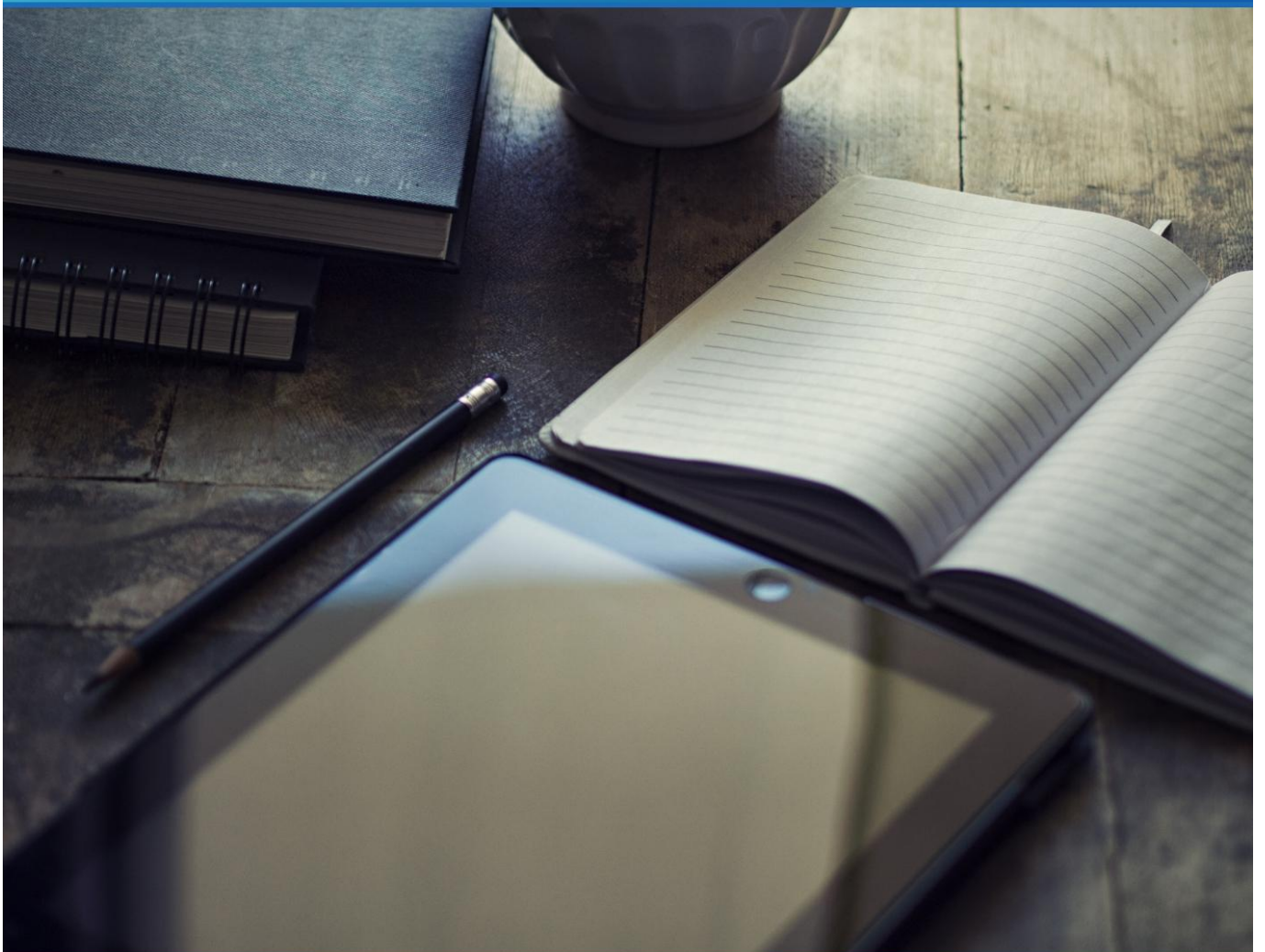


THE TWO-YEAR NOVEL

PLAN, WRITE, EDIT AND PUBLISH
YOUR NOVEL IN 24 MONTHS



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Introduction

Have you ever told yourself something like this:

- “Once I have a bit more time, I’ll start work on that novel.”
- “Once life is less manic, I’ll get back to my novel.”
- “If only I could take a year off work, I could finally write my novel.”

A novel *is* a major undertaking. But it’s also one that can fit around a busy life.

You don’t need all day, every day, to write.

If you can find just 30 minutes each day, you could finish a novel (to the point where you’re sending it out to agents, or self-publishing) in just two years.

Yes, that might not sound quite so impressive as writing a novel in a month (NaNoWriMo) or even publishing a couple of novels every year, like many full-time novelists do – but let’s face it: if you have 30 minutes a day to write, you’re not going to accomplish as much as someone who can spend eight hours a day on their writing.

This ebook is an extended version of my blog post [*How to Write, Edit and Publish a Novel in Two Years – However Busy You Are.*](#)

I’ve linked to lots of further resources at each stage to help you along the way: you might want to keep this ebook handy for reference as you work on your own two-year novel.

