dialogue in your novel, you should basically only use "*said*" as the tag to show which character is speaking. Sure, sometimes you can use *asked* or *shouted* or maybe *replied*, but most of the time, good ol' *said* works best.

Why? All those other words distract the reader from what actually matters: what your characters say and do. For example, check this out:

"I'm bored and hungry and I hate this car," said Charlie. He slid down low and kicked the back of his mom's seat.

We don't have to use the word *whined* or *complained*. You know Charlie's whining because of the words he's saying and how he's acting in the back seat! *Said* works just fine.

Dramatic Dialogue Exercise

Think about some of the fascinating conversations you've overheard recently. What kept you tuned in as those people chattered on and on? Chances are, you learned a great deal about those people in just a few short moments and were left wanting to know more. You can do that with your novel dialogue, too!

Start by writing a dramatic conversation, using two of the characters you've created for your novel. Here are some suggestions to get you going:

1. Write a scene of dialogue that creates tension between your protagonist and a supporting character.

2. Write a scene of dialogue where your antagonist reveals something to your protagonist.

3. Write a scene of dialogue where a supporting character tells your protagonist something that will change the course of the protagonist's actions.

4. Write a scene of dialogue that shows how a supporting character and your antagonist interact.

5. Write a scene of dialogue that shows the relationship between your protagonist and your antagonist.

6. Write a scene of dialogue that reveals a plot twist!

Later, if you like what you've written, you can plop this dialogue right into your novel.

Getting Ready for NaNoWriMo

NaNoWriMo Survival Tips

Now that you've planned out your novel, you may be wondering how the heck you're going to be able to write it all in just one month. We've put together a few ideas to help you get ready for your noveling adventure.

First, we'd like to introduce our **Top Five NaNoWriMo Survival Tips**:

Five! **Reward yourself.** Do really nice things for yourself all throughout the month. Every time you reach a word-count milestone, give yourself a reward! Order a pizza, watch a video of puppies cuddling, or text your friends and brag about how many words you've written so far.

Four! **Keep moving.** Get out of that chair and stretch your arms and legs. Do a couple of sit-ups or jumping jacks. Challenge your next-door neighbor to an arm-wrestling competition! Keeping your blood moving will keep the ideas flowing.

Three! **Get plenty of sleep**. Just because you're writing a novel in a month doesn't mean you should neglect sleep. Besides, you never know what kind of interesting characters and settings your dreams might reveal.

Two! **Borrow from your everyday life**. It is totally okay to borrow material from your life, and the lives around you. Professional novelists do this all the time, even if they don't admit it. In fact, writing about your life is a great idea if this is your first novel. Just remember to ask permission first, and consider changing the characters' names.

One! **Never say "I can't."** This is the most important thing to remember next month! There are no *I can't*'s in month-long novel writing. There are plenty of *This is hard*'s and *I'm not sure what to do*'s, but as long as you keep writing, you'll finish your novel.

You can do it.

Remember that tens of thousands of people just like you write a novel in a month every year. No matter how busy you are, or how little you might know about writing a novel, you can finish! If you begin the month thinking you *can*, you are already way ahead of the game.

National Novel Writing Month Contract

This is an agreement that lays out your rights and responsibilities as a novelist. Make sure that both you and a reliable teacher, adult, or friend sign this contract.

NATIONAL NOVEL WRITING MONTH

CONTRACT

I, _____ , hereby pledge my intent to write a _____ -word novel in one month.

By invoking an absurd month-long deadline on such an enormous undertaking, I understand that notions of craft, brilliance, and competency are to be chucked right out the window, where they will remain, ignored, until they are retrieved for the editing process. I understand that I am a talented person, capable of heroic acts of creativity, and I will give myself enough time over the course of the next month to allow my innate gifts to come to the surface, untouched by self-doubt, self-criticism, and other acts of self-bullying.

During the month ahead, I realize I will produce clunky dialogue, clichéd characters, and deeply flawed plots. I agree that all of these things will be left in my rough draft, to be corrected at a later point. I understand my right to withhold my manuscript from all readers (except possibly my teacher) until I deem it complete. I also acknowledge my right as author to substantially inflate the quality of the rough draft and the rigors of the writing process, should such bragging prove useful in garnering me respect, attention, or freedom from household chores.

I acknowledge that the month-long, _____-word goal I set for myself is both wildly challenging and totally achievable, as long as I let no Evil Inner Editors, outside distractions, or normal bedtime hours stand in my way. I also acknowledge that, upon successful completion of the stated writing objective, I am entitled to a period of gleeful celebration lasting days, if not weeks, afterward, and moreover, should I fail to reach my goal, I am entitled to a well-earned break after which I will try again.

_____ _____

YOUR SIGNATURE DATE

_____ _____

TEACHER/PARENT'S/RELIABLE FRIENDS' SIGNATURE DATE

NaNoWriMo Calendar

Your word-count goal for the month may seem impossible from where you're sitting now. That's totally okay. Big creative projects like novel writing are daunting even for professional writers, but we're here to tell you a secret: **If you break big goals into a series of smaller goals, the impossible becomes doable. Easy, even**. To help make next month's challenge a piece of cake, we've come up with this NaNoWriMo Calendar.

