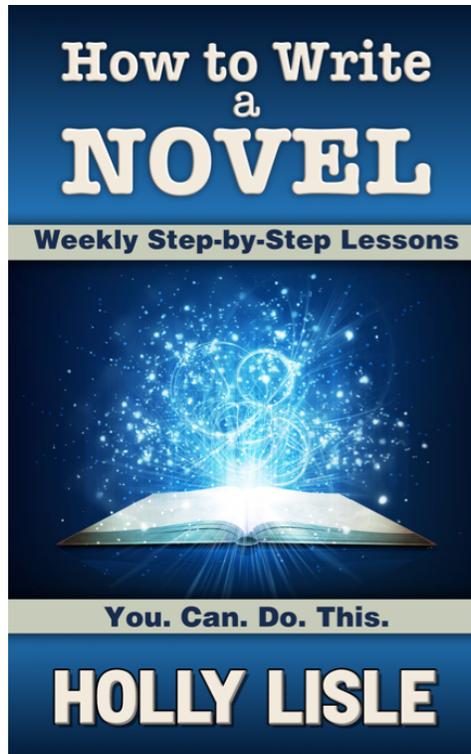


How to Write a Novel



**37 Weeks from “No Idea”
to Completed First Draft
HOLLY LISLE**

HowToWriteANovelClass.com

How to Write a Novel is a COMPLETE Writing Class.

What's in the class?

37 planned lessons -- may include more if students ask questions that I haven't answered that take a full lesson to answer -- with...

- Concepts broken down and demonstrated, and clear, step-by-step instructions
- Worksheets
- Demos
- Live forum where you can discuss the class and your story, get tips, post progress reports, ask questions, and get help, encouragement, and practical support
- AND -- the big one -- regular, paced, scheduled writing on your novel with the goal of completing your first draft by the end of class.

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In this Early-Bird Edition of the class, I'm still writing lessons, but at least half of the planned class will be complete in RAW FIRST DRAFT FORM when I re-open registration.

The course may include MORE lessons than planned because students ask questions I have not covered, or because I discover some area where folks need deeper help with something too complex to be covered effectively in one lesson and one week

If the course runs longer, the students in class will not be charged for extra lessons.

HOWEVER, the price of later classes will reflect the additional content

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COURSE DETAILS

My Objectives for This Class

I have three objectives I want to hit in creating this class. They are:

- That by the end of the class you will be comfortable using the different steps it takes to write a good novel
- That you will get the help you need to get past any previous attempts that failed, starting fresh with a new project on day one, but learning how to go back later and figure out when wrong with any past crashes
- That by the end of the class (approximately 37 weeks from the time you start), you will have finished the first draft of your novel

So that means:

Each week there will be a lesson that you'll read. I'll do my best to keep it short, succinct, and targeted to JUST the subject of the week, so that you can move quickly from reading to doing.

Each week, you'll learn one technique that you'll employ in that week's fiction writing, so that you get both the concept of the technique and hands-on experience with its practical application.

Most weeks, you'll have either a worksheet or a demo (and sometimes both), to show you exactly what I'm describing in the lesson.

Each week, you'll have a writing assignment, with a specific word count to hit. ***Don't panic.*** You choose the word count, you set up your own writing schedule (though I'll show you how to do both of these things and give yourself a workable schedule), and you use the HTWAN forum to touch bases to get both encouragement and help when you need it

So that by the end of the class you will be comfortable using the different steps it takes to write your next novel, and all the novels that follow.

NEXT Novel?

Yes. Because if you do your weekly writing assignment, by the time you finish this class, you will finish the novel you write in this class at about the same time.

The first four weeks are preparation and setup — and once you've mastered the techniques and concepts involved, you'll be able to work through this part in a day or two.

After that, you'll be writing your novel for the next thirty-three weeks. That part? Well, it depends on you, on the book, on how big you want it to be when you're finished, and on LIFE, and what life decides to do while you're writing. But you can spend a year (or more) writing bigger books if you want, or a few months writing shorter novels if you're so inclined.

The process will fit what you want to do with it. So let's look at the process.

How to Write a Novel is a learning=by=doing class

No one learns to write by reading about writing.

We all learn to write well by first writing... ahhh... not so well.

By failing, getting back on our feet, and trying again. Some folks find the learning process simple, some find it incredibly difficult, but if you're willing to dig in and push yourself, to not make excuses, and to work hard — and believe me, real, focused work will be required — you CAN do this.