For updates and news on future two-year novel resources, join my (completely free) email list here:

www.aliventures.com/newsletter

You’ll get a weekly e-newsletter with a practical, encouraging article on writing and a Q&A section where I tackle writing-related questions (please feel free to send yours to me at ali@aliventures.com). I’ll never share your email address with anyone else, and I’ll never spam you.

What You Need to Make the Two-Year Plan Work

Obviously, I have to make some assumptions about your time available and writing speed. (We'll get to "making time" and "speeding up" a little later on in this ebook.)

For the plan to work, you'll need to:

- Have 30 minutes per day available
(or the equivalent across a week, e.g. two 1 h 45 m sessions).
- Write an average of 500 words per day during the first draft
- Edit at an average pace of 1,000 words per day

The plan allows for:

- Two full drafts (writing 500 words per day)
- One full edit (editing 1,000 words per day)
- A final tidying-up edit (editing 1,500 words per day)
- Plus time for your novel to be with your editor and/or beta readers.

This should result in a novel of 75,000 – 80,000 words, completely finished (from initial idea to ready-to-go book) within two years.

The Whole Plan

I'm going to go through the plan step-by-step, with lots of extra guidance, in a moment ... but for now, here's the whole thing in one place:

Month 1	Research, planning, outlining
Month 2	
Month 3	Drafting (<i>writing 500 words/day</i>)
Month 4	
Month 5	
Month 6	
Month 7	
Month 8	Redrafting (<i>writing 500 words/day</i>)
Month 9	
Month 10	
Month 11	
Month 12	
Month 13	Admin, while novel is with editor / beta readers
Month 14	
Month 15	
Month 16	Editing (<i>editing around 900 words/day</i>)
Month 17	
Month 18	
Month 19	Admin, while novel is with editor / beta readers (yes, again!)
Month 20	
Month 21	Final edit (<i>editing around 1,350 words/day</i>)
Month 22	
Month 23	Proofreading / admin
Month 24	Publishing

Yes, that *is* a lot of redrafting and editing. If all goes smoothly, you may not need all of it. Hurrah! You'll be done early. 😊

I'd strongly suggest, though, proceeding on the assumption that you'll need all of that time. My second novel, [Oblivion](#), took me *four years*, mainly because of the amount of redrafting it took. (Admittedly, I also had two babies while writing it.)

And in case you're looking at the plan and thinking "wait, that's not going to work for *my* book..."

Suggested genre-specific tweaks:

- If you're writing in a research-heavy genre (historical, hard SF, fantasy that involves a ton of world-building) then allow a couple of extra months for research before you start the plan proper.
- If you're writing in a genre where books come in around 50,000 words (romance, some YA) then you should be done with "writing the first draft" and "redrafting the whole dang thing" in 3 – 4 months rather than 5. You'll probably find you can cut down the editing phases too.

Making the Time to Write for 30 Minutes per Day

I'm going to make a rather bold assertion here: **however busy you are, you can carve out an average of 30 minutes per day (3.5 hrs per week) to write.**

You do NOT have to do this as 30 minutes each and every day. Depending on the rest of your life, one of these might suit you better:

- **3 hrs 30 mins once a week** – e.g. 7am–10.30am, Saturday mornings
- **1 hr 45 mins twice a week** – e.g. 8pm–9.45pm, Mondays and Thursdays
- **42 mins five times a week** – e.g. 12.15pm–12.57pm, weekdays
- **15 minutes twice a day** – e.g. 6am–6.15am and 9pm–9.15pm, daily

If your time is subject to a lot of interruptions, or if you end up cancelling writing sessions at the last minute, then *plan time for catch-up sessions.*

For instance, aim to write from 5pm–5.30pm, but if for some reason that doesn't happen, write from 9pm–9.30pm.

If you can't fit half an hour a day (or the equivalent) of writing into your life as-is, figure out what needs to change to make it work. Could you hire a babysitter for two hours, twice a week? Can you rely on ready meals or takeaways three nights a week, so you don't have to spend so much time cooking and washing up? Is there a commitment you can give up to make more time?

The Two Year Plan

Months 1 and 2: Planning, Research and Outlining

End goal: A complete, chapter-by-chapter plan.

Daily target: 30 minutes planning, research and/or outlining.

Or

Weekly target: 3.5 hours planning, research and/or outlining.

I've never been much of a planner when it comes to writing novels. I tend to know the start and the end, and have a rough idea of what happens somewhere in the middle, before I get going.

These days, though, with seriously limited fiction-writing time, I've *made* myself get better at planning. After all, I plan my non-fiction writing in detail – and I know I save a ton of time that way.

If you tend to jump straight into writing with a bare minimum of research and planning, I'd really encourage you to try holding back for the first couple of months. I know that can feel weird and unproductive when you're used to measuring your progress in words written ... but a couple of months now can save you a good year or more of work further down the line.

Months 1 & 2: Potential Sticky Points

#1: Listing all your chapter numbers then wondering what the heck should go in each chapter.

I've never liked chapter-by-chapter plans because I always stall about five chapters in, when I just can't "see" the story ahead.

These days, I plan more iteratively. **I start off with loose, brainstorming notes about what *might* happen in the novel, throwing ideas down on paper and running with those that I like.** Then, as the story starts to take shape in my mind, I can begin to wrestle it into a chapter-by-chapter form.