It is best to set aside time each day to write, but be realistic. If you can only write three days a week because you have soccer practice, be sure to take that into consideration when filling in this calendar. Jot down the number of hours and words you plan on writing each day.

Tip: If you want to find out just how many words you will need to write each day to make it to your word-count goal, divide your total goal by the number of days you've set aside for writing during the month. For example, if your word-count goal is 10,000, and you can make time to write on 20 days, you will need to write 500 words each day you've scheduled.

I will write from **1**
_____ TIME AM/PM
to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **2**
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to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **3**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **4**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **5**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **6**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **7**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **8**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **9**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **10**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **11**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **12**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **13**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **14**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **15**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **16**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **17**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
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I will write from **18**
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to
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Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **19**
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to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **20**
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to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **21**
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to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **22**
_____ TIME AM/PM
to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **23**
_____ TIME AM/PM
to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **24**
_____ TIME AM/PM
to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **25**
_____ TIME AM/PM
to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **26**
_____ TIME AM/PM
to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **27**
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to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **28**
_____ TIME AM/PM
to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

I will write from **29**
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to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

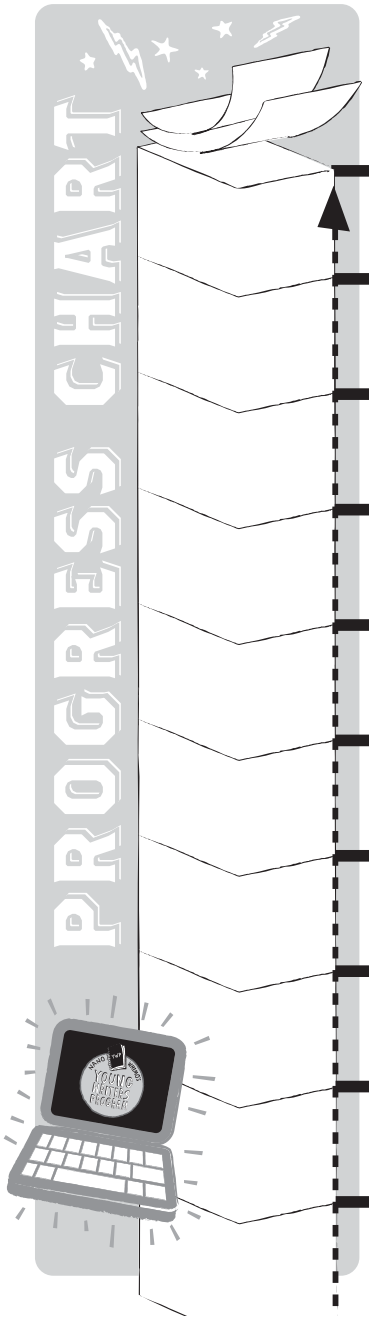
I will write from **30**
_____ TIME AM/PM
to
_____ TIME AM/PM
Word-count goal for the day
_____ AMOUNT

Ready, Set, Write . . . And Keep Writing!

NaNoWriMo's Personal Chart of Noveling Progress

Write your word-count goal at the top of this page, and color this chart in as you make progress on your novel. To find out what each milestone should be, divide your total word-count goal by 10. This number will be how many words you have to write to reach the next milestone.

If your word-count goal is 10,000, you'll need to write 1,000 to reach the first milestone, then another 1,000 (or 2,000 total words) to reach the second milestone, and so on.



YOU WON!
100%

YOUR WORD-COUNT GOAL
_____
(AMOUNT)

Milestone 9= _____ **Words**
(AMOUNT)
90%

Milestone 8= _____ **Words**
(AMOUNT)
80%

Milestone 7= _____ **Words**
(AMOUNT)
70%

Milestone 6= _____ **Words**
(AMOUNT)
60%

Milestone 5= _____ **Words**
(AMOUNT)
50%

Milestone 4= _____ **Words**
(AMOUNT)
40%

Milestone 3= _____ **Words**
(AMOUNT)
30%

Milestone 2= _____ **Words**
(AMOUNT)
20%

Milestone 1= _____ **Words**
(AMOUNT)
10%

Beginnings

Here you are, ready to start your novel. If you are feeling a little nervous, and the blank page and you are having a staring contest, don't worry. It's perfectly natural. Many novelists will tell you that figuring out the first few lines of a novel is the hardest part. That's because a lot is riding on those first lines. Have you ever picked up a novel, read the first page, and said to yourself, “Wow, this is the worst beginning of a book I have ever read. It's so boring, it hurts. I think I'll go ahead and read the whole thing"? We bet not.

Like we said at the end of the plot worksheet, there are several ways to start your novel. You can begin with the inciting incident or work backwards from the resolution to the beginning. Novels are filled with flashbacks, flash-forwards, and unexpected plot twists. So feel free to begin anywhere you like!