INTRO & SECTION ONE: BUILDING YOUR NOVEL'S BARE BONES

LESSON 1: Starting Right — Developing Novel-Sized Ideas

If you've ever asked the question, "Why do I always end up stuck in the middle of my book, lost trying to figure out what happens next?" the answer is, "Your idea wasn't big enough for a novel."

And the answer to the follow-up question, "How do I make sure I have a novel-sized idea before I start writing?" is the step-by- step process in Lesson One.

LESSON 2: Concept Testing — Planning Before Writing (The Path to Cleaner First Drafts)

Once you have an idea that's big enough and rich enough to support a novel, you need to work through some different ways the story could go.

This is not outlining — it's in fact a sort of anti-outline thought process that is friendly to both planners and pantsers.

LESSON 3: Novel-Worthy Characters: How to Make Yours Measure Up

With some places where you can take your story figured out, you're now ready to bring in characters who are big enough and deep enough to sustain 40,000 words (or more) of fiction without ever once falling prey to "the conflict argument" or the dreaded "big misunderstanding."

LESSON 4: Immersive Conflict — Grabbing Readers and Not. Letting. GO.

Now it's time to figure out the conflicts (not conflict arguments) that are going to push your characters forward in spite of fear, anger, loss. This is where your own passion comes front and center, and where you make sure that the story you're writing matters to you.

SECTION TWO: BUILDING YOUR WRITING PROCESS

LESSON 5: Writing the Killer First Page (and All the Ones that Follow)

First lines do matter. But I have almost never written my FINAL first page in first draft. And my first-draft first page is almost always the heaviest-revised page in my revision, AFTER I know what the story has become and needs to be.

However, there are specific things you have to do in your first page to allow you to keep your story flowing, and even if you don't get them perfect in the first draft, you can still make sure your story starts with a strong opening.

LESSON 6: The Next Scene, and Going Deep into "Show, Don't Tell"

It's the first thing experienced writers tell new writers.

Problem is, telling writers to do this is pointless, and SHOWING writers how to do this takes time, effort, and demonstrations of exactly what you mean and how you do it.

This week, I show. This week, you start winning your fight with "show, don't tell."

LESSON 7: Novel Structures, and How to Work Inside Them

Where writing a novel is concerned, there are rigid structures, flexible structures, seat-of-the-pants structures, and mix-and-match processes that can work if you're careful. There is no One True Way to write, but there are a lot of good ways to help your novel turn out the way you want, and this week you'll learn a number of approaches to help you make that happen.

LESSON 8: Getting Words On The Page: Building Your Daily Process

By the time you get to this lesson, you've been writing your actual book for a several weeks, and you will have had the chance to see where you're strong, and where you're weak. Here's the thing: You do not write **a book**. You write words that create pages. And how you embrace the process of doing this determines your success or failure.

LESSON 9: Genre at Novel Length: What HAS to Be There

First, what you want in the story determines its value to YOU, and I'll be blunt here. What you want is what matters most in the story. But once you know that, you do need to be able to figure out who else might want to read it, and you need to be able to figure out what needs to be in the story for those folks to find it and love it. This lesson... is how to do THAT.

SECTION THREE: BUILDING YOUR BASIC TECHNIQUE

LESSON 10: Pacing the Plot — Building and Maintaining Suspense

Getting the suspense into the story is enormous fun, and one of my favorite things about writing fiction. It takes some focus, a bit of planning (but nowhere near as much as you might think), and a willingness to be mean to your characters. But this is where you start building the rewards for the readers who will come to love everything you do.

LESSON 11: Immersive Dialogue — Fixing Talking Heads and Other Conversational Disasters

The dreaded “Floating Heads of Fiction Syndrome” — in which long strings of dialogue happen in the middle of no place by characters doing nothing — are counterbalanced by the equally horrific “Compulsive Choreographer Disease,” in which each character’s every thought, movement, facial expression, and emotion is detailed inside of settings so overburdened by detail that Victorian maidens hardened to flowery excess would be driven to their fainting couches.

Writing good dialogue, which usually lives somewhere in the middle, is an attainable first-draft skill, and this week you’ll learn that.

LESSON 12: Avoiding the TOO MUCH RESEARCH Swamp

Writers have to "eat the elephant" -- go deep into researching some elements of their story to make sure that they have story-critical details right.

But what defines a Story-Critical Detail, and when do you know you know enough, so you can stop researching and get back to writing? (Big Secret: You never stop writing to research. So along with learning when you've found what you need, you'll learn how to research WHILE you write.)

