

Don't get locked into one method. Allow yourself to be flexible and creative.

You may brainstorm your novel but use a more defined outline approach for certain detailed scenes with multiple characters.

Decide which one works best for your story.

Step One - Pre-writing:

The planning stage is your time to gather all the information you want for your story. Some helpful ways to gather this information include brainstorming, free-writing, and outlining. These three are explained below.

Brainstorming: Once you choose a topic then start writing some notes about it such as brief statements or complete sentences. Make sure you turn off the "internal editor" or you will never get anywhere. Brainstorming is basically jotting down some ideas that are associated with your topic of choice.

Free-writing: This is writing without any thought to structure and just letting the story develop as you write. Many authors generate ideas for their stories and novels this way. Just write and don't stop. Free writing is a great way to sort of "mind dump" In free writing, you are free to let your story head off in any direction.

Outlining: This is the more structural approach to planning. This one is my favorite although I like the free writing as well. I thrive on organization so this option works well for me to keep details in order. Your outline may take on a formal look or even a less formal appearance. Outlining allows you to visualize the design or structure of your story by organizing characters, scenes, developing and answering the implied promise.

It is perfectly okay to use all three ideas while planning your writing project. Gather your ideas by brainstorming and then see if you can place the events of your story in some order such as chronological.

I challenge you to practice all three ways of collecting information. Some authors use writing software such as Scrivener; I just like using Word and expandable file folders. I also use One Note from Microsoft. I'll collect pictures from calendars and some from magazines to help me describe places, people, weather reports, etc.

Step Two - Drafting:

Drafting is the first copy of your story from beginning to end. It is normal to see grammar and spelling mistakes, even punctuation errors are found. This is your copy to read back to yourself, unless you have someone else comment on it for you, and you make notes about the changes it needs. This allows you to see information that does not propel your story forward or keeping your main character from reaching her goals. Some authors will go through several drafts or versions before they are satisfied.

Step Three - Organizing:

Once your draft is taking shape, try comparing it to an outline to see how you are progressing. This is your chance to make sure your details are in proper order and that your overall piece has structure and logical flow.

Some authors outline after the draft while others prefer to draft based on their outline.

Step Four - Collaborating

This can be somewhat a scary step but a really important one. Meet with writing tutors or writing group peers and have them read and comment. Go prepared to meet with them by discussing some area you believe need improving, so you may want to write down page/ paragraph numbers and your concern. Fix your mind beforehand that your work is not in a perfect state and be welcoming of the feedback a tutor can provide.

Step Five - Revising:

This is your chance to make the suggested changes to your draft. Sometimes writers need to lay their work aside for a few days then go back and read it with fresh eyes. Do not neglect this step whether you take the advise of your peers / tutor or not. Nobody produces a suitable work on the first go around; and likewise don't be afraid to go through several drafts before you produce a final copy.

Step Six - Editing and Proofreading:

This is the fine-tuning part of your writing. During this stage of the writing process, focus on grammar, spelling, mechanics, etc. Try editing on a printed copy verses on screen but online tools such as spelling check can be valuable. Proofreading is the final step of the writing process.