You can:

- Start at the beginning.

- Start at your inciting incident.

- Start *in medias res* (in the middle of things).

- Start at the end.

Start at the beginning

As you learned in the "Outlining Your Plot" worksheet, the beginning or set-up of your novel needs to introduce your characters and your conflicts. Starting a novel at the very beginning is a great way to ease your readers in. So many stories and fairy tales begin this way, that your readers will feel right at home in your story almost immediately.

> Leaving was all Marissa could think about.
> Fallbrook would drive any teenage girl crazy. It was the kind of place where nothing ever really happened and, certainly, nothing ever changed.

Try starting your novel at the beginning. Take out your plot worksheet and review your set-up. Make sure you include your protagonist in your beginning. You may also want to introduce your main conflict, and a supporting character or two.

Start with the inciting incident

The inciting incident, as you know, is the moment that changes your protagonist's life and launches the book's adventure. Starting with this moment sucks your readers into your story, and leaves them wondering what will happen next.

> When she woke up later that afternoon with a splitting headache, Marissa could only remember two things: one, someone dressed in an unfamiliar uniform had broken into her home; and two, that person had not been alone.

Now try and begin with the inciting incident. Go back and review your inciting incident and then write a beginning to your novel that starts with this event.

Start *in medias res*

"*In medias res*" (pronounced en *med-ee-ya rez*) is Latin for "in the middle of things." It literally means starting your story right in the middle of the action, and then filling in the rest—explaining who the characters are and what got them into the mess they're in. A lot of suspense, mystery, and action novels begin *in medias res*. It's a great way to draw readers in and to make sure they stick around for all the details.

> Marissa stood face to face with General Fernandez—his fists clenched at his sides and an unforgiving look on his face. Marissa wished she were back at home.
>
> Unfortunately, there was no home for her to return to.

Start *in medias res*. Check out your rising action, falling action, and climax to see if there are any moments you might want to start with.

Start at the end

This one is a bit tricky, but well worth a try! You basically reveal the ending to your readers, but leave just enough mystery and intrigue to keep them reading. Then, you can either work backwards to reveal just how that ending came about or jump to any other point of your novel and continue.

> Though Marissa's home would never be the same after the war, she was glad to finally be back in Fallbrook. The burnt homes and storefronts, though barely recognizable, symbolized the end of one era, and the beginning of the next.

Start at the end. Take a look at your resolution to see if it would make sense to begin at the end.

Now, you have a bunch of beginnings to start with. Recopy your favorite one in your notebook or on your computer and start noveling.

Sub-plotting

The More Plots, the Merrier

A sure-fire way to guarantee that there is enough action in your novel to fill the pages, meet your word count, and keep your readers reading is to add subplots starring your supporting characters. Just like your protagonist and antagonist, your supporting characters have dreams, fears, and weaknesses of their own.

> If your protagonist named Eddie is running for President of the United States, he may have a running mate named Gilda whose sole desire is to promote a "greener" environmental future, but her fear of becoming corrupted by power has her second-guessing her future as Vice President.

Since you may have more than one supporting character, answer the following questions for each of them on a separate piece of paper. You may want to review the character questionnaires you filled out for your supporting characters before you do:

More than anything in the world, _____ wants:
Supporting character's name

they are afraid of:

And their greatest weakness is:

Watching TV is a great way to learn about subplots. Shows like *The Simpsons* are filled with them. Episodes aren't always about Homer. Bart, Lisa, Marge, and even Maggie have adventures of their own that weave in and out of the main plot line. For this reason, we would like you to take a break from noveling and watch some TV. Don't get too excited though. You're not totally off the hook . . .

You have to choose a fictional show—meaning no reality-TV shows—and it can't be a show you really like. Otherwise, you will get too lost in the episode to pay attention to the assignment. Which is to sit down in front of the tube, put your thinking cap on, and write down answers to the following questions in your notebook:

1. Who is the protagonist?

2. How many supporting characters are there? Who are they? And how are they related to the protagonist?

3. What are the subplots? These are the plots that involve the supporting characters going after something they want. They may include the main character, but sometimes the protagonist has little to no connection to the subplot.

4. Do the supporting characters have their own antagonists? Or are they also battling the protagonist's antagonist?

5. What did you notice about the pace of action in the subplot? Was it fast? Slow? Did it happen all at the beginning, or was it spread out through the story?

Bonus Exercise: One Antagonist Sometimes Just Isn't Enough

To add even more conflict to your subplots, create secondary antagonists. Is one of your supporting characters having trouble with an evil school security guard or your antagonist's best friend?

If you would like to add more drama to your story, create a secondary antagonist for a supporting character or two. You can do this by turning back to that handy "Character Questionnaire" and completing it for each new antagonist.

Anytime you feel stuck or bored with your protagonist, go see what your supporting characters are up to. You can totally switch gears and follow their journeys whenever you'd like. Maybe they'll run into your protagonist, maybe they won't. No matter what happens, we promise that all kinds of unexpected things will unfold each time you explore a subplot.