#2: Getting so excited by your story that you want to jump straight into the writing.

This is a lovely problem to have, really! You're feeling fired up and enthused and you can't wait to get started. If you have a full chapter-by-chapter plan that you're reasonably happy with, then go ahead and start early. If you're not at that stage yet, try to keep working on the plan for just a little longer.

#3: Getting bogged down in the research.

This doesn't tend to happen to me because I don't like research. I also don't write in research-heavy genres (like historical fiction) and I avoid stories that will involve a lot of world-building (like some science fiction and fantasy).

If you normally end up spending months on this stage, either it's becoming a form of procrastination, or you genuinely need that time to do justice to your story. If necessary, allow two extra months at this stage – but don't let research drag on for longer.

Months 1 & 2: Useful Resources

Books:

Structuring Your Novel, by K.M. Weiland – a fantastic book that breaks down the structure of novels into specific moments and stages, with lots of examples from published fiction. There's also a companion workbook available. You can [see the structure as a quick visual chart here](#).

Outlining Your Novel, by K.M. Weiland – some overlap with *Structuring Your Novel*, but with much more focus on things like character and setting.

Articles / blog posts:

[The Snowflake Method for Designing A Novel](#), Randy Ingermanson, *Advanced Fiction Writing* – a popular, step-by-step method of planning a novel, starting with one sentence, then expanding on it.

[Researching Your Novel](#), Susan Dennard, *SusanDennard.com* – an excellent introduction to research, with lots of practical suggestions, handy links, and examples of research Susan has done.

Months 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Writing the First Draft

I think there's a bit of a myth out there that good novels take ages to write.

In my experience, at least, the reason I sometimes take a year or more over a first draft is not because I'm spending days agonising over word choices and character motivations – it's because I focus on the novel for a month or so, hit a busy period in my life (and potentially a sticking point in my novel), and then don't write a word for several months.

If you have a plan (see months 1 & 2) and the commitment to sit down for 30 minutes every day – or the equivalent length of time across a week – then you can and will finish your draft in five months. Chances are, it'll be a better draft than if you'd taken a year or more over it, because you won't have lost track of what you were doing multiple times along the way.

Four Ways to Write More Quickly

If you're *not* a very fast writer, then don't assume that's unchangeable. Try:

1. **Getting rid of anything that distracts you during writing sessions** (put your phone somewhere else, turn off your internet connection).
2. **Planning the scene before you start writing** – you may have done this during the first couple of months, but you might want to revisit and flesh out that plan a little.
3. **Writing as fast as you can, in timed bursts** – e.g. for five minutes or ten minutes at a time – this is a good way to train yourself to write faster more generally.
4. **Ignoring your inner editor.** First drafts are normally rough and ready, full of clunky phrasing, clichés, and other infelicities. Don't stop to perfect every sentence – keep moving.

You might want to track how many words you time to see whether you're speeding up – or at least to give yourself a good benchmark of what to expect from a 30 minute session.

If you feel that averaging 500 words in 30 minutes really isn't achievable, then either extend your sessions a little (40 minutes instead of 30) or fit in an extra session once or twice a week.

Months 3 – 7: Potential Sticky Points

#1: Your novel veers off-course, getting further and further from your initial plan

This isn't normally a problem – often, it's a sign that you've discovered what your story is *really* about. **Rather than ploughing ahead blindly, or trying to wrestle your story back into a plan that's a poor fit, take a few days off from drafting and re-plan.**

(If the new direction means that what's gone before needs to change, don't go back and make those changes yet. Just jot down notes for what you need to rewrite. You may end up changing your mind, or finding a whole new direction.)

#2: You're frequently skipping writing sessions

Every writer has to skip a planned writing session occasionally: life happens. **If you're regularly missing sessions, though, you're going to end up losing momentum.**

If you're just not keen to write at all, did you choose the wrong novel idea to work on? If you're still excited by the idea but struggling to sit down and write, can you try writing at a different time of day or in a different location? If too many other commitments are intruding, is there some way you can reduce these?

#3: You're writing your 500 words each day but you're worried that everything you're producing is rubbish

Everyone (at least, everyone I know!) feels like this during a first draft, at least some of the time. **During the first draft, you've got a hell of a lot to juggle: it's a bit like being a sculptor but having to create the marble itself as well as carve it.**

The redrafting and editing stages exist to help you whip that first draft into shape. Plus, when you re-read the first draft, you will realise that it's better than you feared ... and that some passages are really rather good. (You'll also find you can't always remember writing them.)

Months 3 – 7: Further Reading

Book:

[2k to 10k: Writing Faster, Writing Better, and Writing More of What You Love](#), Rachel Aaron – this is a fantastic ebook, based on Rachel’s very popular blog post [How I Went From Writing 2,000 Words a Day to 10,000 Words a Day](#).

Blog posts:

[30 Tips for Writing a Book in 30 Days](#), Jessica Strawser, *Writer's Digest* – a ton of great advice from lots of different authors, focused on NaNoWriMo but just as useful for anyone writing 500 words/day instead of 1,667.

[9 Tips for Writing a Really Good “Shitty First Draft”](#), Lisa Cron, *Writer Unboxed* – good tips for writers in any genre, many of which overlap with the planning stage.