LESSON 13: Writing Good Descriptions (That Aren't Exposition)

Remember those Victorian maidens and the fainting couches back when you were getting a grip on dialogue?

They're back. Because most writers end up either skipping description entirely or jamming so much useless furniture into every scene that the poor reader can't breathe.

You'll learn how to show your readers what THEY think matters, and to walk them around what really matters (so you can get the "OMG jaw-drop" from them later when they see how cleverly you misdirected them) and you'll learn how to do this while never, ever, EVER cheating. Being good at active description is so cool it's almost a superpower. This week, you start trying on capes.

LESSON 14: The Writer's Guide to Transition Scenes: Shooting "But..."

So right here I'm going to tell you flat out that in good fiction, there is no such thing as a transition SCENE. "But..." you say, "I know they're boring, but I need to get my characters from Point A to Point B." So this week, you learn how to shoot "But I need to..." and find out all the really cool things you can INSTEAD.

SECTION FOUR: BUILDING YOUR INTERMEDIATE TECHNIQUE

LESSON 15: The Fun and Friendly Approach to Writing Meaningful Fiction: Allegory + Theme = The Subtext Your Readers WANT

Allegory, theme, and subtext are generally considered the sole realm of literary novelists.

But when you tell stories that meaningful to yourself AND your reader, you make the experience of writing your fiction rewarding for yourself, and the act of reading your work MEMORABLE for your fans.

Allegory, theme, and subtext are the secret sauce that compels a reader pick up your book a second and third time, and read it again because every time they read it, they discover something new. Something deeper.

I've written intentional, planned subtext and themes in every novel I've written since the first one that sold -- *Fire in the Mist*. And this week you'll learn THAT.

LESSON 16: Building Your Novel's RIGHT Voice and Tone

VOICE is “single first person, multiple third person, omniscient, alternating first and third” or some other options.

TONE is funny, snarky, sincere, smart-ass, scary, creepy, romantic, elegant, and anything and everything else writers have been doing since Chaucer sent his gang of pilgrims down the road to seek the Martyr of Canterbury...

and to entertain themselves, had each tell a story in his or her own voice. Some are lovely, some are raunchy, but all of them create characters and a world that are deeply and recognizably real.

Chaucer did this so well those stories hold up today—630-ish years later.

You can learn this skill, and this week you'll start putting it to work in your novel.

LESSON 17: How to Figure Out "What Happens Next?"

You have a pretty good beginning, and you know that in first draft, “pretty good” is all you’re looking for. But now you’re working into the middle, and you’ve just discovered (perhaps not for the first time) that even small novels are big, and that while your characters are sitting around drinking coffee and thinking, you’re falling asleep.

And as it stands, anyone fool enough to pick up your story is going to fall into a coma.

But figuring out a GOOD “what happens next” isn’t as hard as it feels.

It takes some shifts in your thinking, but you can do this.

LESSON 18: Twists: Building Hidden, Revealed, and Other Core Plot Developments

Short stories have one twist. Novels have a lot of them — smaller reveals that surprise individual characters, the one big twist with which you resolve the ending...

And a lot of these you come up with as you're writing. The actual twists and reveals are pretty hard to plan in advance, but the process of setting up and writing your story so you can come up with them as you need them builds on last week's lesson, and adds some additional, well...

twists...

that get you where you need to go.

LESSON 19: Story Fitting — Having Enough Good Stuff (and No Filler)

This is the final week of focusing on your story core. This week, you learn how to go through what you've built and make sure that it will hold up, and that there's enough MEAT, and that it's good, and that everything fits the story you want to tell, and that you aren't drifting off on destructive tangents that will wreck the book.

SECTION FIVE: BUILDING YOUR ADVANCED TECHNIQUE

LESSON 20: Getting Your Character Into GOOD Corners

There are as many kinds of story corners as there are kinds of fiction, but all of them have this in common. They absolutely must be relevant to the story, to the character, and to the conflict.

These essential limitations make it easier, not harder, for you to get your character into the right kind of trouble every single time.

LESSON 21: Getting Your Character OUT of Good Corners

You've put your character in a tight spot. So far, so good. But NOW that he's dangling off the cliff by his fingertips and the vulture sitting on his head is banging its beak into his skull to hurry along his imminent demise, you know that sending someone along to rescue him is cheating.

But you have no clue how to figure out how he can get himself out of the mess on his own. This week, you learn that.

