

# The Writer's Digest Handbook of Novel Writing

by Meg Leder, Martin Greenberg, and Robert J. Ray

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## Summary:

The Writer's Digest Handbook of Novel Writing is a comprehensive guide to the craft of writing fiction. Written by Meg Leder, Martin Greenberg, and Robert J. Ray, this book provides aspiring novelists with all the tools they need to write their own novels. It covers topics such as developing characters and plotlines, creating believable dialogue, finding an agent or publisher for your work, and marketing your finished product.

The book begins with an overview of the basics of novel writing: how to come up with ideas; how to structure a story; what elements make up good characterization; and more. The authors then provide detailed advice on each step in the process from outlining a story through revising it for publication. They discuss techniques for crafting compelling scenes that draw readers into the narrative world you create.

In addition to providing guidance on writing itself, The Writer's Digest Handbook also offers practical advice about getting published. It explains how agents can help writers find publishers who are interested in their work and outlines strategies for marketing one's books once they have been accepted by a publisher.

Finally, there are chapters devoted specifically to genres like romance or science fiction/fantasy that offer tips tailored specifically towards those types of stories. This section also includes interviews with successful authors who share their experiences in these fields.

Overall, The Writer's Digest Handbook is an invaluable resource for anyone looking to write a novel—from beginners just starting out on their journey as writers all the way up through experienced professionals seeking new insights into honing their craft.

## Main ideas:

**#1. *Understand the Elements of Fiction: Fiction is composed of characters, plot, setting, theme, and style. Knowing the elements of fiction is essential to writing a successful novel.***

Fiction is composed of many elements that work together to create a compelling story. Characters are the people or creatures who inhabit the world of your novel and drive its action. Plot is the sequence of events that make up your story, from beginning to end. Setting refers to both the physical environment in which your characters exist as well as any social or cultural context they may be part of. Theme is an idea or message that runs throughout your novel, often related to a universal truth about life or human nature. Finally, style encompasses all aspects of how you tell your story—from sentence structure and word choice to pacing and tone.

Understanding these elements can help you craft a successful novel by ensuring each element works together harmoniously towards achieving one unified goal: telling an engaging story with memorable characters in an interesting setting with meaningful themes expressed through effective writing techniques.

By familiarizing yourself with these components, you'll have a better understanding of what makes fiction great—and how you can use them in combination to write stories readers won't soon forget!

**#2. *Develop Your Characters: Creating believable characters is essential to a successful novel. It is important to understand the motivations and goals of each character and how they interact with each other.***

Developing your characters is an essential part of writing a successful novel. It's important to understand the motivations and goals of each character, as well as how they interact with one another. To create believable characters, you need to think about their backgrounds, personalities, relationships with other characters in the story, and any conflicts or challenges they face.

Start by asking yourself questions such as: What does this character want? How do they go about getting it? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Are there any secrets that could be revealed later on in the story? Once you have a better understanding of who your characters are and what drives them, you can begin to craft more detailed descriptions for each one.

You should also consider how different elements like setting or plot points will affect your characters' decisions. For example, if two people from different social classes meet in a certain location at a certain time—how might that impact their interactions? Thinking through these scenarios can help bring your characters to life.

Finally, don't forget that even minor details can make all the difference when it comes to creating realistic and engaging characters. Pay attention to things like body language or speech patterns; these small touches can add depth and complexity to your cast of players.

**#3. Create a Plot: A plot is the sequence of events that make up the story. It is important to create a plot that is engaging and has a clear beginning, middle, and end.**

Creating a plot is an essential part of writing a novel. It should be engaging and have a clear beginning, middle, and end. The beginning should introduce the characters and setting, as well as establish the main conflict or problem that will drive the story forward. The middle should build on this conflict by introducing complications and obstacles for the protagonist to overcome. Finally, in the end, all conflicts must be resolved in some way so that readers can feel satisfied with how things turned out.

When creating your plot it's important to consider pacing—the speed at which events unfold throughout your story. You want to keep readers engaged by having moments of tension followed by moments of resolution; too much tension without any resolution can make readers lose interest quickly. Additionally, you may want to include subplots or side stories that are related to but separate from your main plot line; these can add depth and complexity while also providing opportunities for character development.