Details, Details, Details

The noveling has begun. You've been writing like a mad person and we commend you for it. Even if you had a great start, you may now be wondering how to keep your word count from waning. One of the easiest ways to get your word count soaring and give your readers description they'll never forget is by adding more **concrete details** to your novel.

Concrete details are those details in your novel that come right out of your five senses.

1. Taste

2. Touch

3. Smell

4. Sight

5. Hearing

"The storm was bad. The boat was about to capsize." = 10 words

"The sound of the storm was deafening, and the metallic taste of bile filled my mouth as I ran frantically back down the stairs to my flooded cabin with an empty bucket. The wind had taken the sail, and three of my best men, and it took all I had not to give up completely.

I carried another bucket of water up the stairs and onto the deck. Both my feet had gone numb from the cold, so it was even more of a struggle to keep my balance as the boat swayed and dipped.

'Captain, we're about to capsize,' Tom shouted over the wind.

He was right, but as their captain, I had to keep trying until the bitter end."

= 117 words

Below, we've listed a few things that could use some spicing up in the detail department. We've also provided you with some Word Banks with synonyms for over-used words. But beware! In general, the solution to over-used words is NOT overly complicated synonyms. The solution is specific, concrete details and dialogue and action and other writing skills you've been learning.

For example, a better way to say "The air smelled nice," is NOT "The air smelled congenial," but instead something like "The air smelled like cut grass and sun-warmed concrete."

In the spaces provided, answer the questions for each of the following items, using your senses to make your descriptions come alive on the page.

The first day of school

What does it feel like to be back at school? (Focus on physical sensation, not emotion!)

What does it smell like?

What do the halls look like?

What sounds stand out?

Word Bank for "Nice"

delightful, kind, likable, pleasant, charming, agreeable, gratifying, lovely, friendly, appealing, gracious, polite, amiable, congenial, affable, benign, comely, suitable, respectable, proper

What does your lunch taste like?

A concert

What does it feel like? (Focus on physical sensation, not emotion!)

What does it smell like?

Word Bank for "Interesting"

captivating,
compelling,
entertaining,
stimulating,
intriguing,
fascinating,
absorbing,
engaging,
enchanting,
challenging,
attractive,
gripping,
riveting,
enthralling,
exhilarating,
mesmerizing,
noteworthy,
striking,
significant

What do you see?

Word Bank for "Funny"

hilarious, comical, humorous, weird, curious, droll, absurd, ridiculous, silly, witty, side-splitting, laughable, odd, peculiar, ludicrous, riotous, hysterical, uproarious, slapstick, zany

What does it sound like?

An abandoned house

How does it feel? (Focus on physical sensation, not emotion!)

What does it smell like?

Word Bank for "Bad"

poor, unsatisfactory, ghastly, dreadful, terrible, appalling, horrific, awful, unacceptable, disappointing, substandard, atrocious, abominable, loathsome, offensive, shoddy, dire, disastrous, grave, ominous

What do you see inside?

What do you hear?

Bonus Exercise: The NaNoWriMo Description Challenge

The following things are a little more difficult to describe, but not impossible. If you can describe the following using all your senses, you will have no problem reaching your word count this November.

A blank white wall

Taste:

Touch:

Smell:

Sight:

Sound:

Word Bank for "Good"

excellent, superior, outstanding, tremendous, fantastic, terrific, exemplary, desirable, beneficial, advantageous, favorable, decent, superlative, proficient, marvelous, useful, exceptional, incredible, altruistic, angelic

Embarrassment

Taste:

Touch:

Smell:

Word Bank for "Evil"

deplorable, malevolent, wicked, immoral, depraved, corrupt, degenerate, diabolical, heinous, sinister, sinful, reprobate, monstrous, fiendish, infernal, demonic, malicious, hateful, iniquitous, nefarious

Sight:

Word Bank for "Fun"

amusing, enjoyable, pleasurable, festive, recreational, exciting, playful, merry, entertaining, appealing, mirthful, jovial, cheerful, celebratory, jollity, convivial, gay, jocular, animated, gleeful

Sound:

Happiness

Taste:

Touch:

Smell:

Sight:

Sound:

Word Bank for "Awesome"

breathtaking, amazing, remarkable, extraordinary, outstanding, incredible, magnificent, wonderful, superb, fantastic, grand, astonishing, majestic, notable, phenomenal, stupendous, spectacular, unparalleled, supreme, striking

Waking up from a bad dream

Taste:

Word Bank for "Stupid"

unintelligent, vacuous, inane, foolish, dimwitted, imbecilic, moronic, senseless, dense, ignorant, idiotic, doltish, simpleminded, nescient, obtuse, imperceptive, absurd, inept, preposterous

Touch:

Smell:

Sight:

Sound:

The universe!

Taste:

Touch:

Smell:

Sight:

Sound:

Does your brain hurt? We thought it might. Try and describe that!

Your hurting brain

Taste:

Touch:

Smell:

Sight:

Sound:

Stupendous job! If you ever feel like your word count is waning, be sure to use your senses and add a lot of concrete details.

