

# How to Write a Book

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Co-authored by Grant Faulkner, MA , Christopher M. Osborne, PhD , and 315 contributors

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Anyone with a story to tell can write a book, either for their own enjoyment or to [publish](#) for all to see. Getting started is often the hardest part, so set up a good workspace, create a regular writing schedule, and stay motivated to keep writing something every day. Focus on developing a “big idea” that drives your narrative, as well as at least one unforgettable character and realistic conflicts. Once you’ve written and revised your manuscript, consider your [publishing options](#) to get it into readers’ hands.

Method  
1

## Method 1 of 3: Staying Focused and Productive



**1 Clarify why you’re writing a book.** Before you start writing, or typing, or even thinking too much about your book, be honest with yourself about your reasons for writing it. Are you hoping to become rich and famous? Is it a necessity for advancing your career? Do you dream of seeing your name on a book cover? Do you simply have a great story that you want to share with the world?<sup>[1]</sup>

- Writing a book is both a vocation and an avocation—that is, both a job and a passion. Figure out why you need to write, and why you want to write.
- Keep your goal or goals in mind as motivation. Just remember to keep them realistic. You probably won’t become the next J.K. Rowling by your first novel.



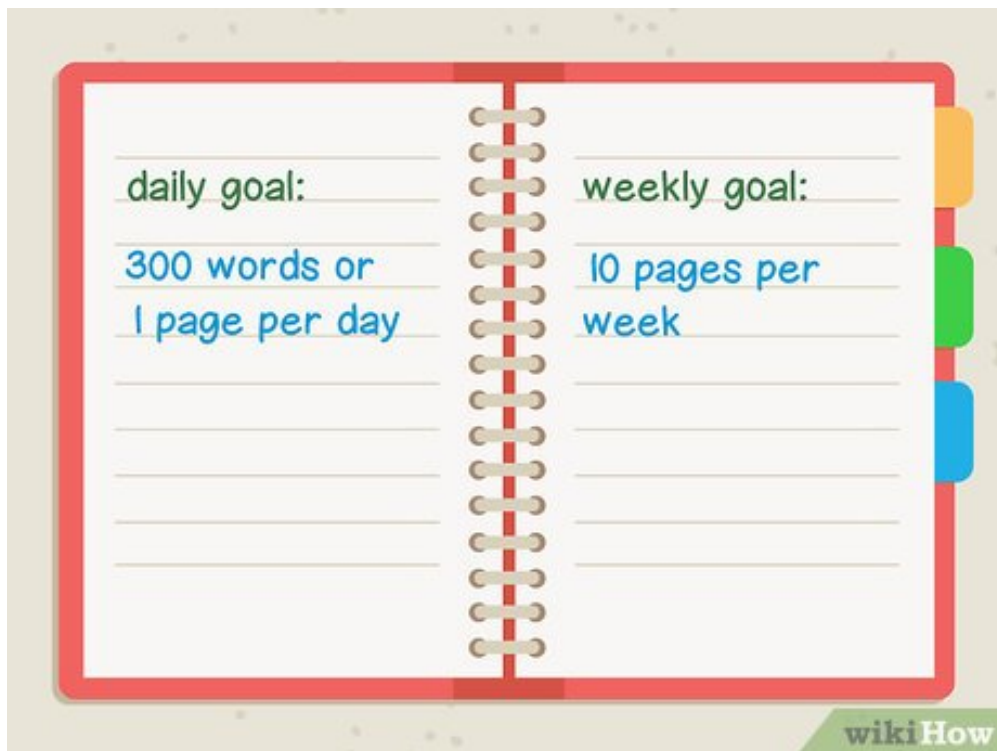
**2 Set up a [workspace](#) that works for you.** There's no one ideal workspace for every writer. Some prefer a quiet desk in an isolated room, while others work best amidst the clatter of a coffee shop. Most writers, though, tend to work best with minimal distractions and with easy access to any materials they may need. Also, make sure that the place you choose works with your preferred writing medium. If you want to write on a desktop, make sure to have a desk and plug point nearby!<sup>[2]</sup>

- While moving from a cafe to a park bench to the library may work for you, consider setting up a single workspace that you always—and only—use for writing.
- Set up your writing space so you have any supplies or references that you'll need close at hand. That way, you won't lose your focus looking for a pen, ink cartridge, or thesaurus.
- Pick a sturdy, supportive [chair](#)—it's easy to lose focus if your back aches!