Finally, when crafting your plot remember that it doesn't need to follow a linear path—you can use flashbacks or flash-forwards if they help move the story along in interesting ways. Ultimately though, no matter what kind of structure you choose for your novel's plotline it needs to be compelling enough for readers to stay invested until its conclusion.

**#4. Establish a Setting: The setting of a novel is the time and place in which the story takes place. It is important to create a setting that is believable and helps to create a sense of atmosphere.**

Establishing a setting is an important part of creating a believable and immersive story. It helps to create atmosphere, provide context for the characters' actions, and give readers a sense of place. When crafting your setting, consider the time period in which your novel takes place as well as any geographical or cultural elements that will be relevant to the plot. Think about how these elements might affect the characters' lives and their relationships with each other. Additionally, think about how you can use sensory details such as smells, sounds, tastes, sights and textures to bring your setting alive for readers.

When describing your setting it is important to remember that less is often more; too much detail can bog down the narrative flow. Instead focus on providing just enough information so that readers have an understanding of where they are without getting lost in unnecessary minutiae. Finally don't forget to include small touches like local customs or regional dialects which will help make your world feel real.

**#5. *Develop a Theme: A theme is the underlying message or idea of a novel. It is important to create a theme that is meaningful and resonates with readers.***

Developing a theme for your novel is an important step in the writing process. It can help to shape the story and give it meaning. A good theme should be meaningful, relevant, and resonate with readers. It should also be something that you are passionate about exploring in your work.

When developing a theme, consider what message or idea you want to convey through your story. Think about how this message will affect characters and plot points throughout the novel. Ask yourself questions such as: What do I want my readers to take away from this book? How does this theme relate to my characters' journeys?

Once you have identified a potential theme for your novel, think of ways that you can explore it within the narrative structure of your book. Consider how different scenes or chapters could illustrate aspects of the chosen theme in interesting ways. You may even find that certain elements of plot or character development arise naturally out of exploring these themes.

Finally, remember that themes don't always need to be explicitly stated within a text; they can often remain implicit and still provide powerful messages for readers to interpret on their own terms.

**#6. *Understand Point of View: Point of view is the perspective from which the story is told. It is important to understand the different types of point of view and how they can be used to create a unique narrative.***

Point of view is an important element in storytelling. It determines how the story is told and can be used to create a unique narrative. There are three main types of point of view: first-person, second-person, and third-person.

In first-person point of view, the narrator is one of the characters in the story and speaks directly to readers as "I" or "we". This type of narration allows for a more intimate connection between reader and character since it gives readers direct access to their thoughts and feelings.

Second-person point of view uses "you" instead of "I" or "we" when addressing readers. This type of narration puts readers into the shoes (or mind) of another character by making them part of the action rather than just an observer.

Third-person point of view uses pronouns such as he/she/they when referring to characters in order to maintain distance from them while still providing insight into their thoughts and feelings. This type allows for greater objectivity since it does not rely on any single characters perspective.

Understanding these different points of view can help writers craft stories that are engaging, immersive, and emotionally resonant with their audience. By choosing which point(s) of view they want to use strategically throughout their work, writers can create powerful narratives that draw readers in from start to finish!

**#7. *Create Conflict: Conflict is essential to a successful novel. It is important to create believable conflicts that drive the plot forward and keep readers engaged.***

Conflict is an essential element of any successful novel. It helps to create tension and suspense, keeps readers engaged, and drives the plot forward. When creating conflict for your story, its important to make sure that it feels believable and realistic. Consider the characters motivations and how they might clash with each other or their environment in order to create a compelling narrative.

Think about what kind of conflicts you can introduce into your story: interpersonal conflicts between characters; internal struggles within a character; external forces such as nature or society; moral dilemmas; physical obstacles; etc. You can also use symbolism or metaphors to represent larger themes or ideas in your story that will add depth and complexity.

No matter what type of conflict you choose for your novel, make sure that it is meaningful and relevant to the overall plot. Conflict should be used strategically throughout the book so that it builds up gradually until reaching its climax at the end.

**#8. Use Dialogue: Dialogue is an important tool for creating believable characters and advancing the plot. It is important to understand the different types of dialogue and how to use them effectively.**

Dialogue is an essential part of any story. It can be used to reveal character traits, advance the plot, and create tension between characters. When writing dialogue, it's important to consider the type of dialogue you are using and how it will affect your story.