Lists, Lists, and Lists of Lists

"During the month of November, Nia was busy with all kinds of activities. Not only was she writing a novel in a month (no easy feat!), but she was also training for a marathon, helping her mom start a food truck business, volunteering at a local homeless shelter, and inventing a new color of hair dye to match the shade of her favorite shoes.

Because she was so busy, her room was a bit of a mess (and that's an understatement). She had dirty clothes under her bed, a half-eaten sandwich on her nightstand, a stack of homework assignments crumpled on her desk, and opened boxes of hair dye strewn across her dresser.

Oh hey, we were just doing one of our favorite noveling activities—taking the items from lists we made called "What Nia Does in November" and "Items in Nia's Room" and putting them right into our novel.

Lists are great because they do a lot of things at once:

1. They help us discover new things about our characters.
2. They reveal plot twists.
2. They help boost word counts (always a plus!).

You can use the suggested list topics below in many different ways. Here are a few ideas:

1. You can write out the lists in your notebook to see if you discover anything interesting to add to your novel. You may discover something new about your characters or plot that will take your novel in a new direction.
2. You can take the items from your lists and write them into your novel as full sentences just like we've done in the example above.
3. You can just read the list of suggested lists below and see if any of them spur new ideas and write from there.

Whichever way you choose to do it, make sure to let your brain loose and just write. You may discover something totally unexpected, like a portal to the fourth dimension in a character's closet, or more about the best day of your protagonist's life.

Write as many of the following lists in your notebook. You can apply these list prompts to *any* or *all* of your characters. The more characters you apply them to, the more you might discover.

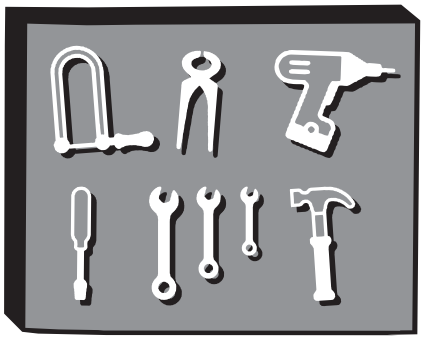
A List of Lists

- Things about this character that no one knows
- Things in this character’s room
- Hidden things in this character's room
- Undiscovered places in this character's town
- Things this character collects
- Things that fascinate this character
- Things that embarrass this character
- Things that disgust this character
- Things in this character’s refrigerator right now
- This character's bad habits
- What this character daydreams about
- What other people say about this character behind their back
- Things that make this character nostalgic
- Things this character might include in a time capsule
- Things this character dreams about while sleeping
- Things this character carries in their pockets or purse
- Things this character obsesses over
- Things this character plans to do in their lifetime

Bonus Exercise

If you like lists and you finish with these, come up with your own list of lists. Anytime you get stuck during NaNoWriMo, take out your list of lists and get writing. A list prompt like “Things my protagonist wants to eat this very moment” may help you get out of a rut and get your story moving again. . . to the taco truck!

I Wrote a Novel! Now What?



The Workshop

Today is a great day for your novel, because today your novel will be read for the first time by one of your peers. Fortunately, that person is also a novelist. They know exactly what you've been through in the last month and will have a lot of useful insight into your work. Unfortunately, this does not mean your work is finished. Your fellow novelist will have questions, comments, and maybe even complaints about what you've written so far. You'll need to consider these and make decisions about what to change.

Below are guidelines you and this fellow novelist—your workshop partner—will follow as you read one another's novels.

- **Read through your partner's draft once without writing comments.** Skim quickly to get an idea of what the story's about and who some of the characters are. Then read it again more carefully.

- **Forget about grammar, spelling, and how you would say something if it were your novel.** Today, focus on the content of the story—the characters, the events, the setting, and the awesome writing techniques your partner used that you've never seen before.

- **Take time to write specific comments about words, sentences, or whole sections that you really like.**

- **Ask lots of questions.** If something doesn't make sense, ask. If you need more detail about a character, ask. If you just want to know how your partner came up with a word, phrase, or idea, ask about it!

- **Be kind—and specific—as you point out things that just aren't "working."** "I lost interest by the end of this paragraph because it's so long" is much more constructive than "I don't like this paragraph."

- **Keep the criticism between you and your partner.** No one else needs to hear about all the typos you noticed in so-and-so's novel!

To get a clearer idea of what "helpful" feedback looks like, compare these two paragraphs.

Not So Helpful

Garth clutched the rail struggling to steady him. Earlier, the captain had assured him that the storm would die down by nightfall. But as the last traces of daylight faded on the horizon, winds picked up and the sea growled ferociously. The ship seemed to moan as brutal waves pounded the deck.

?????

Cool

Suddenly, wind blew salty spray onto Garth's face. He wiped his eyes with one free hand and squinted to regain his vision. That's when he saw it: in the distance, another ship moved towards them.

