



Novelist

“If I would have realized that the stories in my head would be as intriguing to others as they were to me, I would probably have started writing sooner. Believe in your own taste.”

—Stephanie Meyer,
best-selling novelist

Share a meal with a historical figure, unearth ancient treasures, spend the summer in outer space or dancing flamenco in Spain—writing a novel lets you dream the world your way. As you write descriptions and dialogue, invent situations, and make up feelings, you’ll experience the fun of a novelist’s career: spending time with new friends (characters you’ve created) and in other worlds (those from your imagination). And you’ll end up with something impressive to share in college admissions—a work of fiction you wrote yourself.

Steps

1. Deconstruct a novel
2. Create great characters
3. Develop a plot
4. Write at least 20 pages
5. Edit your pages

Purpose

When I’ve earned this badge, I’ll know what it takes to write a great novel and I’ll have written at least 20 pages of my own.

Teen Novelists

These writers prove that it's the quality of the writing—and not the writer's age—that matters most.

MARY SHELLEY

wrote the classic *Frankenstein* at the age of 18. Published in 1818, the novel told the story of a monster built by a medical student named Victor Frankenstein.



Hulton Archive/Getty Images

S.E. HINTON was 15 when she started writing her groundbreaking novel *The Outsiders*, about 14-year-old Ponyboy and his friends. It was published in 1967.



David Livingston/Getty Images

CATHERINE BANNER

began writing *The Eyes of a King* at age 14. The fantasy novel, published in 2009, tells the story of two 15-year-old boys who are connected through parallel worlds.



Max Cicotti/Getty Images

HELEN OYEYMI wrote *The Icarus Girl* when she was 18. The novel, published in 2005, is about eight-year-old Jessamy Harrison and her friend Tilly Tilly.



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Tip Before Takeoff

- ▶ Many authors keep a journal or index cards with them to jot down inspiration throughout the day—a funny sentence overheard, the page number of a great line in a book, or an idea for an ending. Try it as you work on this badge.

STEP 1 Deconstruct a novel

Select a novel of at least 200 pages in a genre you might like to write in. For ideas, check out what your favorite authors are reading on an online book-discussion site, look at reviews on literature blogs, or find the latest exciting novels on publishers' websites. Then choose the activity you think will most help you as a writer.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- ☐ **Review the novel.** As you read, get a sense of what appeals to you as a reader. Note passages and moments that you love (or really don't). Then write your review and share it.

FOR MORE FUN: Find other reviews of the novel and see if you agree.

OR -----

- ☐ **Chart the plot.** Chart your novel's plot to discover how authors balance action and character development. Focus on the rise and fall of the action and how the characters grow and change. You can find examples of plot charts in books about writing or online.

OR -----

- ☐ **Read like an editor.** When assessing a manuscript, editors write a "reader's report." Imagine the novel is a manuscript, and make notes in the margins about scenes, characters, and sentences you like or don't like. Then write your report, including a plot summary, whether you think the book would sell, and whether you'd publish it.

More to Explore

Start a book club. Read the same novel as several friends, and do one of the above choices. Then share your reviews, charts, or reader's reports at a book club meeting.

Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more!

STEP 2 Create great characters

Characters are the heart of a great novel. If you have a story concept already, keep that in mind during this step. If not, build your characters and see what happens. Many novelists start with characters, and then figure out what should happen to them—and a story idea blooms from there.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- ☐ **Let real people inspire your characters.** Create a character profile (see page 4) for three real people—if you don't know all the answers, make your best guess. Or create a character who is a composite of three different people you know. Try exaggerating some qualities of real people to create more fascinating fictional characters.

OR

- ☐ **Use your favorite novels for inspiration.** Fill out profiles for three characters from a favorite novel or series of novels (choose a book besides the one you read in step 1). Use your findings to add to the personalities of your novel's characters.

OR

- ☐ **Use character profiles to create a hero and a villain.** Their conflict will drive your plot, so think about how their personalities interact. What drives the hero to be good? What drives the villain to be evil? And how will your story define good and evil?