Months 8, 9, 10, 11, 12: Redrafting the Whole Novel

Daily target: 500 words redrafted.

End goal: A good draft of your novel that you're willing to share with your editor and/or beta readers.

This may sound horrendously inefficient, but it's the only thing that works for me: **I write a whole first draft, print it out, then redraft from scratch.**

Obviously, *some* of the original words make it into the redraft – I may even retype whole sentences or paragraphs (particularly of dialogue).

For me, this complete reworking means that every single sentence gets an overhaul. I enjoy revisiting each scene but getting it *right* (or close to right) – in many ways, this can be more enjoyable than the first draft.

If you prefer to edit what's already there, rather than redraft completely, that's absolutely fine too. I'd still suggest allowing five months, as this method can still take a fair while.

In month eleven, contact your editor (or beta readers). By this point, you hopefully know whether you're on track to finish by the end of month twelve. This means they can plan ahead to slot you in.

(Obviously, if you happen to know that your editor gets booked up months in advance, contact him/her earlier. You may also find that having someone waiting for you to finish helps you stay motivated to carry on.)

Months 8 – 12: Potential Sticky Points

#1: You need to make *big* changes

It's often impossible to really know what your story is until you've written it. Most of my first drafts require *significant* changes – like cutting out several early chapters to speed up the pace, or getting rid of a subplot that I later decided against.

If you know your draft needs extensive revisions, take a deep breath and go for it. You may want to go back to the planning stage here and create a spreadsheet of Draft 1 vs Draft 2 chapters or scenes, so you can keep track of what needs to change.

#2: You want every word to be perfect

As you're revising, it's easy to get bogged down in making it perfect. You're going to do a fair amount more editing after this, so **try to focus on the bigger-picture changes, and don't sweat it if a few lines of dialogue aren't quite ringing true.**

You might find it helps to give yourself a time limit for each scene or chapter (or to keep going until you hit the 500 word target each day, even if that means spending longer than 30 minutes).

#3: You're losing momentum

Many authors find the first draft is a lot of fun – they're discovering the story as they write it. **Editing what you've already got can also be really fun, but after you've spent nine or ten months on this same story, day in, day out, you may find yourself flagging.**

Take a break if you need one. It's better to have two weeks completely away from your writing than to struggle on half-heartedly, only to end up shelving your novel for the next year.

Depending on what stage you've got to, you might also want to share some of the early chapters with a trusted writer friend. Let them know that, at this stage, you're looking for encouragement about what's working rather than critical feedback.

Months 8 – 12: Further Reading

Blog posts:

[Revising Your Novel in 10 Easy Steps](#), Anne Lyle, AnneLyle.com – an in-depth post taking you step by step through the revision process, with lots of practical tips.

[How to Revise Your Novel](#), Bridgid Gallagher, BridgidGallagher.com – if you like to revise by fixing one problem at a time throughout the whole novel, Bridgid explains how.

Months 13, 14, 15: Your Novel is with Beta Readers or Your Editor

Daily target: 30 minutes novel-related work.

End goals:

From your editor or beta readers:

You have a coherent list of final edits to make, both on a bigger-picture level (e.g. “you need to cut about 20,000 words”) and on a fairly detailed level (e.g. “this sentence didn’t make sense”).

Other:

- If you’re self publishing, you have a draft cover design and blurb.
- If you’re submitting to agents, you have a draft cover letter and synopsis.
- You’ve read and returned any manuscripts that *you* are beta-reading.

This might seem like a long time to allow for your novel to be edited, **but unless you’ve been super-organised and booked up your editor months in advance, there’s a good chance that they won’t be able to drop everything to work on your novel.**

If you have several beta readers, as well as giving them plenty of time to read your novel – they’re probably doing it for free – you’ll want to allow time for

asking them questions and perhaps even redrafting bits of material for them to look over again.

(You may well be swapping manuscripts with a friend or two at this stage, in which case you'll all be using some of your "writing" time to read and make notes.)

This is also the point at which to get a cover designer involved. Unless one of your beta readers happens to moonlight as a designer, you'll need to provide a synopsis of the story and an idea of what elements should appear on the cover.

Give everyone you're working with a clear deadline – it's a good idea to make this two or three weeks prior to the end of month 15, so that if their work overruns, it doesn't disrupt you too much.

Unless you're really pushed for time, this is also a good point at which to:

- Draft your blurb and book description (if self-publishing)
- Draft your synopsis and cover letter (if traditional publishing)

You'll have plenty of opportunities to tweak these during the rest of the year.

Months 13 – 15: Potential Sticky Points

#1: Not knowing how to proceed with a particular element

This is the point where "writing a novel" segues into managing the process of producing a book. It's likely to involve some skills you don't have (like cover design) or tasks you've never before attempted (like writing a blurb), and you may not know where to begin.

Happily, there are plenty of great resources out there, from blog posts to books to fellow writers who're a little further along than you – some of which I've linked to in the further reading for this stage. Use these to figure out the basics. Don't let a lack of knowledge become an excuse to stop altogether.

#2: Feeling anxious about working with an editor or beta readers

Your editor and/or your beta readers are on your side. They want your novel to be as good as it can possibly be. Of *course* there'll be a part of you hoping

they'll say, "It's perfect! Don't change a thing!" ... but that's unlikely to happen.