Direct dialogue is when a character speaks directly to another character or group of characters. This type of dialogue allows readers to get inside the head of a particular character and understand their thoughts and feelings more clearly. Direct dialogue also helps move the plot forward by providing information that would otherwise remain hidden.

Indirect dialogue occurs when one character speaks about another without actually speaking directly to them. This type of dialogue can be used for comedic effect or as a way for one character to express their opinion on something without having direct contact with someone else in the scene. Indirect dialogue can also help build suspense by hinting at what might happen next.

Subtextual dialogue is when two characters communicate through body language or facial expressions rather than words. This type of communication reveals underlying emotions that may not be expressed verbally but still have an impact on how other characters perceive each other and interact with each other in a scene.

Finally, internal monologue is when a character reflects on their own thoughts without saying anything out loud. Internal monologue gives readers insight into what's going on inside a particular character's mind which helps bring depth and complexity to your story overall.

**#9. Employ Description: Description is an important tool for creating a vivid and believable setting. It is important to understand how to use description to create atmosphere and draw readers into the story.**

Description is an essential element of any story. It helps to create a vivid and believable setting, drawing readers into the world of the narrative. Through description, authors can evoke emotions in their readers by painting a picture with words that bring characters and settings to life. By carefully selecting details that are meaningful and relevant to the story, authors can craft descriptions that will transport readers into another time or place.

When writing descriptions, it's important to focus on sensory details such as sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. These elements help create atmosphere and give readers a more immersive experience when reading your work. Additionally, using figurative language like metaphors or similes can be effective for conveying emotion or creating imagery in your reader's mind.

Finally, don't forget about dialogue! Dialogue is also an important tool for providing description without being overly wordy or expository. Characters speaking directly to each other allows you to provide information while still keeping things interesting for your reader.

**#10. Employ Symbolism: Symbolism is a powerful tool for conveying meaning and creating a deeper level of understanding. It is important to understand how to use symbolism to create a richer narrative.**

Symbolism is a powerful tool for conveying meaning and creating a deeper level of understanding. It can be used to represent abstract concepts, emotions, or ideas in an indirect way that allows readers to draw their own conclusions. Symbols can also be used to create atmosphere and evoke certain feelings from the reader. For example, if you want your story to have a feeling of mystery or suspense, you could use symbols such as darkness or shadows.

When using symbolism in your writing it's important to think about how each symbol relates back to the overall theme of your story. You should also consider how different symbols interact with one another and what kind of message they are sending together. Additionally, make sure that any symbols you choose are appropriate for the tone and genre of your work.

Using symbolism effectively requires practice but it can add great depth and complexity to any narrative. By taking time to carefully select meaningful symbols throughout your story, you will be able create an engaging experience for readers that will stay with them long after they finish reading.

**#11. *Employ Foreshadowing: Foreshadowing is a tool for creating suspense and anticipation. It is important to understand how to use foreshadowing to create a sense of mystery and intrigue.***

Foreshadowing is a powerful tool for creating suspense and anticipation in a story. It can be used to hint at future events, or to suggest the presence of an unseen force that will shape the course of the narrative. By carefully placing clues throughout your story, you can create a sense of mystery and intrigue that will keep readers guessing until the very end.

When using foreshadowing, it's important to remember that subtlety is key. Too much foreshadowing can give away too much information about what's coming next, while not enough may leave readers feeling confused or unsatisfied with how things turn out. The best way to use foreshadowing effectively is by sprinkling hints throughout your story without giving away too much detail.

For example, if you want to hint at an upcoming conflict between two characters in your novel, try having them exchange meaningful glances or have one character make a comment about their relationship being strained before any actual fighting takes place. This type of subtle foreshadowing allows readers to anticipate what might happen next without knowing exactly how it will play out.

By employing effective techniques such as this one when writing your novel, you can ensure that each twist and turn keeps readers engaged until they reach its thrilling conclusion!