More to Explore

Read a book, then listen to its audiobook. Did you respond differently to the story? Did any characters appeal to you more or less? Did it feel more active, or less? Write notes about what makes a character come alive for you, and use that information when you write your character profiles.

Tip: If you need to find a great book, you might do today what girls did in 1940: Volunteer to help out at the library.



Careers to Explore

Children's book writer
Novelist for young adults
Motivational speaker
Editor
Publisher
Book marketer
Book publicist
Foreign-rights agent
Literary agent
Journalist
Technical writer
Print-production expert
Copy editor
Web-content developer
Advertising copywriter
Audiobook producer
Book packager
Bookseller
Publishers' salesperson

Character Profile

It helps to physically describe a character. But a great character is about more than hair color. What does she want more than anything in the world—and what's stopping her from getting it?



STEP 3 Develop a plot

The plot is a story's sequence of events. The plot draws the reader into the characters' lives and moves the story along. Use one of these activities to help you develop a plot starring your characters.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- ☐ **Explore character-driven and action-driven plots.** Find three examples of a character-driven plot and three of an action-driven plot. Which do you like better, or do you prefer a balance of both?
OR -----
- ☐ **Interview a novelist or writing teacher.** Ask an expert how to create a great plot. Do they suggest outlining the plot, or just starting with page one and going wherever the characters take them? Do they create a synopsis of their story before writing? Do they always know how it will end?
OR -----
- ☐ **Read five interviews with novelists who describe creating a plot.** You might find these interviews online or in magazines. How different or similar is each writer's process?

"The best recommendation I've read on plot was in Donald Maass's book Writing a Breakout Novel. He said that once you get your characters down, you ask yourself, 'What is the one thing this person would never say/think/do?' Then ask yourself, 'What would make that person say/think/do that very thing?' Then put that in your novel. It's a great way to braid plot and character."

—advice from
a published novelist

Common Plotlines

In character-driven plots, the drama in the stories revolves around changes in the characters. By the end of the story, characters are usually better able to handle their emotions, or they look at their world in a new way. In action-driven plots, the characters try to solve or do something. Thrillers, science-fiction adventures, and mysteries often have action-driven plots. Do you think action, character, or both drive these common plotlines?

THE QUEST: A hero takes a journey, seeking something or someone, and encounters obstacles along the way. **Example:** *The Lord of the Rings*

UNDERDOG: A person, group, or animal is expected to lose a competition, but wins through sheer determination and help from others. **Example:** *Seabiscuit*

REBIRTH: The protagonist is cast under a dark spell, only to be released by actions of other good forces. **Example:** *Beauty and the Beast*

OVERCOMING THE MONSTER: A hero confronts a life-threatening monster. **Example:** *Beowulf*

TRANSFORMATION: Events or circumstances lead a character to change into a better person. **Example:** Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*

Point of View

Novelists have to decide whose voice will tell the story. This is called the “point of view.” Most novels are written in first person or third person.

- **FIRST PERSON** is when one character tells the story from their perspective. We see the action through their eyes, and experience their emotions firsthand. Example: “Suddenly, as I looked at those teenaged girls in their teenaged clothes, I felt younger than twelve-turning-thirteen.”
—from *Savvy*, by Ingrid Law
- **THIRD PERSON** is when the narrator tells the story from the perspective of one or many characters. Example: “Almost without knowing what he was doing, as though drawn by some powerful magnet, James Henry Trotter started walking slowly toward the giant peach.”
—from *James and the Giant Peach*, by Roald Dahl

“Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader. Not the fact that it is raining, but the feeling of being rained upon.”