"Burgess's men are approaching!" Garth cried. "I'd recognize that dastardly ~~evil~~ vessel anywhere!"

not clear

The main problem with these comments is that, like a dull novel, they lack detail. The reader did not explain in their margin comments what they found confusing, cool, or unclear. The reader also did not give any clues as to why they crossed out the word "evil." These comments do not give the writer a lot of concrete guidance to go on.

Now check out the comments below.

More Helpful

Garth clutched the rail struggling to steady him. Earlier, the captain had assured him that the storm would die down by nightfall. But as the last traces of daylight faded on the horizon, winds picked up and the sea growled ferociously. The ship seemed to moan as brutal waves pounded the deck.

The wording here is hard to follow

I love how you make the sea and ship sound alive

Suddenly, wind blew salty spray onto Garth's face. He wiped his eyes with one free hand and squinted to regain his vision. That's when he saw it: in the distance, another ship moved towards them.

"Burgess's men are approaching!" Garth cried. "I'd recognize that dastardly ~~evil~~ vessel anywhere!"

Delete this word -- repetitive

Who is Garth talking to? Explain.

The comments here are more helpful because they are more specific. Now the writer knows what they need to revise, as well as what they are already doing well.

Reader Review Worksheet

Take out your workshop partner's draft and fill in the blanks below. And remember, be specific! Return this sheet to your partner when you are done.

Your workshop partner's name:

_____

Novel Title: _____

1. Based on the beginning, what do you think this novel is about?

2. Who is the most important character so far? What are they like?

3. How could your partner improve their first line and paragraph to grab readers?

4. Where is the story set? What other details about the setting/settings would you like to know?

5. Where else can your partner add more details to tell what things look, sound, smell, or even feel like?

6. List three things you really like about your partner's work so far.

7. List three things your partner can work on as they revise.

Unleash Your Inner Editor

Your Inner Editor is *almost* ready to get to work. You've gotten some helpful editing notes from classmates, but your classmates were not able to read your whole novel—so you still need more information. For example, does your novel's organization make sense? Do you use enough dialogue throughout? This worksheet will help you make a plan for revising your whole novel, not just the first few pages.

Start by recalling all the hopes and dreams you had as you wrote your first draft. What was your goal in writing? Another way to think about this is to ask yourself what you hope readers will think or feel after reading your novel

Here are some example goals:

"I want to move people to understand the potential impact of climate change."

"I want to change the reader's view of punk rock culture."

"I want to show that love really does conquer all."

"I want to make people laugh until they cry."

"I want to show that money isn't everything."

Write your goal below, using a complete sentence:

My Goal for My Novel:

Now use the novel draft you've got with you, as well as your own recollections from writing, to fill out each section below. And keep that goal you wrote on the last page in mind; it will help keep you focused when you start to feel overwhelmed by details.

Note: You may notice that none of the questions below have to do with grammar or typos. You and your Inner Editor will fix those absolutely last, after you've revised your novel in every other way.

I. Organization

1. Is your novel organized in chapters? If so, how did you decide where to make chapter breaks? If you didn't use chapters, why not?

2. Find and read a few transitions between chapters and/or between settings/scenes. Describe some transitions—or links—you created between chapters and/or events to make the organization clear.

3. Name three places in your novel where readers might get confused about the order of events.

- _____
- _____
- _____

4. Name three changes you plan to make as you revise your novel for organization. These changes could be big (moving whole chapters) or small (adding a scene at the end of chapter two to make the flow of events clearer).

- _____
- _____
- _____

II. Voice and Writing Style

1. How would you describe your writing style? Tell how the words and sentences in your novel might sound if read aloud (such as dramatic, dark, simple, minimalistic, stark, dry, funny and light hearted, wordy and highly intellectual, etc.).

2. Skim through your novel, stopping to read up to five paragraphs, each in a different section of your book. Are all the paragraphs written in the same style? If not, what happened?

3. Name three changes you plan to make as you revise your novel for voice and writing style. These changes could be big (not using monster SAT words in every single sentence) or small (not using the word "confabulation," ever).

- _____
- _____
- _____

III. Plot and Conflict

1. In three sentences or fewer, describe the plot of your novel.

2. In one sentence, describe the conflict in your novel.

3. Think about how you plotted your inciting incident, rising action, and so on. Did you stick to your plan when writing? Does the plot still unfold in a way that makes sense? If not, write about the places your plot wandered.

4. Name three changes you plan to make so your novel's plot and conflict are clearer.

- _____
- _____
- _____

IV. Literary Devices that Make Your Novel Fun to Read

1. A literary device is any kind of special trick an author—such as yourself—uses to make a story more dramatic or fun to read. What devices did you use in your novel? First complete the list below with features you like to see in novels, such as suspense, humor, surprises, dialogue that shows without telling, details about settings and characters, interesting sub-plots, flashbacks, flash-forwards, or plot twists. Once you write your list of tricks you like, circle all the listed items *you* used in one color and the ones you did not use in a different color.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Name three ways you plan to revise your novel to improve the dialogue, sensory detail, sub-plots, or any of the other devices you listed above. These changes could be big (tell the whole story backwards!) or small (have your characters crack a joke every once in a while).

