



## Best Tips for your First Novel

A few basics that can help you get over the many hurdles to completing a first draft.

- 1) Work out what you are writing about.** Spend some time developing your premise before you start. The premise is what the book is about at a deeper level. The plot is what happens, the premise is the concept that drives plot. It often starts with the question 'What if....' and that's your compass. Without this, the project can easily stall (often between chapter 2 & 4) because you've run dry on plot and the story doesn't have a sense of direction.
- 2) Help us visualise your story.** Without going overboard on description, give us some idea of where the action is taking place. Even if a scene is mainly dialogue, we still need a sense of where they are - in front of the fire? Under a tree? At a boxing match? Paint the picture.
- 3) Don't overpopulate your world.** Yes, JK Rowling had literally hundreds of characters but remember every one needs to have a purpose and the more characters you have the more complex it will get. If you give your character six sisters living nearby we're going to expect some back-story and an appearance by each with their own personality. If the six sisters don't each have a role to play - delete five of them.
- 4) Don't give all your characters names starting with the same letter.** It's thoroughly confusing when the sisters are Sarah, Samantha, Sybil, Susannah, Sandy and Saffron.
- 5) Become aware of the difference between 'show' and 'tell' in your own writing.** There is a good quote from Mark Twain that makes the point: *'Don't tell me the old lady screamed. Bring her on and let her scream'*. It's not to say that scenes cannot be summarised but you can spend pages describing someone's personality when, if you allowed them to step onto the page and speak, we would get it and make our own interpretation. A lot of 'telling' is actually back-story and comes before we have a commitment to the characters in the main story.
- 6) Keep your plot fairly simple.** Insanely complex plots can become overwhelming for first-timers because making it believable can be very challenging. Perhaps start with a simple main plot line and weave in sub-plots in the next draft, so you build complexity incrementally.
- 7) Don't give up.** There's no point racing towards publication, make it a habit that you enjoy. Being accountable to delivering a chapter every month to someone (a writing friend or group) might offer the discipline you need to keep going. The more you write the more committed you will be.
- 8) It doesn't need to be great writing.** The first draft is 'drafting', the rewriting is actually the craft of 'writing', so don't be too hard on yourself for not being a flamin' genius every day, just get it down and keep going.

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