**3 Schedule writing into your daily routine.** It's easy to say that writing occurs in spurts of inspiration, so you should just be ready to drop everything and write when the spark of creativity hits you. However, this is also a great way to not get any writing done. Instead, try specifically blocking off a writing time into your daily schedule.<sup>[3]</sup>

- The average book writer should probably look to set aside 30 minutes to 2 hours for writing, at least 5 days per week—and ideally every day.
- Block out a time when you tend to be most alert and prolific—for instance, 10:30-11:45 AM every day.
- Scheduling in writing time may mean scheduling out other things in your life. It's up to you to decide if it's worth it or not.



**4 Establish daily and weekly writing goals.** Instead of hoping to produce 10 pages at a time during random spurts of creativity, try setting a goal to write 1 page each day. Set your writing goal based on your writing speed and any specific deadlines, and try not to adjust it after you've set it.<sup>[4]</sup>

- For instance, if you've given yourself a 1-year deadline for writing a complete first draft of a 100,000-word novel, you'll need to write about 300 words (about 1 typed page) every day.
- Or, if you are required to turn in a doctoral dissertation draft that's about 350 pages long in 1 year, you'll likewise need to write about 1 page per day.



**5 Write without worrying about editing.** This is another key component of writing on a set schedule—just focus on writing something now, and figure out if it's any good or how it needs to be fixed up later. To finish a book, live by the mantra, "write fast, edit slow."<sup>[5]</sup>

- You're nearly always going to spend at least as much time editing a book as you will initially writing it, so worry about the editing part later. Just focus on getting something down on paper that will need to be edited. Don't worry about spelling mistakes!
- If you simply can't help but edit some as you write, set aside a specific, small amount of time at the end of each writing session for editing. For instance, you might use the last 15 minutes of your daily 90-minute writing time to do some light editing of that day's work.

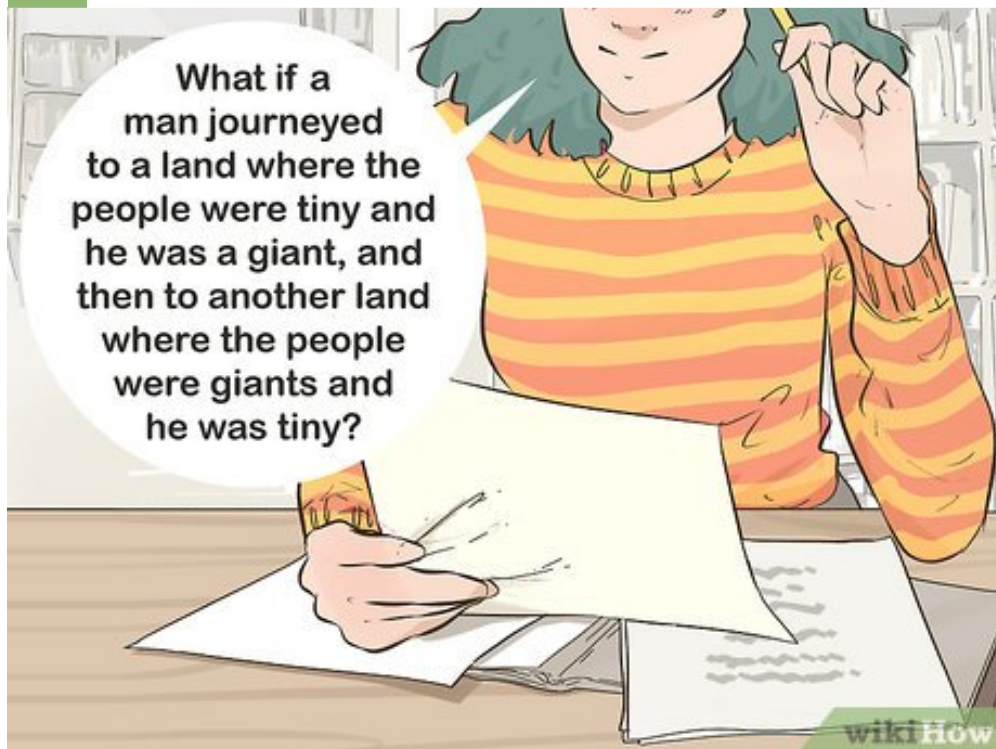




**6 Get feedback early and often.** Don't wait until you've completed an entire book draft before showing it to anyone. Let someone you trust look over each chapter and offer primarily "big picture" feedback—that is, general opinions on the clarity and quality of the work, as opposed to close editing for style and grammar.<sup>[6]</sup>

- Depending on your circumstances, you might be working with an editor, have committee members you can hand over chapter drafts to, or have a group of fellow writers who share their works-in-progress back and forth. Alternatively, show a friend or family member.
- You'll go through many rounds of **feedback** and revisions before your book is published. Don't get discouraged—it's all part of the process of writing the best book you can!