- _____
- _____
- _____

Okay, now you have a plan for revising your novel. Let that Inner Editor loose!

Cleaning It Up

All month, we've told you to focus on getting your words on paper. "Don't worry if it's not perfect," we've repeated. "Write as much as possible," we've reminded. Now we take it all back! Well, not really, but here's the deal. You've worked really hard on this novel, and while it doesn't have to be perfect, you also don't want it to be full of typos and grammatical errors.

No matter how you slice it, mistakes really distract readers' attention away from your brilliant story. And who knows what you may do with this novel in the future? Maybe you'll submit it to a contest. Maybe you'll try to get it published. If so, you're going to have to do the dreaded deed anyway: proofreading.

Below are a few areas where writing can get messy. Read the description of each writing woe then grab your very best red pen and clean up the messy sentences!

Tricksters
First, check your spelling. But don't think you can count on your computer's spell check. Spell check won't pick up on tricky words that sound alike, such as *they're* and *there*. You've got to use your own brain to find those mistakes!

> Mark put his foot on the gas petal and imagined an egg under the soul of his shoe. That's what his driving instructor had told him to do. Today, Mark wasn't about to keep that pretend egg hole. He imagined smashing the shell and watching the yoke oozing onto the floor matt as he peeled out of the driveway. "Their never going to find me," he said out loud.

Make Your Mark!

- insert
- delete
- switch
- period
- comma
- quotation marks
- start new paragraph

Punctuation Trepidation
Yes, we'll remind you. Use correct capitalization and commas, semicolons, and quotation marks correctly. Your reader will get lost if you don't!

> Mark knew that he had no time to spare if he was going to have a future with melanie he had to get to the party before she found out what had happened. He took a left on beach road and saw the bonfire ahead but couldn't see her she was gone Melanie it's Mark he cried out.

Pick and Stick
It is important to stay with one verb tense. There are times when you may have to switch (dialogue, flashbacks) but for the most part, pick a tense and stick to it.

> Sparks from the bonfire dance around in the night sky. Mark approached the crowd. He scans the group and tried to find Melanie.

We Agree
Make sure all your subjects and verbs agree. Don't forget to check your pronouns!

> Finally he spotted she near the water. The profile of her face were unmistakable. She had a quirky ski-jump nose. She thought it made her ugly. However, Mark knew every guy at school would want her to be they girlfriend.

Keep It Active
Make sure every sentence has a clear subject that the reader can easily visualize. Avoid using feelings or ideas as subjects; use characters instead. This is called using the "active voice." The subjects always "acts" in active voice.

> As Mark was approached by Melanie, the shore was struck by waves while Mark was struck by his overwhelming nervousness.

Mix It Up!
Have you ever heard the phrase "variety is the spice of life"? It's true for sentences, too. Keep your writing interesting by using different sentence lengths and types. It's a good idea to combine sentences with repetitive words or phrases. Often, just adding a semicolon or a connecting word like "and" will do the job!

> He took a step forward. He opened his mouth. Nothing came out. He looked down at the sand. Melanie began to speak.

Look at the beginning of a novel below. It's got promise, but it's also got some major problems. Wield thy mighty editorial pen!

My ancestors came from planet earth. My great-great-grandfather lives in a place they called new york city. Pictures I have show that it was a huge city with very tall buildings. We don't build up hear on Genesis. We build underground. Its because of the night-fliers. A skyscraper wouldn't last for long here. It would be torched to the ground in a nanosecond. My father reminded me of the danger just last night.

Don't ever leave the compound he said banging his fist on the table.

If he knew what I have planned for tonight he would lock me in my room?

Now be your own world-class editor. Apply this checklist to your own novel.

Inner Editor Proofreading Checklist

- ☐ Every sentence begins with a capital letter.
- ☐ Every proper noun begins with a capital letter.
- ☐ Every sentence has the correct end mark.
- ☐ I use other punctuation marks, including semicolons, correctly.
- ☐ I use a variety of sentence types and lengths.
- ☐ I use a consistent verb tense.
- ☐ All my subjects and verbs agree.
- ☐ All my pronouns agree.
- ☐ I combined sentences where I could.
- ☐ My sentences are written in a clear, active voice.
- ☐ I have checked my spelling.
- ☐ I have really checked my spelling and looked for tricky words.

After you check off all of the following, and you feel good about your book, go to the NaNoWriMo YWP site (ywp.nanowrimo.org) for more opportunities to continue your brilliant writing career!

Choosing an Exceptional Excerpt

Congratulations on completing your novel and getting it ready for publication! Hopefully, you've read your manuscript plenty of times while editing and rewriting. Now it's time to let others in on your hard work.

The Bad News: Most literary publications that print teen writing aren't able to include your *whole* novel. Can you imagine if they got a manuscript from every high schooler who wrote for NaNoWriMo? They would be overwhelmed!

The Good News: Those same publications are very willing and excited to publish *excerpts*—short sections—from your novel. This worksheet is a guide for how to pick the best excerpts to submit and—fingers crossed—get published. (If you're still bummed about the bad news, talk to your teacher or check the NaNoWriMo website for resources to self-publish or submit your entire manuscript.)

In the most general sense, a good excerpt should represent your novel at its best. It should be concise but intriguing; in the best case, it makes the reader want to know more about your plot and characters. Here are some of the traits of an excerpt that really **CALLS** out to publishers and readers:

Character - Remember that readers are most interested in original, well-developed characters. They want people they can love, hate, relate to, and so on. So be sure your excerpt includes a strong sense of at least one major character.

Action - Choose a part of your story where something important, crazy, mysterious, sad, funny happens. In other words, think about an event in your novel that really stands out. Chances are it will also stand out in an excerpt!

Language - You've worked hard on the language in your novel. You've crafted great dialogue and description, and used imagery, metaphors, and similes to put pictures in the reader's mind. What part makes you say, "Wow, I *love* my language here"?

Length - A good, publishable length for an excerpt is generally between 1,000 and 5,000 words (2–10 pages, if your manuscript is double-spaced). Don't worry if you go over or under a little.

Stands on Its Own - Readers may be confused if you choose an excerpt that doesn't make sense without knowing the rest of the story, or a part with too much description. Think of the excerpt as a mini-novel, with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Use the space below to brainstorm a few sections or chapters that might make good excerpts. List three different options, including page numbers for where each excerpt should start and end. What makes each option publication-worthy? Explain in your notes.

Writing a Superior Submission Letter

In order for publishers to consider printing part of your novel, you need to give them some context and background information about what you're sending. Do this by writing a good "submission letter." **A submission letter is a brief note to an editor giving them an idea of who you are and what your work is about.** It doesn't have to be long—just enough to intrigue the editor to read your excerpt.

Consider the important components of a good submission letter, described below. If you have ever written a formal letter, some of these will already be familiar to you! (We've also set this section up as a checklist so that as you write your own letter, you can check to make sure you've included each section.)

☐ **Heading** - This is where you give your name, home or school address, and the date you're sending the letter. (Ask your teacher for a model of how to format these if you're unfamiliar with standard letter writing.) Also include your phone number or e-mail address; this is often the easiest way for editors to contact you.

☐ **Greeting** - "Official" letters don't start with "Dear So-and-So," as you might normally write to your aunt or grandmother. Instead, they simply say the editor's name—"Mr. Jones," "Ms. Jefferson," etc.—with a colon at the end. If you can't find the editor's name, you can use "To Whom It May Concern."

☐ **Background Info** - Tell the editor your name, age, school, and any other information he or she may want to know. You might want to mention NaNoWriMo, too, since many publishers who print teen writing will be familiar with it.

☐ **Novel Info** - Provide the editor with a brief description of your novel. It shouldn't be too detailed—about two or three sentences at most. You may have already done this before you started editing! Check page 79 in your workbook.

☐ **Request** - Here's where you say why you're writing. State very clearly that you are including an excerpt to possibly be printed in the publication. Most editors will know the reason for your letter, but it doesn't hurt to be obvious.

☐ **Excerpt Info** - Discuss the specific excerpt that you have chosen to submit. Include the estimated word count, what happens in the section, and how it fits into the novel as a whole. Close this section by giving yourself a compliment: tell the editors why you think it's a good excerpt. Often, they'll agree.

☐ **Closing** - Politely remind the editor why you've written, and be sure to say thanks for his or her time. This can go a long way! Sign your letter with "Sincerely" and your name.

Now take a look at the parts of a superior submission letter in action:

Heading

Sally Student
3354 Adeline St.
Berkeley, CA 94703
sally.student@gmail.com

November 30, 2010

Greeting

To Whom It May Concern:

Background Info

My name is Sally Student, and I am a ninth grader at Coliseum College Prep High School in Oakland, CA. This November, my class participated in National Novel Writing Month, a nationwide event where students write their own novels. Recently, I completed my book, Space Case. It is about a 14-year-old girl named Jessica who is recruited to be part of NASA's "young astronauts" program. She has a tough time in training camp, but overcomes her obstacles to become the youngest passenger ever on a space mission.

Novel Info

Request

I am submitting an excerpt from Space Case to possibly be included in The Sci-Fi Teen Journal.

Excerpt info

The excerpt is about 3,000 words, and is about the first time Jessica tries the "motion sickness" simulator. She has a terrible time, but realizes she cannot give up. I think it is a great example for kids, and it's a very interesting, action-packed part of my novel.

Closing

Please consider printing my excerpt. Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,
Sally Student

It's finally your turn! Draft your submission letter below using the checklist on page 87 as a guideline. You can even lay that sheet, or the example letter, right next to this one if it helps you remember what to write.

Terrific. Now your first draft is complete. You're ready to make any little edits and proofread it—you remember how to do all that, right?—pop it in a stamped envelope with your excerpt, and voila! You're on your way to publishing success!