

A Novel in 30 Days? Here's How to Do It (Plus, 6 Ways You'll Become a Better Writer at the Same Time!)

By Li Vasquez-Noone

Write a novel in 30 days? Yes, it really is possible! Here's an easy way to do it, and improve your writing at the same time.

I'm talking about National Novel Writing Month, or NaNoWriMo, which is held in November of each year. Billed as "30 days and nights of literary abandon," it's a contest to write a novel over the course of the month. To "win," you must write at least 50,000 words during that time. There are no entry fees, and no prizes, except for the satisfaction of knowing you did it.

But can writing fast fiction really help you become a better writer?

Well, for the past three years, I've written novels during NaNoWriMo, and the experience has helped my writing immensely. Here are five ways that NaNoWriMo will help you become a better writer, too.

Improve your storytelling.

As a writer, you learn that it's important to weave

a story into whatever you write. But let's face it, often you must focus on facts — making things up is usually frowned on. So writing fiction can be a somewhat foreign experience.

But writing fiction can also take you outside of your comfort zone and force you to think about

Want to write a novel?

Join me and over 250,000 others this November! Sign up for free at www.nanowrimo.org. This will allow you access to your own profile page where you can upload details about your novel, a word count scoreboard to keep track of your progress, as well as pep talks and writers' forums to keep you motivated. If you write at least 50,000 words in 30 days, you'll receive an electronic winner's certificate and badge. Plus, you'll forever have the satisfaction of knowing you wrote a novel in an insanely short amount of time.

what makes a compelling story. And this skill will transfer to your business writing or copywriting.

Once you get a taste for making stuff up, you can try your hand at other literary techniques. For instance, last year I tried epistolary writing, which is telling a story through letters or documents. I was writing a story that took place in present day, but had a subplot with two characters writing letters to each other in the 1930s. It forced me to really stretch and think about the details of when these characters lived, what they would have talked about, and how to keep it interesting.

Increase your writing speed.

To get through 50,000 words in 30 days, you need to write a minimum of 1,667 words each day. Every day. If you miss a day, you will have to make it up before the end of the month. And all this writing takes place around life, work, family, friends, pets, holidays, sniffles, and anything else going on.

To maintain this pace, you must write quickly, and you'll likely get even faster over the course of the month. It takes me a few hours to craft a well written, 500-word article, depending on the subject. But during NaNoWriMo, I can knock out 800 to 1,000 words in an hour. I'm not saying they're great words ... but hey, they can always be edited later!

Learn to silence your inner editor.

To paraphrase Voltaire, perfect is the enemy of good. Have you ever tried to write something perfectly on the first try, only to become so frustrated by your internal editor that you can't get much written at all? When you take on writing a novel in one month, one of the first things you learn is that you just need to *write*. Editing can wait till next month. You'll learn to write down every thought in the name of word count, and sift through it later. When you allow yourself to simply write, you'll be amazed at what you come up with.

Write in Diverse Genres to Improve Your Skills.

My first NaNoWriMo novel was a feminist romance called *Gamble with the Heart*. The second year, I wrote a murder mystery, *Stimulus for Murder*. And last year, I wrote a literary novel set in both the present day and the early 20th century titled, *Find My Way Home*. This year I'm planning to write 30 short stories that will be tied together with common themes and characters.

Develop a habit of writing every day.

Keeping up with your word count forces you to write just about every day, which is a habit that nearly every successful writer has developed. Ernest Hemingway wrote 500 words every day early in the morning, before the heat set in. Stephen King writes 10 pages a day, every day, no matter what.

At the end of the month, it will be second nature to sit down and write every day.

Discover your unique writing schedule.

Writing a novel in 30 days allows you to try out different writing techniques, styles, and times of day. You'll have the chance to discover what works for you. During NaNoWriMo, I've tried getting up early to write, staying up late, writing at my office desk, at the kitchen table, in my car at lunch, and in a notebook while standing in line at the grocery store.

I've discovered I like to get up an hour early and write while still half asleep, and I also like to change things up and drag my laptop computer from my desk to the kitchen table or living room couch. But I do not like to write longhand on paper, and I don't write as well when I go elsewhere, like the library or sitting in my car.

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become a better writer (Continued)

Gain confidence as a writer.

Sure, NaNoWriMo takes a lot of time and focus, and can be stressful. It forces you to really push your limits. But when you reach for such a lofty goal and succeed, the sense of confidence you gain will be worth it. It shows you that you're capable of anything. And the ability to say, "I'm a novelist" ... is priceless.

Are you ready to improve your writing skills, as

well as take on the enormous challenge of writing a novel in 30 days? Join me this year and try NaNoWriMo! You'll impress yourself with what your imagination comes up with, and who knows? You may just get a publishable novel out of it. ■

Editor's Note: For more tips from Li on how to survive NaNoWriMo, visit <http://www.awaion-line.com/2012/02/unleash-your-inner-novelist/>

cool tools

Can You Zap Writer's Block with this "Extreme" App?

By Mindy McHorse

[Write or Die](#), a popular web application for writers, claims to put the "prod" in productivity.

The concept for the app, which you can get on your desktop or iPad, is to make writing goals tangible. It was created by "Dr. Wicked," who says writers need rewards when they succeed and penalties when they don't.

The online writing lab lets you set your own options, including a word count goal and a time limit. You can also disable both the backspace and the save command until you reach your word count goal.

Plus, you set your own consequence level. If you take too much time between words, the "Gentle" consequence is a pop-up box. The "Normal" setting plays a blaring sound until you start writing again. And Kamikaze mode starts un-writing your work if you stop for too long. Our thoughts? It's a useful tool for putting words on a page, especially if you want to increase your writing speed. But being a Barefoot Writer is about writing for satisfaction, not punishment. Keep this in mind if you use the app to challenge yourself or to time your daily writing. ■