—E. L. Doctorow,
award-winning author

STEP

4 Write at least 20 pages

Before you delve into writing, look through your writer’s notebook for ideas and inspiration. And remember, a first draft is a first draft—a time to write whatever flows from you, without judgment.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- ☐ **Write the first 20 pages.** Create a great first scene that pulls the reader in. That usually means starting with juicy action or dialogue and saving details like hair color for later. If you get stuck, add your characters to the first scene of a book you love and see what happens.
- OR
- ☐ **Write important scenes.** You might not know how the story begins, but you’re bound to come up with at least one crucial moment—the first time characters meet, a big discovery, or a watershed event. Write 20 pages of one big scene, or five pages of four scenes—whatever makes sense and keeps you inspired.
- OR
- ☐ **Write the last 20 pages.** Some writers swear you have to know where you’ll end up before you can work out how to get there. So write that final homecoming, the end of the quest, the moment of victory—the place where the curtain will fall.

More to Explore

Complete a first draft. Write a rough version of your entire novel.

STEP 5 Edit your pages

Editing is the most essential step in writing. It gives you the chance to improve and polish your work. Even the most seasoned writers go through several drafts of revising and rewriting, and sometimes two or three more drafts after a publisher has bought their book. Editing can mean the difference between a mediocre novel and a truly great one.

Before you show your pages to anyone, give them a first-pass edit. First, put away your work for at least a day—the break will give you a chance to look at it with fresh eyes. When you’re ready, print out the pages and grab a pencil. Read your work aloud. Polish your sentences. Examine your word choices. Mark any issues you find. (Would your character really say that? Does the timeline make sense?)

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- ☐ **Share your pages with two people.** Once you’ve revised, show your work to a friend, a teacher, or anyone else who’ll give you constructive feedback. Getting two opinions can reveal what’s an issue for every reader versus what’s particular to one person.

FOR MORE FUN: Review their ideas and keep editing.

OR

- ☐ **Use a critique group.** Find a writing group, either through school, online, or by starting your own. Share your pages for feedback and edits. An English class is a good place to find peers to critique your pages, or ask a creative-writing teacher for their thoughts.

OR

- ☐ **Ask a mentor to write you an editorial letter.** Find an editor, novelist, teacher, or knowledgeable friend and ask them to write you an editorial letter (see sidebar).

FOR MORE FUN: Exchange pages with a friend working on her Novelist badge and write editorial letters for each other.

More to Explore

Attend a writer’s conference or writing workshop. Whether you attend in person or online, choose a program that includes getting feedback from others about your pages.

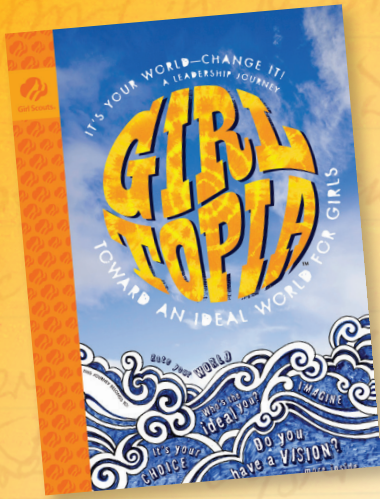
The Editorial Letter

Editors share ideas and advice about character development, plotlines, tension, action, logic, and more in an “editorial letter” they send to the author. Writers usually get this letter along with a marked-up manuscript where the editor praises or points out concerns about specific sentences. The author then returns a revised draft. Editors and authors can go through this process many times before a novel is published.

Getting Published

Many published authors have the help of a literary agent. The agent’s role is to know the editors most likely to publish a certain kind of novel. Agents often post on their websites what kinds of books they like to represent, as well as guidelines on how to format and submit manuscripts for consideration. Publishers’ websites offer similar information for aspiring authors without agents.

Most often, the first step is writing a query letter—a short note or e-mail that explains what your book is about and why readers will want to read it. Query letters reveal the novel’s “hook”: a one-sentence description that intrigues and tantalizes. The taglines on movie posters are a great place to get ideas for hooks.



Add the Badge to Your Journey

When you create your plot, experiment by giving one or two of your characters a leadership challenge based on an idea from *GIRLtopia*. Perhaps your character faces an ethical dilemma? Has a vision about *GIRLtopia*? Cares deeply about the global rights of girls? Has some righteous indignation about a particular issue?

Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Writing informed book reviews to share
- Helping a friend edit a story for a creative-writing class
- Starting a book club or writing group



I'm inspired to: