

# Preparing to Write Your Novella

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This is a basic guide on how to start writing a novella. You may choose to develop your story in a different manner, but this is a good stepping stone for first-time authors.

## Stage I CHARACTERS - PLOT - SETTING

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### Characters

#### Major Characters

Build character profiles that are complex and extensive; to be real, they must have as many flaws as exceptional qualities. For each major character, you should know the following:

1. **Physical Description**

Write a detailed description of your character's physical attributes, and include mannerisms that are peculiar to each character. For instance, a character might bite his/her nails, smoke, eat paan, or constantly run their hands through their hair.

2. **Background/History**

Consider where they grew up and how that affected your character's personality.

3. **Character traits**

Is your character bold, shy, outgoing, aggressive, passive, or a recluse?

4. **Purpose**

More for minor characters, each person in your story is there for a reason. What is that reason?

#### Minor Characters

Minor characters add interest, but are utilized to take the story forward. Too many side characters can detract from a story—especially in a novella. These sketches do not need to be as detailed as major characters.

### Plot

#### What is your story?

Write a brief sequence of events that will include:

1. **Introductions to your characters**

How are your characters introduced into the story, and when? Major characters should appear quickly in the novella. This is a shorter format, without the luxury of several chapters devoted to a single character.

2. **A main conflict**

What is the conflict that will drive the plot, and when will it be introduced? This needs to be a climactic element of your story. For instance, in a romance, the conflict may be a misunderstanding that would lead to a break up. In a mystery, it may be a situation that puts your characters in danger.

3. **Resolution**

How does resolution of your conflict occur? Who or what is involved in resolving the conflict?

#### Do you need a sub-plot?

If you have a fairly straightforward main plot, your novella may benefit from a secondary conflict that is smaller in nature and more easily resolved. It could also be a root cause of the main conflict.

### Setting

#### Where does this story happen, and when?

1. **Where the story is set is relevant to the character development and to the plot.**

Decide the locations in which the story will unravel, and make a list of any research you may need to describe these locations. Drill down from a broad to miniscule level:

Which country is the story set in? Is it set in more than one?

Which city/village?

Where in the city does action occur? For instance, in a college (which one, and what are some particular aspects that may be used in your book), hospital, office, etc.

2. **When**

Is this a historical novel, a present day novel, or set some time in the past or the future?

You may need to research times, events, and attributes of whatever time you chose to set your novella in. Social, cultural, political and world events that occur in your timeline may not make an appearance in your book, but the knowledge of their existence will add depth to the novel, particularly to dialogue.

For instance, South Asians are inordinately involved in politics, and it is likely that there will be dialogues involving politics that will add relevance to the plot.

## Stage II STORY OUTLINE

### Building an outline

Now that you have the basic elements together, you can begin to plan the progression that your story will take.

Break your plot down into three logical sequences: Beginning, Middle and End. The plot itself does not need to be sequential, or linear. A well-crafted story will weave the different elements of your story (character, plot and setting) as threads that flow through the scenes. **DO NOT** divide the book into straight descriptions of each element—that’s both boring and immature.

For instance, a character’s background and history should not be revealed in a single paragraph, or chapter. Backgrounds motivate characters to commit certain acts, and should be revealed as you read more about a character.

Divide your plot into a series of events and scenes. Each scene contributes to the plot, and moves the story forward. Each scene/event also has a significant purpose, which is why it appears in the book. These scenes could be logically used as chapters or as parts of chapters.

As novellas are a shorter format, unnecessary elements should be pared down to a minimum.

The table to the right is an example of how to create your outline. Use it to build the three segments of your story, keeping all elements in mind when you decide what scenes go where.

You can always move scenes around if you feel the sequence is not logical.

Beginning/Middle/End (specify which part of the book these scenes appear in)				
Scene	Setting	Characters involved	Purpose	Description
name or number of scene	location and time.	Major and minor characters involved - who are they and why are they in this scene?	Why is this scene in the book? How does it contribute to the plot? Is it an introduction, the climax, or the resolution?	What happens in this scene? Write a brief description. For example: X is rushing to work, and decides to take a shortcut. She hasn’t been in this part of the city before, and gets lost, ending up outside a seedy joint in a strange neighborhood. She enters the bar for directions, and encounters Y, who will later play a pivotal role in X’s financial dilemma. The conversation is brief, and Y is annoying and sleazy, but she ends up taking Y with her so that she can return to a main road.

## Stage III START WRITING!

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### Revise Your First Draft

You want your editors and publishers to view you as a professional, so be careful with punctuation, grammar and language. Review the first draft yourself, and check for typos, spelling errors and formatting. If your editor is not worried about these things, he/she is more likely to concentrate on the plot and character development. Feedback will be more comprehensive and far more constructive as a result.

You may find that as you write, your story evolves by itself. That's not always a bad thing, and you may make changes to the plot or a character as you go along. Editor feedback will point out any holes in your story, or weak elements that can be corrected. As objective readers, they tend to see gaps in a story with far more clarity than you will.

Indireads provides a comprehensive guide for authors with examples of writing dialogue and character development. In addition, a style guide provides grammatical and punctuation rules commonly used at Indireads. Both these documents are available on the Indireads website.

### Some tips to remember

**Voice:** Decide whether you are writing in the first or third person and then adhere to the principle. Also decide whether you want to have a narrator as a storyteller or commentator.

**Tenses:** Remember to check your tenses and be consistent with tenses throughout the book.

**Pace:** Novellas tend to be fast-paced and the action and scenes should move along briskly. There may be sections however, when the pace should slow down; for example, in describing a tender moment between protagonists, or a lovemaking scene.

**Dialogue:** Whenever two people meet within a setting there needs to be dialogue. Dialogue should be natural and meaningful, and it should move the story along. Effective dialogue can either move the story along or highlight the equation between the people who are talking. Dialogue can become even more effective if used in conjunction with thoughts:

“So, are you going to the party tonight?” Please, God, let him ask me out, she thought, *I'll do anything you want me to.*

**Flow:** The story should flow from one scene to the next, connected by means of triggers or motivations. One person getting angry in one scene may lead to a confrontation in the next. The connectors are vital for the flow of the story.

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