## Method 2 of 3: Creating a Great Story



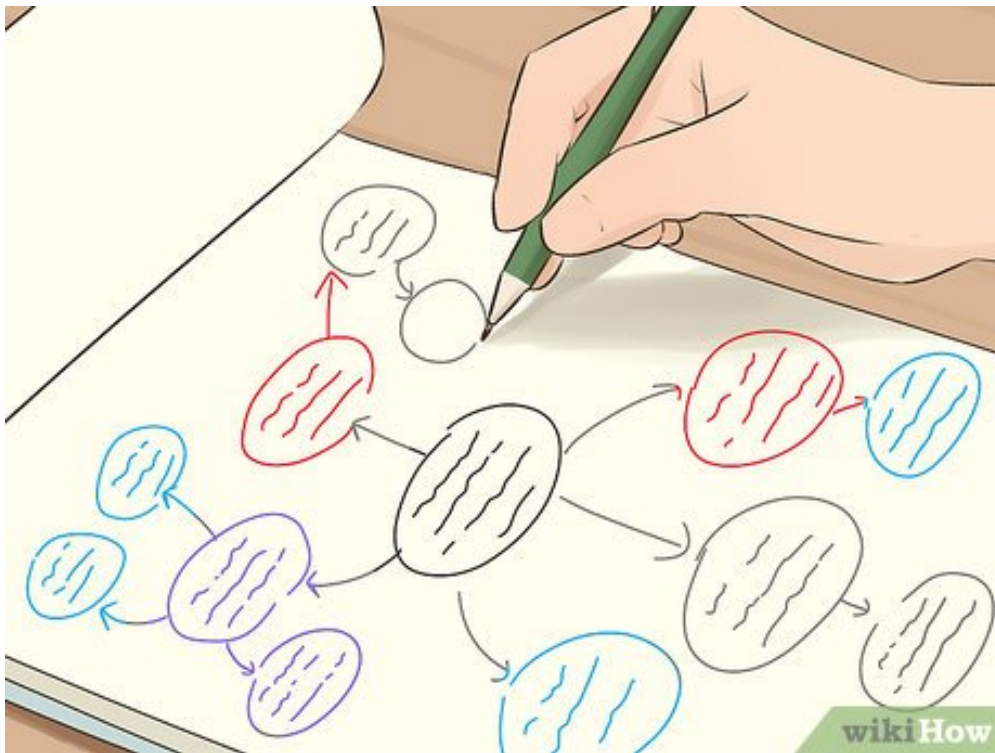
**1 Start with a big, captivating idea.** This is easier said than done, of course, but it's essential to writing a good book. Whether you're writing fiction or nonfiction, you need a concept that will hold your fascination throughout the long process of writing and editing, and that will also captivate your readers.<sup>[7]</sup>

- Start with the "big picture" first, and worry about filling in the finer details later on.
- Brainstorm themes, scenarios, or ideas that intrigue you. Write them down, think about them for a while, and figure out which one you're most passionate about.
- For instance: "What if a man journeyed to a land where the people were tiny and he was a giant, and then to another land where the people were giants and he was tiny?"



- 2 Research your big idea to build your expertise.** If you're writing a nonfiction book, you'll obviously need to deeply research your subject matter in order to write about it effectively. Even fictional works, though, should be grounded in some degree of reality.[8]
- For instance, a sci-fi adventure set in space will be more effective if the technology draws at least a small degree from reality.
  - Or, if you're writing a crime drama, you might do research into how the police typically investigate crimes of the type you're depicting.





**3 Break your big idea into manageable pieces.** If your focus each day is to write about the American Civil War or the goings-on in a fantastical “Middle Earth,” you may become paralyzed by the immensity of the task. Instead, divide up your larger concept into smaller components that feel more manageable to tackle.[9]

- For instance, instead of waking up thinking “I need to write about the Civil War,” you might tell yourself, “I’m going to write about General Grant’s military strategy today.”
- These “manageable pieces” may end up being your book’s chapters, but not necessarily so.