It's often helpful to ask for an overall impression, as well as for detailed feedback: it can be really disheartening to get a list of typos and nitpicks, with your beta reader taking for granted that you know that the plot and characterisation are great.

If your beta readers give vague responses, like "Julie's characterisation seems inconsistent", ask for specific examples – where did the characterisation slip? How would they suggest changing it? (Editors will normally be specific and give suggestions as a matter of course.)

#3: Not getting edits back quickly enough

We're allowing three months here, so you should have plenty of time to get edits back from your editor or beta reader. **If the three months are up, though (or if they've promised to get back to you sooner and you've heard nothing), politely check up with them.**

It's worth asking if they'd be happy to share their overall impression and their edits so far, if they're most of the way through: that way, you can at least begin work on the next stage.

Months 13 – 15: Further Reading

Blog posts:

[Writing Feedback: The Ultimate Guide to Working with Beta Readers](#), Amanda Shofner, The Write Life – lots of excellent advice about finding and working with beta readers

[10 Things Your Freelance Editor Might Not Tell You – But Should](#), Brian Klems, Writers' Digest – a good list of things to be aware of when choosing and hiring an editor

[5 Keys to Book Cover Success](#), Judy Probus, The Book Designer – sensible suggestions on working with a cover designer, with examples on how Judy found and worked with a specific artist.

Months 16, 17, 18: A Full Edit Incorporating Feedback from Your Editor or Beta Readers

Daily target: Editing 800 - 1,000 words.

End goal: A finished novel that comes at least close to publishable standard.

This is a fantastic stage to be at, because it's when your novel starts to really take on its true shape. You've had feedback from experienced readers, and you've probably got a whole list of issues to address – big and small.

While I've given a daily target above, depending on the edits you need to do, you may find that it's easier to work with a weekly average.

Sometimes, you'll be cutting a whole chapter and adding a new one; at other points, you might just be tweaking a handful of sentences in a chapter.

Try to keep moving fairly fast at this stage: keep up the momentum as you watch your story come together. It's easy to get bogged down or to procrastinate on making changes, particularly larger ones – and this is the point at which novels can drag on and on.

As you edit, make sure *you* are happy with the editorial choices you're making. Your editor or beta readers may offer some suggestions that you decide don't suit your conception of the story or the characters. Give them due consideration, but remember, you're the author: you have the final say.

Months 16 – 18: Potential Sticky Points

#1: Finding that one change has a knock-on effect on the rest of your novel

Often, changing something in Chapter 2 will affect a bunch of later chapters. There's no real way round this. To make life easier:

- **Start making any major changes at the earliest point in the novel** (e.g. Sue and Bob are in a romantic relationship, not just friends – or vice versa) – don't jump in at the first chapter where that change becomes significant.

- **Jot down notes at the start of each scene about what needs to change** (e.g. “Sue talks more eagerly about seeing Bob”) so that you don’t forget when you come to it.
- **Consider going through the whole book and making notes** – or putting everyone’s notes into one copy of your manuscript – before you put in actual edits.
- **Keep a particular eye out for characters or objects** that are no longer in scenes they were once in. You may want to do a “find” for their name to make sure you fully eradicate them.

#2: Getting different feedback from different people

If you have multiple people offering feedback, it’s unlikely that they’ll all agree on everything. You’ll probably find some clear points of agreement (e.g. your pacing is off) and those are clearly issues that need addressing.

Sometimes, though, two people will have a completely different view of a scene or character: one person may love it, another may feel it’s not adding anything to the story. Ultimately ... it’s your call. **If you’re unsure what direction you want to go in, either ask for a third opinion, or pick whatever option is the least work for you.**

Months 16 – 18: Further Reading

[A Quick Guide to Beta Reader Etiquette](#), K.M. Weiland, Helping Writers Become Authors – the second part of this post has lots of advice on taking feedback on board, and on knowing when *not* to make changes.

[How to Beta Read](#), Corrine Jackson, CorrineJackson.com – if you’ll be taking on someone’s manuscript in exchange for them reading yours, this post has good advice on being a constructive beta reader.

Months 19 and 20: Further Feedback from Beta Readers

Daily target: 30 minutes novel-related work.

End goal:

From your editor or beta readers:

A list of (hopefully) fairly minor changes and tweaks, probably include some typo-spotting.

Other:

A finished blurb and “product description”, potentially a website or blog online, your copyright page and acknowledgements written, and a good idea of how to get your manuscript formatted and online (even if your plan is “pay someone else to do it”).

This is a good point at which to get one final round of feedback to make sure there are no lingering issues – or to check you’ve not accidentally introduced a new problem. At this point, you should feel pretty happy with the current state of the novel. You may well feel it’s ready to publish straight away.

I’d encourage you to run it past at least one more beta reader, though. This might be someone who read the earlier draft, or it could be someone who’s coming fresh to your novel.

You may want to give them a list of questions or things to look out for, such as:

- Is the pacing too slow in the early chapters?
- Does the relationship between Sue and Bob work for you?
- Have I over-used any words / phrases?