**#12. *Employ Flashbacks: Flashbacks are a tool for providing background information and creating a sense of continuity. It is important to understand how to use flashbacks effectively to create a richer narrative.***

Flashbacks are a powerful tool for providing background information and creating continuity in a story. They can be used to reveal important plot points, provide insight into characters' motivations, or simply add texture to the narrative. When using flashbacks, it is important to consider how they will affect the pacing of your story and how they will fit within the overall structure of your novel.

When writing flashbacks, make sure that you clearly indicate when the flashback begins and ends so that readers don't become confused about what is happening in present time. You should also ensure that each flashback serves an important purpose; if it doesn't move the plot forward or provide meaningful character development then it may not be necessary. Additionally, try to avoid having too many flashbacks as this can disrupt the flow of your story.

Finally, remember that flashbacks should always feel organic and natural within your narrative—they shouldn't feel forced or out-of-place. If done correctly, flashbacks can help create a richer experience for readers by adding depth and complexity to your story.

**#13. *Employ Subplots: Subplots are a tool for creating a more complex and engaging story. It is important to understand how to use subplots to create a more dynamic narrative.***

Subplots are a great way to add depth and complexity to your story. They can be used to introduce new characters,

explore different themes, or provide additional information about the main plot. Subplots can also help create tension and suspense by introducing unexpected twists and turns in the narrative. By weaving multiple storylines together, you can create an intricate web of events that will keep readers engaged.

When using subplots, it is important to make sure they are connected to the main plot in some way. This connection should be clear from the beginning so that readers understand how each storyline relates to one another. Additionally, try not to let any of your subplots overshadow the main plot; instead use them as tools for enhancing it.

Finally, remember that subplots should have their own arcs with beginnings, middles and ends just like any other story element. Make sure each one has its own climax and resolution so that readers feel satisfied when they reach the end of your novel.

**#14. *Employ Suspense: Suspense is an important tool for creating tension and keeping readers engaged. It is important to understand how to use suspense to create a more thrilling narrative.***

Suspense is an essential tool for creating tension and keeping readers engaged. It can be used to build anticipation, heighten emotions, and create a sense of mystery. By withholding information from the reader until the right moment, suspense can add depth and complexity to a story.

When using suspense in your writing, it's important to consider how much information you want to reveal at any given time. Too little information will leave readers feeling confused or frustrated; too much will take away the element of surprise that makes suspense so effective. You should also think about when you want to reveal certain plot points—for example, if you're building up towards a big climax or twist ending, it may be best not to give away too many details beforehand.

Finally, remember that suspense isn't just about withholding information—it's also about providing clues along the way that hint at what might happen next. This helps keep readers guessing and encourages them to stay invested in your story as they try to figure out what comes next.

**#15. *Employ Irony: Irony is a tool for creating a sense of humor and surprise. It is important to understand how to use irony to create a more entertaining narrative.***

Irony is a powerful tool for creating humor and surprise in writing. It can be used to add an unexpected twist to a story, or to create tension between characters. Irony can also be used as a way of making light of difficult situations, allowing readers to laugh at the absurdity of life's challenges. When using irony in your writing, it is important to consider how you want the reader to interpret it. Is the irony meant as a joke? Or does it have deeper meaning?

When crafting ironic scenes or dialogue, think about what kind of effect you are trying to achieve with your words. Are you looking for laughter? A sense of shock? Or perhaps something more subtle that will leave readers thinking long after they finish reading? Consider how each character might react differently when faced with an ironic situation—this can help bring out their individual personalities and make them more relatable.

Finally, remember that irony should always serve the purpose of advancing your narrative rather than simply being there for its own sake. If done well, irony can be one of the most effective tools in any writer's arsenal!

**#16. *Employ Climax: The climax is the most exciting and intense part of the story. It is important to understand how to use the climax to create a satisfying and memorable ending.***

The climax is the most important part of any story. It is the moment when all of the tension and conflict that has been building throughout the narrative reaches its peak, and it can be used to create a powerful and memorable ending. The climax should be carefully crafted so that it feels like a natural conclusion to the story, while still providing an exciting resolution for readers.

When writing your climax, consider how you want your characters to react in this pivotal moment. What will they do? How will they feel? Will there be any surprises or unexpected twists? These are all questions you should ask yourself as you craft your climax scene.