#### EXPERT TIP



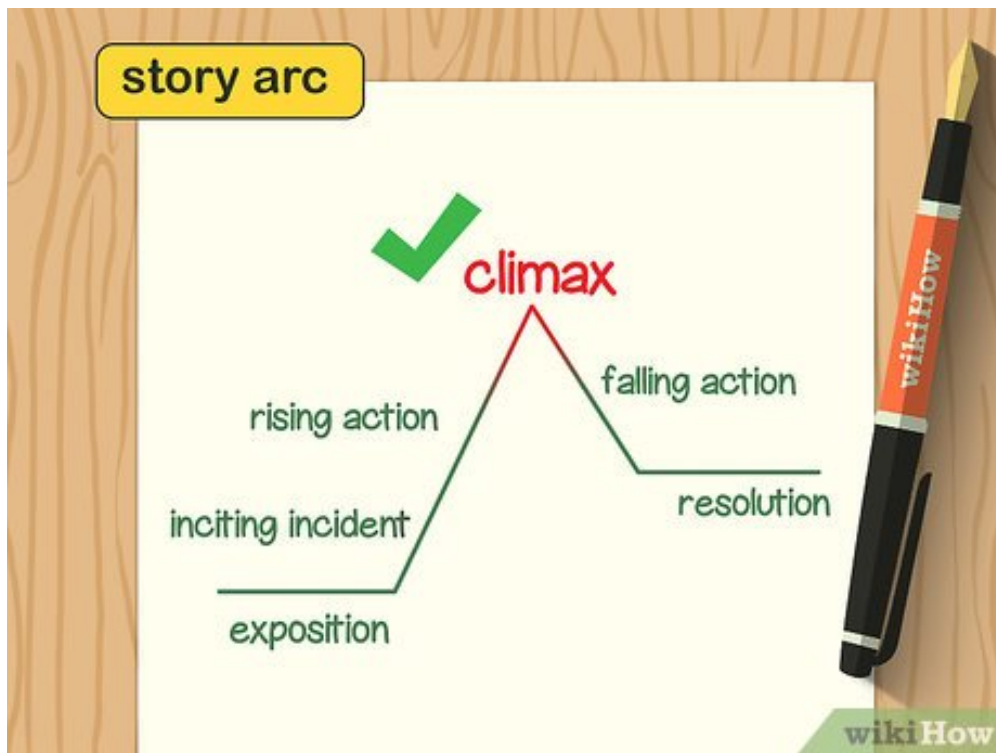
**LUCY V. HAY**  
Professional Writer

**Look at breakdowns of movie plots for insights into common successful story structures.** There are many good sources, like Script Lab or TV Tropes, to find plot breakdowns of popular movies. Read these summaries and watch the movies, then think about how you can plot your story in a way that is similar to the movies you really like.



**4** **Develop at least one unforgettable character.** This is another one of the “easier said than done” parts of writing a great book. Aim to build one or more characters who are complex and rounded, not one-note “heroes” or “villains.” You want your readers to be able to identify with them and care about what happens to them.<sup>[10]</sup>

- Think about some of your favorite characters from books you love. Write down some of their character traits and use these to help build your own unique characters.
- If you’re writing nonfiction, dig deep into the complexities and all-too-human qualities of the real figures you’re writing about. Bring them to life for your readers.



**5 Emphasize conflict and tension in your narrative.** Introduce challenges and obstacles early on in your book, and lead your characters through struggles, triumphs, and failures. The conflict and tension can be both external (like a cunning adversary) and internal (your main character's inner demons due to past tragedy). Make it hard for your readers to put the book down!<sup>[11]</sup>

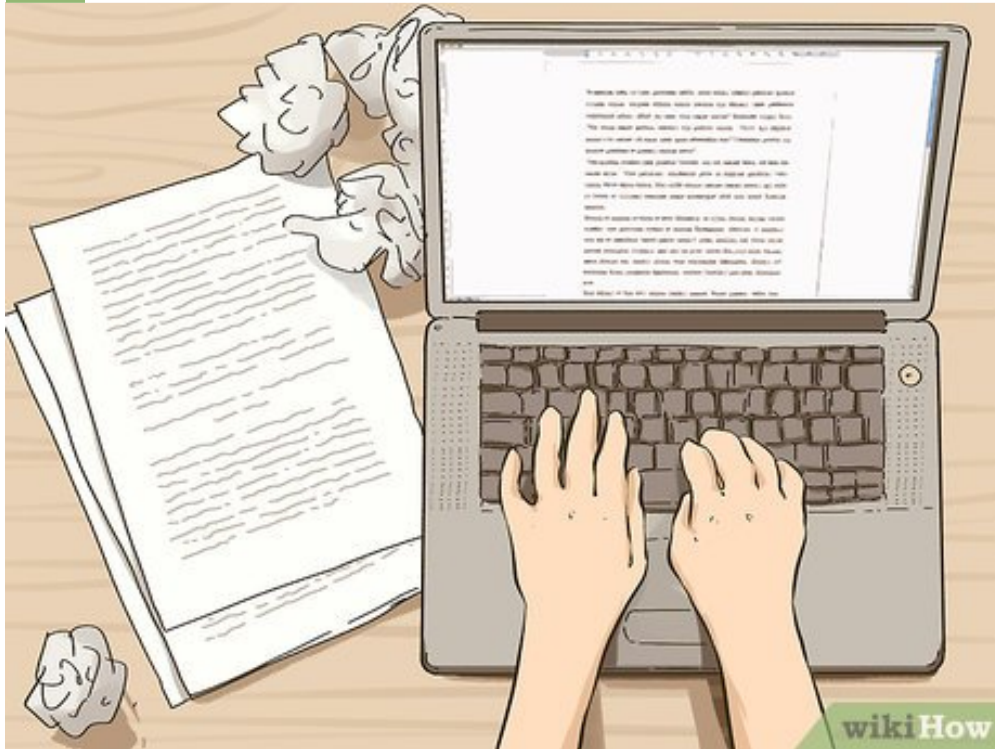
- The main conflict—for instance, Captain Ahab's obsession with the white whale in *Moby Dick*—can be an entry point for a range of other external and internal conflicts.
- Don't downplay conflicts and tension in nonfiction works—they help to ground your writing in reality.



**6 Make sure everything you include advances the story.** This is helpful to keep in mind while writing your first draft, but essential while you're editing your book. Make sure every chapter, every page, every sentence, and even every word serves a purpose in moving your story forward. If not, look for ways to revise or streamline your writing.<sup>[12]</sup>

- Your goal is to never give your readers a reason to lose interest. Keep them engaged and turning those pages!
- This doesn't mean you can't use long sentences, descriptive writing, or even asides that deviate from the main storyline. Just make sure that these components serve the larger narrative.

## Method 3 of 3: Publishing Your Book



**1** Keep **revising** your book, but don't make excuses for not submitting it. In other words, commit yourself to getting your book out there, and don't use "it's not quite ready yet" as a permanent excuse. Revising, refining, and **editing** are all essential to a good book, but at some point you have to have the courage to get it published.<sup>[13]</sup>

- Seeking publication can feel a bit like losing control over your manuscript, after all the time you've spent working and re-working it. Keep reminding yourself that your book deserves to be seen and read!
- If necessary, impose a deadline on yourself: "I'm going to submit this to publishers by January 15, one way or the other!"





**2 Hire a literary agent if you're aiming for traditional publication.** You can submit your manuscript to publishers yourself, but you'll increase your odds of success by working with an agent. They'll have the experience and industry contacts needed to give your work a better chance of finding the right publisher. Unless you live near a book publishing hotbed, your best bet is to search online for literary agents.<sup>[14]</sup>

- Evaluate potential agents and look for the best fit for you and your manuscript. If you know any published authors, ask them for tips and leads on agents.
- Typically, you'll submit excerpts or even your entire manuscript to an agent, and they'll decide whether to take you on as a client. Make sure you're clear on their submission guidelines before proceeding.



**3 Look into self-publishing options if the traditional route isn't ideal.** If your book has a small target audience due to its subject matter, it may be tough to find a publisher to take it on. This is especially the case when you're a new author. Fortunately, you have options when it comes to publishing the book yourself.

- You can self-publish copies on your own, which may save you money but will take up a lot of time. You'll be responsible for everything from obtaining a copyright to designing the cover to getting the actual pages printed.
- You can work through self-publishing companies, but you'll often end up paying more to get your book published than you'll ever make back from selling it.
- Self-publishing an e-book may be a viable option since the publishing costs are low and your book immediately becomes accessible to a wide audience. Evaluate different e-book publishers carefully before choosing the right one for you.



## Expert Q&A

### Question

**How do you begin writing a book?**



**Grant Faulkner, MA**  
Author, Pep Talks for Writers  
Expert Answer

There are a lot of different ways to write a book and everyone has their own particular way of doing it. Some people get their idea in the shower or when they're driving to work. Other people are more conscious and deliberate and look for story ideas in the newspaper or a prompt. Once you get a story idea, you have to decide whether you need to write it. Is it something you can't not write? Then, you write it.

