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## Getting started on your novel

Chairman Mao famously reminded us “the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” A novel begins with the first word written on the page, although most authors will have had the idea rolling around in their head for quite some time before beginning to write.



There are a couple of methods a first-time novelist can use to get started. Either will work, and the one you choose will probably depend on how complete your idea is and whether you are naturally a planner or a refiner. In other words, do you like to know each step before you start or do you prefer to jump in and perfect your efforts later?

If you're a planner, you might want to start with an outline of your story, plotting the action from beginning to end before you start filling in the details. You will have notes about each character and their backstory, notes about your settings, and ideas for dialogue and subplots to try out.

If you're a refiner, you will start to write without too clear an idea of exactly where your story is going. Just get it all down on paper and then go back and rewrite, probably dozens of times. This method works the best when the writer has themes and characters ready to explore and a rough plan of the plot. Authors who insist that their work is actually guided by their characters aren't lying, but they know those characters so well that they have become alter egos.

If you are really having trouble getting started, maybe your characters just aren't ready to be born yet. Think some more, make rough notes, give the characters some conflict, something they want, something or someone that is preventing them from getting it. Once you know those things, then you can decide where and when they live, how they speak, what they look like, and more. And without actually meaning to, you will have begun to write a novel.

As you begin to write your novel, there are a few things that you should not be thinking about: correct spelling, perfect grammar, and photographic description of settings. All that comes with refining and revising, and paying too much attention to these elements at the beginning can distract you from actually writing your story. In the worst-case scenario, you

will grind to a halt and your story will never get told.

Be sure to look ahead; an important accomplishment beyond starting your novel is actually *finishing it*.

## Can I turn my writing into a business?

A dream job for many would be to write for a living. The reality, however, is that writing of any kind isn't exactly an easy way to make money. It's time consuming and usually yields modest rewards at best. The bestselling authors we admire are the rare exception to an unforgiving rule.

This doesn't mean that you can't write as a core activity of a business. Writing is very useful as a marketing tool, and you can even use your writing to generate revenue. Consider the kind of business you want to run and determine how your writing can build it towards profitability. Also consider writing as a way to grow a current business.



Below are a few ways to generate a regular income through writing:

1. Ebooks
2. Blogging
3. Writing articles

**Ebooks** whose purpose is to inform and educate are an excellent way to earn a writing income. Though an ebook can take a lot of time in planning, writing, and marketing, the rewards can be worth it. Consider also that once you've sold copies of an ebook, developing and publishing follow-up titles will help you build a readership. Building and selling a library of ebooks based on your knowledge or expertise may earn you money, but it may also help you in other aspects of building a business. Creating ebooks demonstrating your expertise is a good way to promote yourself or your business.

**Blogging** takes less time than writing ebooks, but it does require a few essential ingredients: timeliness, regularity, and relevancy. If you're writing blog posts about your interests or expertise, it's important that the content is up-to-date and therefore useful to readers. Posting content every day or several times a week encourages your readers to return to your blog regularly to read what you have to say. If you post less frequently than that, your readers may end up finding content elsewhere. While it's nice to add a personal touch to your posts, be sure that it's relevant to your blog's stated goals or themes. Try to stay on topic so you don't alienate readers who expect one thing but get another. Give readers useful tips, important information, exciting news, and expert advice, and you will be sure to build a readership over time.

**Writing articles** is a way to tap readerships outside of those you build yourself. Markets for articles exist both online and in print. If you have experience and expertise in a specific

industry, consider writing articles for trade journals. Also consider general interest magazines that publish content that interests you. For starters, try submitting articles to magazines you read regularly. You may already be an expert whose writing is ripe for publication in their pages.

Any exposure you garner from writing will increase your chances of earning a regular income, whether directly or indirectly. If your business is service-based, publishing ebooks, blog posts, and articles will position you as an industry expert. If your business is product-based, publishing can be an invaluable promotional tool.

In the end, remember that content is king: If you produce something of value and deliver it to those who will benefit from it, everyone wins.



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