LESSON 22: Writing TIGHT Story Middles at Novel Length

I want to clear up a common misconception. Writing tight doesn't mean that you're cramming in action scene after action scene, and writing cliffhanger after cliffhanger.

It means that you're only writing scenes that develop your story characters, and actions that show these characters doing things that move your story forward.

Writing tight takes practice, but learning the technique for identifying what fits the definition of "tight" and what doesn't is pretty straightforward.

LESSON 23: Identifying, Pacing, Tracking, and Resolving Story Arcs

Very few novels are just one story. In a simple, straightforward romance novel (chosen as an example because two folks falling in love is a pretty common story), you have the protagonist's story, the love interest's story, the story of what's keeping them apart, and the story of what allows them to overcome that, which finally brings them together. Depending on how you decided to write it, that's either three or four story arcs right there.

But..

Throw in a best friend for each, a meddling antagonist who wants to keep them apart, and some overarching story world conflict, and you're up to seven-ish separate but intertwined stories... and you're on the path to missing things, losing track of who does what when with whom and how... and you don't want this to happen.

So here's where you learn how to write story arcs that interweave, bring what you want to each section of your story, and then resolve at just the right time.

SECTION SIX: DEALING WITH MID-BOOK PROBLEMS

LESSON 24: Invasive Ideas — Protecting Your Novel from Wrong Directions

You're writing along, words falling on the page beautifully, telling a story that you love, and suddenly you know exactly what the story needs to make it perfect.

You're certain you can see how right it is, how much it's going to improve what's already good.

So you jump. And sometimes you're absolutely right.

Sometimes, though, the idea is a trap, and will wreck your story. In this lesson, learn how to tell the difference between the genuinely great idea and the horrible wreck you're gonna end up having to fix.

LESSON 25: I Turned Right, My Story Veered Left... Now We're BOTH Lost

Picking up where we left off... You know how to tell good ideas from book-wreckers. Most of the time, anyway.

But sometimes... Sometimes in spite of your caution, the siren song of a beautiful idea drags you in, bad things happen, and you can find yourself utterly lost and standing in the wreckage of a story you broke.

Ask me how I know.

Best case, this doesn't happen to you while you're on tight deadline, and require you to throw away 60,000 words. Twice. (Again, been there, done

that). But if you write enough, and love your work enough, sooner or later, you're going to go down the rabbit hole.

This week, you learn how to get back out.

LESSON 26: Fixing Broken Plots BEFORE You Hit "The End"

There is no such thing as an irreparably broken book. In revision, if you're willing to put in the work and the project means enough to you to commit the time and effort necessary, you can fix ANY story.

But there are a lot of things you can fix as you write, BEFORE you move to revision, and this week, you're going to work on building "running fixes" to your plot.

SECTION SEVEN: DEALING WITH LATE and UNEXPECTED PROBLEMS

LESSON 27: Thin Prose, Fat Prose: The Jack Spratt Dilemma

I use pretty much everything in every story I write. Thin prose, fat prose, and middling prose.

Thin prose is light, tight, short, sharp, crisp.

Fat prose embraces beauty, elegance, metaphor and simile, the scent of rain before a storm, and the angle of the perfect shoulder illuminated and accented by the golden light of late afternoon.

But there's a time and a place for each. And in this lesson you'll learn when, where, why, and how to write each.

LESSON 28: The Series Temptation: Keeping the Story Inside One Book

Characters tend to want to expand their roles.

Plots tend to grow subplots.

Conflicts that get bigger and deeper tend to spawn mini-storms in their wake.

And the book you planned for 50,000 words (or that your contract requires you to bring in at 50,000 words) suddenly looks impossible to finish in your allotted space.

You have to get tough here. You'll learn to identify what stays, what dies, and what might possibly be salvageable in a second story...

AFTER you've written a real ending to this one.

LESSON 29: The Story That's Bigger than Your Writing Skills

Sooner or later — if you keep writing regularly — you're going to have the best, most amazing, most compelling story idea you've ever had.

It's going to be so far above anything you've ever done that you know it could define your entire career. But as you start writing it, you stall. You know what the story has to be, but you don't know how YOU can make it the story you envision.

In this lesson, you'll learn how to know when you've hit that idea, and how to work with it.

LESSON 30: Knowing When and How to Cut and Simplify DURING First Draft

You're running long, or you've suddenly realized you have a dozen separate stories going, or you realize to your dismay that your cast of important characters exceeds the number of extras cast on the movie "Titanic"... And you can't find your way through the thicket of people and conflicts to the part you were excited about when you started. Here's how to clear the chaos with the least amount of damage.