Hopefully, at this stage, you’re not going to get feedback like “the second half of the book feels like a whole different story from the first” or “there are too many subplots going on”. Instead, you’re likely to find that there are just a few little niggles to address – perhaps a scene gets off to a slow start, or some of your dialogue isn’t quite convincing.

While your novel’s off being edited, you can get on with various admin tasks to put you in a good position to publish. The following lists aren’t by any means exhaustive, but should give you some ideas.

If self-publishing:

- Revise your blurb and product description. The blurb is what goes on the back of your book (if you're creating a paperback); the product description is what goes on Amazon in full.
- Finalise your cover with the cover designer, if you've not already done so.

If traditional publishing:

Revise your cover letter and synopsis: at this point, your novel's unlikely to change significantly. You may want to pay your editor to look at these as well as your manuscript (especially if they have significant experience of either being published traditionally or working in an agency or publishing house).

Create a list of agents and/or publishers to contact with your covering letter, synopsis and sample chapters. In the UK, the [Writers' & Artists' Yearbook](#) is a great resource for this; in the US, try [Writers' Market](#).

Any type of publishing:

- Write or finalise the acknowledgements; decide who to dedicate the novel to.
- Create a website, blog or social media accounts. You don't *have* to do this, but if you have the time, it's a good idea. I'd recommend using your name (or pen-name) as the website's URL, if it's available.

Months 19 & 20: Potential Sticky Points

#1: Getting feedback that suggests major changes are still needed

This is really disheartening. Just when you thought you were almost done, you're facing a significant amount of additional work.

First, unless you immediately agree that the changes are needed, I'd suggest getting a second (and probably a third) opinion. While your beta reader might have some interesting suggestions, there's not much point incorporating them into your novel if everyone else is happy with it the way it is.

After that, you need to make a decision on what to do: I cover that in the next section on "Months 21 & 22: Make the Final Edits".

#2: Procrastinating on marketing-related tasks

A lot of writers tell me they "hate marketing". If you're on the shy and retiring side (like many writers are), it can all feel quite daunting.

The hard truth, though, is that if you want *any* sort of success as a writer, you need to get at least somewhat comfortable with marketing. Even if you have a traditional publisher, you'll be expected to do a lot of the marketing legwork yourself.

You might find it's helpful to create a checklist of tasks, or you might want to rope in a slightly more experienced friend who's already been there, done that, and can talk you through it.

If you're stuck on something in particular (I hate writing blurbs), then a quick Google search for advice, plus a look at what other authors are doing, can be incredibly helpful.

Months 19 & 20: Further Reading

Book:

[How to Write a Sizzling Synopsis](#), Bryan Cohen – this book gives you everything you need to know about writing a blurb (which Cohen calls a "synopsis") for your novel. There are lots of examples and concrete tips.

Blog posts:

[A Checklist of Basic Promotion Materials for Indie Authors](#), Chris Robley, BookBaby Blog – use this list for ideas on what to tackle during these months (don't feel you have to do everything!)

[A Step-by-Step Guide to Build Your Author Website](#), Jane Friedman, Writers Digest – an in-depth and detailed guide with explanations of the pros and cons of different ways of creating your website.

Months 21 and 22: Make the Final Edits

Daily target: Editing 1,200 - 1,500 words.

End goal: A truly finished novel!

***Note:** If the previous revising and editing stages went really smoothly, you may well not need two full months. Allow for this time when planning, though – better to finish early than end up rushing to get your novel to your proofreader(s).*

Hopefully, you're not going to have any major changes to make at this stage. **You'll probably find that some chapters can remain almost untouched and others need quite a few detailed tweaks – that's fine.** The daily target here is very much an *average* – you might zoom through 6,000 words of manuscript in one 30 minute session, then spend the next session tackling just 500 words.

If you are facing the prospect of making major changes, take a few days off. Come back to your manuscript and your beta reader or editor's feedback afresh – and go with your gut reaction.

Do you feel, deep down, that they have a good point and that your novel genuinely needs significantly more work? I know how frustrating this can be – but better to allow a couple of extra months now than to rush out something that you know isn't really as good as it should be.

Or do you feel that, while they have an interesting idea, it's not really right (or necessary) for your novel? If so, consider making a few easy tweaks, but avoid wholesale rewrites.

It's worth allowing a little bit of your writing time to contact potential proofreaders (for month 22) and reviewers. Keep in mind that Amazon may

remove reviews from your friends or family, so you might want to cast the net a little further afield (try friends of friends, or people you've met in writing groups or forums).

Months 21 & 22: Potential Sticky Points

#1: Struggling to let go of your novel

After this stage ... you're basically done. Your novel needs a final proof-read to check for any typos or outright errors, but your story is complete.

You may well have mixed feelings about this. I'm usually firmly in the "thank goodness I'm finally shot of this darn thing" camp ... but if this is your first novel, or one you particularly enjoyed working on, it can be very hard to let go.

(I imagine this is a bit like packing your kids off to university, though as mine are currently 3 and 1, I guess it'll be a while before I find out.)

I'd firmly urge you to [avoid over-editing](#) and stick within the 2 month timeframe if you possibly can. You'll write more novels and – even if you can't imagine it right now – you'll fall in love with those too.

