

National Novel Writing Month: NaNoWriMo

If you've ever felt like you had a novel in you, or if you're a writer struggling to get that first or second novel written, I feel your pain. About 90% of writing seems to consist of procrastination. If it isn't the lure of the internet, work, blogging or social life, then it's just the enormity of the task. Writing the first draft of a novel is like a rough sketch of a hastily drawn landscape. It isn't perfect, and it is often nothing like the final draft. In fact, the finished novel is often a product of years of revisions, third or fourth drafts and many late nights and early mornings.

If this sounds like you and you've always wanted to write a novel, or are already doing so and need a push in the right direction, then look no further than National Novel Writing Month, nicknamed NaNoWriMo, an international phenomenon. Like all the best things, this happens once a year, in November. One month of pure, unbridled novel writing (fiction or non-fiction) with the goal of writing 50,000 words in one month. According to the founder Chris Baty, 50,000 words is roughly half a novel, about the same size as *Brave New World*. Everyone signs up to the NaNoWriMo website, where they can validate their word counts, and keep track of how far they are from the finishing line by a nifty green stats counter.

Writing 50,000 words in a month is one of the hardest things I've done, but one of the best things I've accomplished this year. Quite simply, finishing NaNoWriMo feels like you've swum the Channel. Not that I've swum the Channel, but I imagine reaching the other side feels amazing. Many people begin with just an idea – a character or a scenario – and dive right in. Other people have a plan. For me, it was a character and half a plan. For the rest of it, I was winging my way through, trying to work out how my character gets from A to B. At some point, I did actually have to sit down and think about where the plot was going. What helped was that NaNoWriMo has extra perks – you get to try software such as Scrivener, which makes plotting and writing a novel much simpler.

The goal isn't to have a perfect, finished novel by the time December rolls around. The goal is to have the bones, something that you might want to rework, add to and edit once November is over. Motivation comes from a community of writers via forums, twitter, Facebook and your local chapter of NaNoWriMo-ers – you can meet in coffee shops, pubs and bars to work together whilst ingesting coffee. If you're going to do NaNoWriMo, be prepared for sleepless nights and the sad looks of neglected friends and relatives. Ultimately, it was one of the best things I have ever done – and now I have half of a novel to work with.