Helpful 7 Not Helpful 4

#### Question

### How do you write a book and get it published?



**Grant Faulkner, MA**  
Author, Pep Talks for Writers  
Expert Answer

Having a community of other writers really helps. They encourage you and keep you accountable and maybe in the future give feedback or networking help. You can get things published because people introduce you to other people who are editors or agents. As for writing the book, the main way is like the famous quote by William Faulkner: "Writing is 99% perspiration, 1% inspiration."

Helpful 7 Not Helpful 3

#### Question

### How do I write my first novel?



**Grant Faulkner, MA**  
Author, Pep Talks for Writers  
Expert Answer

Decide on your idea and show up to write every day in a determined fashion. Having a goal and a deadline helps by putting pressure on your writing. Once you get to the publication step, you'll have to revise and get feedback from others and your editors, which is a long journey. You can, of course, self-publish your book, which is usually the easiest way.

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 2

#### Question

### Does the author or the publisher make the book cover?



Community Answer

It doesn't matter. It can be the author, publisher, a friend, or someone paid to make it. The important thing is that it looks appealing and makes the book marketable.

Helpful 248 Not Helpful 35

#### Question

### I am having trouble naming a chapter in my novel. How do I deal with it?



Community Answer

Get a friend or family member to read the chapter and ask what they think would be a good name for the chapter. Think to yourself: what is the chapter about? What significant thing happens in the chapter? Is there any small line of the chapter you particularly love that you might be able to turn into a chapter title?

Helpful 278 Not Helpful 23

#### Question

### How do I transfer what I have on paper to my computer?



**Anonymous**  
Community Answer

You have to type the book into the computer manually. It is tedious, but the end result is glorious.

Helpful 74 Not Helpful 23

#### Question

### How do I choose the genre in which to write?



**Abdul Basit**  
Community Answer

Think of the genres with which you are familiar. What types of stories do you enjoy? Most writers prefer to write stories they'd like to read themselves.

Helpful 76 Not Helpful 7

#### Question

### How do I decide on a title?



Community Answer

Brainstorm. Write the book first, then an idea might pop up. Make sure it connects to the story, for example, don't give a romance title to a horror book. Read further: [How to Come Up with a Good Book Title](#).

Helpful 209 Not Helpful 28

#### Question

### How do I decide what to write about? I know what type of book I want to write, but I'm having trouble coming up with a plot. How do I create one?



Community Answer

One option is to base your story on a real event. Or, you can look at photos or movies and other books for inspiration. Another approach is to stop worrying about the plot and form it as you write. About a quarter of the way in, stop and reformulate the plot from what your writing has inspired you with, then reshape as needed.

Helpful 179 Not Helpful 29

#### Question

### How do you write a fictional series?



Community Answer

Plan out ahead of time what the story will be for each book. Make sure the series is going somewhere. Like in Harry Potter, the story keeps on building until the showdown between Voldemort and Harry.

Helpful 194 Not Helpful 30

## VideoRead Video Transcript

<https://www.wikihow.com/video/a/a4/Write+a+Book+Step+0.360p.mp4>



### Tips

- Keep your notebook and pen beside your bed, and keep a journal of your dreams. You never know when a dream of yours could give you inspiration or a story to write about!
- Ask some other authors for some tips and write them down.

- If you want to add a true fact in your story, do some research on it first.
- Sometimes your book might sound idiotic and you will want to quit. DON'T. Give it a few days (maybe a few weeks) and try again.
- Sometimes, you should just start writing, and eventually a story will just pop into your head.
- Remember to be original!
- Find the time of day when you are most productive, and schedule your writing sessions for that time.



## Warnings

- Avoid plagiarizing (copying another author's work). Even if you do it as artfully as possible, eventually someone will track down and piece together all the copied parts.

## References

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## About This Article



Co-authored by:

**Grant Faulkner, MA**

Author, Pep Talks for Writers

This article was co-authored by [Grant Faulkner, MA](#) and by wikiHow staff writer, [Christopher M. Osborne, PhD](#). Grant Faulkner is the Executive Director of National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) and the co-founder of 100 Word Story, a literary magazine. Grant has published two books on writing and has been published in The New York Times and Writer's Digest. He co-hosts Write-minded, a weekly podcast on writing and publishing, and has a M.A. in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. This article has been viewed 2,583,380 times.

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