#2: Losing track of small but important details

When I get to this stage of editing, I invariably find a whole bunch of little things I need to fix – like two Thursdays in one week, or a minor plot detail that's never actually resolved, or something that happens in Chapter 25 that I need to set up in some small way in Chapter 2.

It's easy to lose track of all of these, so find some way to list them all – whether that's post-it notes on your printed manuscript, comments in Microsoft Word, or bold text at the start of the relevant scene(s).

You may also find that you need to revisit your time-scheme or planning spreadsheet at this point, updating it with anything that's changed during the editing phases.

Months 21 & 22: Further Reading

[Repetition, Redundancy, and Overused Punctuation – Oh My!](#), Christy Distler, Live Write Thrive – a great look at the “micro” level of editing, which you’ll probably be getting onto at this stage.

[Six Easy Tips for Self-Editing Your Fiction](#), Kristen Lamb, Huffington Post – another excellent post on sentence-by-sentence editing, with plenty of examples of what to do (and what *not* to do).

Month 23: Proofreading

Daily target: 30 minutes novel-related work.

End goals:

From your proofreader(s): A finished novel with no typos or other errors.

Other: Reviewers contacted; website / blog / social media accounts (delete as appropriate) ready for visitors; potentially advertising slots booked up; draft email copy to send out to family and friends about your novel.

Don’t try to proofread your novel yourself.

That’s so important that I’ll say it again: *don’t try to proofread your novel yourself.*

It is incredibly hard to spot typos in something you’ve written, because you know what you meant to write.

Instead, find at least one other person (preferably two) and get them to proofread the whole manuscript. Chances are, you’ll need to pay them. If you’re relying on unpaid, amateur help – like a spouse or a friend – then try to get several people to proofread. It’s more of a skill than you might think.

(There’s no reason you can’t *also* proofread your novel yourself, of course. If you’re doing that, you’ll need to get through 3,000 words in each of your 30 minute sessions – which should be very do-able.)

If you'll be self-publishing, this is also the time to contact reviewers, using the list you drew up last month. Send the book to them early in this month and let them know when you expect to publish it.

I'm assuming, here, that any really glaring errors will have been caught during editing. If for whatever reason you think your book has a fair number of typos, hold off on sending it to reviewers until it's been proofread.

Potential Sticky Points

#1: Mistakes get missed in the proofreading

No proofreader will be able to one hundred percent guarantee they'll catch *every* mistake – especially as some “mistakes” are really a matter of personal preference.

I'd always recommend either:

- Hiring a professional proofreader – someone who's experienced at this.

OR

- Getting two or more people to proofread *the whole manuscript*.

(You could even do both, though that might be overkill.)

If you absolutely must do the proofreading yourself and without even a friend as a backup, force yourself to go slowly by reading every single word aloud. You might want to run a pen or pointer under them too.

#2: You're nervous about contacting reviewers

It *is* nerve-wracking to put your work out there for comment or critique.

Whatever responses you get will only be one person's opinion (and a quick look at any bestselling book on Amazon will show that it has its share of one-star reviews).

You may want to ask a couple of friends to review the book first, if only to feel confident that it's good enough to send out more widely. Keep in mind that, if they post their reviews on Amazon, those reviews may be taken down due to their personal connection with you.

Month 23: Further Reading

[10 Risks You Run if You Don't Proofread Your Manuscript](#), Kathy Ide, Live Write Thrive – this post clearly sets out why proofreading matters, with some points relating to authors seeking a traditional publishing deal, and others that are more relevant to self-publishers

[Get Your Eagle Eye On: 10 Tips for Proofreading Your Own Work](#), Leah McClellan, Write to Done – although this advice isn't aimed specifically at novelists, these tips are all great ones if you do want to proofread your novel yourself.

Month 24: Publishing Your Book

Daily target: 30 minutes novel-related work.

End goal: Your book is available to buy online *or* your manuscript is with agents/publishers.

***Note:** for some tasks this month, like getting your book onto Amazon, it'll be useful to work in longer sessions of 1 – 2 hours rather than 30 minutes.*

I'm going to assume that, at a minimum, you're publishing on Amazon in ebook format (by far the most popular option for self-publishers) – you may, of course, be publishing on other ebook sites in addition to this, or producing a paperback version of your book.

If you don't want to self-publish, of course that's fine! Instead, this is your month for sending out your manuscript to agents and publishers. If you've been following the whole plan, you'll have a list of appropriate agents/publishers from months 21 - 22.

Self-publishing your book might sound like quite a technical challenge, but it's become more and more straightforward over the past few years. You may want to simply upload your manuscript to Amazon yourself, or you could outsource this to a freelancer or a company like [Book Baby](#).

[You can find out how to prepare your manuscript for Amazon here:](#)

essentially, you can use a Word document with Styles (not tabs or manual font

size changes) to handle all the formatting – like chapter headings and paragraph indents.