SECTION EIGHT: HANGING ON WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

LESSON 31: Keeping the Faith: Getting THIS Novel Done In Spite of Fear, Doubt, and Distraction

And then there's this.

The moment when you think, "I've made a terrible mistake. How did I ever think this would be a good story? I need to walk away and start something new."

This moment will come.

When it comes... you shouldn't walk away. Finishing the first draft of this book is your promise to your Muse (your creative right brain) that you can follow through. That you can be trusted with another good idea in the future.

Finishing what you start is make-or-break.

And you can do this. In this lesson, I'll show you how.

LESSON 32: Big Book or Story & Sequel?

Sometimes the answer to "I love what I'm getting, but this book is way bigger than I'd planned," is to up your stakes, increase your tension, and turn it into a magnificent 200,000-word epic.

Sometimes the answer is to figure out where you can take it apart and turn it into two books (or more) at the word length you'd planned. I'll walk you through the steps to identifying your best path, and then making the changes that will let you follow through.

LESSON 33: Unsticking Stuck Stories

Way back in Lesson 2, you did some concept testing, and you built some tools you could use down the road if things went wrong.

This is where you pull them out, and here's how you use them late in the game.

LESSON 34: Affirming Theme, Allegory, and Passion

You have a theme, you have an allegory, and you're writing your passion (at least if you didn't ignore me when I walked you through the process of building these way back at the beginning).

But have you followed through? You're getting close to the end, and theme, allegory, and passion are what YOU get out of your story — but they're also the part of what you're writing that will make your story matter to your True Fans.

So learn how to make sure you have this right.

SECTION NINE: FINISHING THE NOVEL

LESSON 35: Endings With Multiple Antagonists and Multiple Climaxes

There are folks who can only be happy if they're playing a game on the highest difficulty.

Writing-wise, I frequently find myself in this camp. Even if you don't, though, you'll still find a stack of useful fixes in this lesson that make sure your characters resolve well, and your ending and your plot(s) and subplot(s) hold together.

LESSON 36: Finding or Building (and Recognizing) Your RIGHT Ending

I always write with an ending in mind. By the time I actually write the ending, though, I've almost always come up with something better — sometimes something spectacular.

There are things a good ending has to do. There are a few extras that a great ending brings to the story. This week, you learn where to find the keys to your great ending, and how to write it when you get there.

LESSON 37: Bringing It All Home: Story, Characters, World, and Promise

And now we're down to it. This week, you finish the book. You use the elements of your RIGHT ending that you built last week, you wrap it up, you write the end. And when you're done, you go through what you'd planned,

you compare it to what you have, and when you've got an ending you can live with, you write THE END.

You graduate from the class (but you can take it again as often as you like, and use it with every next novel until you know the process inside and out).

And you celebrate! You've written a complete first-draft novel.

Revision awaits... but before you start into that, savor the joy of your success in writing your book.

THIS moment is beautiful, and wonderful, and something you can remember with joy and delight for the rest of your life.

You put a challenge in front of yourself, you followed through, and you persevered.

That's the future... But it's an achievable future.

You want to make it YOUR future?

You can do this!

The Splinters Version & The Early-Bird Price

This takes a bit of explaining. Please bear with me.

The reason the price on this class is so good is that I'm still writing the lessons. Creating the class AS PEOPLE are taking it.

I know this sounds strange, but this is the way I've found that allows me to fund the creation of bigger classes, to make sure that every lesson is relevant to the students taking it, to test worksheets and processes on the first (and second) group going through to make them work better.

Because I do this, sometimes it takes me more than one week to write a lesson. So students don't always get their lesson on the same day of every week.

Because I do this, I'm working quickly, and the first run of lessons always have typos and other errors that I go back after the class is completely done, and fix (with a Canary Class of students going through and bug-hunting for me).

THE BONUS

Folks in the Early-Bird Group will be able to brainstorm the class bonus with the Super-Early-Birds, suggest possible bonuses, and vote the final selection of bonuses that are actually buildable by me.

So the first (and second) groups of students consist of me and the folks upon whom I'm testing the lessons.

If you let me test the class on you, you get a special price, you get a special bonus -- and you get all in-version upgrades, including the inevitable Canary Class upgrade, for free.

Because having folks who are willing to help me test a class and endure the Splinters means the world to me.

Holly Lisle

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Holly". The letters are cursive and connected, with a long vertical tail on the final letter.

Novelist, Writing Course Creator

HowToWriteANovelClass.com