It's also important to think about how long your climax should last. You don't want it to drag on too long or end too quickly; instead, try to find a balance between suspenseful buildup and satisfying resolution. Finally, make sure that whatever happens during the climax ties into themes from earlier in the story—this will help ensure that readers have an emotional connection with what transpires.

**#17. *Employ Resolution: The resolution is the part of the story where the conflicts are resolved and the story comes to an end. It is important to understand how to use the resolution to create a satisfying and memorable ending.***

The resolution is the part of the story where all conflicts are resolved and the story comes to an end. It's important for writers to understand how to use this resolution effectively in order to create a satisfying and memorable ending. The resolution should be used as a way to tie up any loose ends, answer lingering questions, and provide closure for readers. This can be done by providing answers or explanations that resolve any plot points that were left unresolved throughout the story. Additionally, it's important for writers to ensure that their resolutions feel earned; they should make sense within the context of what has come before them in order for readers to find them believable.

In addition, it's essential for writers to consider how their characters have grown or changed throughout the course of their stories when crafting a resolution. By showing how characters have evolved over time due to events from earlier in the narrative, readers will be able to connect with these characters on an emotional level and gain satisfaction from seeing them reach a successful conclusion.

Finally, it's important not only for authors but also editors and agents alike when considering manuscripts that they look at whether or not there is sufficient closure provided by its resolution. A well-crafted ending can leave readers feeling satisfied with what they've read while also leaving room open for further exploration if desired.

**#18. *Understand Genre: Genre is the type of story being told. It is important to understand the conventions of the genre and how to use them to create a successful novel.***

Understanding genre is essential for any writer looking to create a successful novel. Genre refers to the type of story being told, and it can range from fantasy and science fiction to romance and mystery. Each genre has its own conventions that must be followed in order for the story to be effective. For example, a fantasy novel should include elements such as magic, mythical creatures, and otherworldly settings; while a romance novel should focus on developing relationships between characters.

In order to write an effective novel within a particular genre, writers need to understand how these conventions work together. They must also consider their audience when crafting their stories—what kind of readers are they targeting? Knowing this will help them determine which elements of the genre they should emphasize or downplay in order to make their book more appealing.

Finally, understanding genre helps writers develop unique ideas that stand out from other books in the same category. By exploring different aspects of each genre and experimenting with new approaches, authors can create something truly original that resonates with readers.

**#19. *Understand Structure: Structure is the way in which the story is organized. It is important to understand the different types of structure and how to use them to create a successful novel.***

Structure is an essential element of any novel. It helps to create a sense of order and purpose, allowing the reader to

follow the story in a logical way. Different types of structure can be used to achieve different effects, from creating suspense and tension to providing clarity and direction.

The most common type of structure is linear, which follows a chronological sequence from beginning to end. This type of structure allows for easy comprehension as it progresses in a straightforward manner. However, this type of structure can also become predictable if not handled carefully.

Another popular form is non-linear or flashback structures that jump back and forth between past events and present ones. This technique can be used effectively when there are multiple storylines or characters involved in the plotline as it allows readers to gain insight into each character's motivations without having them all revealed at once.

Finally, circular structures involve stories that come full circle by returning back to where they began but with new understanding or perspective gained along the way. These types of stories often have themes that are explored throughout their entirety such as redemption or growth.

Understanding how these various structures work together will help you craft your own unique narrative style while still maintaining coherence within your story arc. With careful consideration given towards structuring your novel correctly, you will be able to ensure that your readers remain engaged until its conclusion!

**#20. *Understand the Publishing Process: The publishing process is the process of getting a novel published. It is important to understand the different steps of the publishing process and how to navigate them successfully.***

The publishing process is a complex one, and it can be difficult to know where to start. The first step is usually writing the novel itself. This involves creating an outline of the story, developing characters and plot points, and then actually writing out the book in its entirety. Once this is done, authors must decide which type of publisher they want to work with – traditional or self-publishing.

Once a publisher has been chosen, authors will need to submit their manuscript for review. This includes providing information about themselves as well as samples of their work. After submission, publishers may request revisions or additional material before making a decision on whether or not to publish the book.

If accepted by a publisher, authors will enter into negotiations regarding royalties and other terms related to publication rights. Authors should also consider marketing strategies that will help promote their books once published.

Finally, after all these steps have been completed successfully, authors can look forward to seeing their books in print!