As well as getting your actual manuscript ready to upload, you'll need:

- **A price for your book.** There are *countless* blog posts about pricing your book as a self-publisher: if you want a super quick answer here's what I recommend. Make the ebook \$2.99 in the US and £1.99 in the UK. You'll qualify for the 70% royalty rate but your book will still seem good value.
- **Your finalised book cover from the designer.** If you can, get it full size (to use for a printed version), and in a smaller version (to upload to Amazon as your book's cover image – this will appear on Amazon and on readers' devices).
- **Your "book description"** – this is your blurb plus extra details about you and your book; at this point, you may have some quotes from reviewers to include.
- **A list of keywords for your book.** [Amazon explains how to use those here.](#)
- **Two categories for your book.** [Get Amazon's advice on choosing categories here.](#)
- **A biography for your Author Central page and your Goodreads page** (important to get these set up as soon as your book is on Amazon).
- **Email copy for contacting people about your book** (this might be your blog's readership, for instance, or simply your family, friends, former colleagues...)
- **Any copy you want to put on your website related to your novel.** You might use the blurb, for instance, but also include information about your writing process.

Month 24: Potential Sticky Points

#1: Struggling to get everything set up

Take things step by step. When you upload your book to Amazon, there are two pages of information to fill out for the book itself. You'll also need to fill in information about you (tax related) in order to actually get paid.

If you get stuck at any point, or if you're not sure what a particular box on the form requires, just search online for the answer. If you have a writer friend who's already self-published a book, you might want to get them to lend you a hand – or even sit with you while you upload your manuscript, if they have the time.

#2: Trying to do too much

Now, in an ideal world, you'd launch your novel to great fanfare and excitement. **If you're doing this in 30 minutes per day, though, rather than as a full time job – you've done brilliantly just to get your novel out there on the virtual shelves.**

There's nothing wrong with taking things a little more slowly – of course you'll want to do as much marketing as possible, but it doesn't all need to be done right away.

In fact, you may find you're better off waiting a bit – it gives you more time to gather reviews (and it may look better to readers if these appear gradually rather than all at once) and if you do discover a typo or other problem with the book, you can fix it before too many people download it.

#3: Spending the next year on marketing instead of writing

While marketing is crucial if you want to get your book in front of potential customers, it's not a great idea to stop writing altogether in order to market. **There's only so much you can achieve with just one book out there – and many successful self-published authors recommend that you focus, initially, on simply writing more books.**

You'll also find that some marketing avenues (like paying for a spot in popular ebook-related email newsletters) are only viable once you've got quite a lot of reviews, or once you've saved up a chunk of money to spend on advertising.

So don't let marketing take over – start on your next book. You might decide to do very little marketing (or none at all) until you've got two or three books out: that's fine too. The great things about ebooks and print-on-demand is that your book never goes out of stock. It doesn't matter how slowly it sells – you can get back to it, and market it, once you're ready.

Month 24: Further Reading

[How to Self-Publish Your Book Through Amazon](#), Deborah L. Jacobs, Forbes – while this post doesn't get into the nitty-gritty of uploading your manuscript, it gives a great overview of the various branches of Amazon that you might end up using (including Author Central and the Affiliate programme).

[The Self-Publishing Checklist: Editorial, Production and Distribution](#), Jane Friedman, JaneFriedman.com – this handy checklist works for novels and non-fiction books, covering print as well as digital publication.

Where Next?

The Aliventures Blog and Newsletter

My blog Aliventures will help you master the art, craft and business of writing, with a new post about one aspect of writing every week. You can choose to get blog posts straight to your email inbox – just sign up in the blog sidebar.



As a member of the Aliventures newsletter, you get a little library of short ebooks about writing (including this one)! You can find the others here:

Your free ebooks: aliventures.com/secret-newsletter

Password: **alinewsletter**

The weekly newsletter email normally comes out on Thursdays and includes a short article about writing.

If there's anything you'd like to see in the newsletter emails, or on the blog, just let me know. I use the newsletter for quick tips and updates, and the blog for more in-depth content.

The Aliventures Courses

I used to offer one-to-one writing coaching, but I found it frustrating to only be able to work with a few writers – and only with those who could afford my hourly rate.

So, for the past few years, I've been running online courses instead. Each of the courses lasts for six weeks (with a further four weeks of support), and each is designed to be hands-on and practical. The courses are \$60 each – which includes all materials and as much support as you need.

You can find the full list of courses here – and you can join the waiting list for any courses that you're interested in:

aliventures.com/courses

The Aliventures Writing Challenges

As well as running courses on specific topics, I run regular Writing Challenges. These are a great opportunity to make significant progress with a writing project, alongside other writers.

The Writing Challenges last six weeks and are suitable for everyone: it doesn't matter what you write, or what stage you're at. You set your own goals, and check-in with the group each week to tell us how you got on. Along the way, we have prize draws to help you stay motivated!

You can find out all about the Writing Challenges, and check out when the next one is happening, here:

aliventures.com/challenges

About Ali

I've been a writer since my teens, when I started work on my first novel – and I've been a professional writer since 2008, when I quit my day job in IT to be a freelancer.

I write regularly for many big websites – including writing/ blogging sites like Craft Your Content, ProBlogger, Daily Writing Tips and Write to Done.

I have a BA (Hons) in English from Cambridge University and an MA in Creative and Life Writing from Goldsmiths College, University of London.

I live in Leeds in the UK with my husband Paul, my daughter Kitty and my son Nick.

You can find me:

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- On Facebook – [facebook.com/aliventures](#)
- Or email me ali@aliventures.com

