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# November is National Novel Writing Month!

[www.nanowrimo.org](http://www.nanowrimo.org)

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November Spawned

## A Novel Writing Handout

*“Of all the ways of acquiring books, writing them oneself is regarded as the most praiseworthy method” - Walter Benjamin*

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Your novel's title here!

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Space for a drawing!

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Your name here!

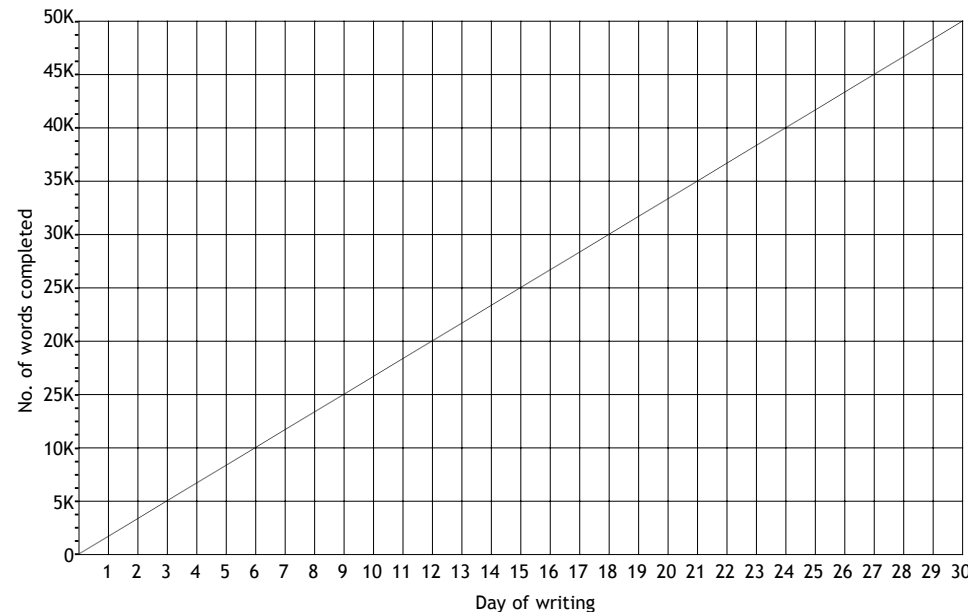
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My Novel .....	2	NaNoWriMo Mechanics .....	17
Characters and Relationships .....	4	Previous Years in Birmingham .....	18
Timeline .....	6	This Year's Plans .....	18
Maps .....	8	Novel-Writing Hints and Tips .....	19
Random Character Generator .....	10	Useful Websites .....	21
Unstucker .....	12	Novelling Progress .....	22
Notes .....	14	Writing Achievements .....	23
Check This (Later On) .....	16		









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# My Novel

<p><b>Title</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Genre</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Theme</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p><b>Movie tagline</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <p><b>Protagonist's Name</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Protagonist's Goals</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Protagonist's Catchphrase or Motto</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Antagonist's Name</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <p><b>Antagonist's Goal</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <p><b>Antagonist's Catchphrase or Motto</b></p> <hr/> <hr/>	<p><b>Pre-planning (% or description)</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <p><b>Influences</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p><b>Music to Write By</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p><b>Years Taken Part</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <p><b>Years Won</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <p><b>Note to self</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p><b>Encouragement from friend or loved one</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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# Writing Achievements

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Quadruple Figures!</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  1,000 words</p> <p><b>Weekend Warrior!</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  3,000 words in a weekend</p> <p><b>One Third Done!</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  16,666 words</p> <p><b>Social Scribe!</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  1,000 words at a write-in</p> <p><b>All Downhill Now!</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  25,000 words - halfway point</p> | <p><b>Two Thirds Done!</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  33,333 words</p> <p><b>Ninja Focus!</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  1,667 words without getting up</p> <p><b>Almost There!</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  40,000 words</p> <p><b>The Great Concluder!</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  Bring your novel to a conclusion</p> <p><b>NaNoWriMo Novelist!</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  50,000 words during November</p> |
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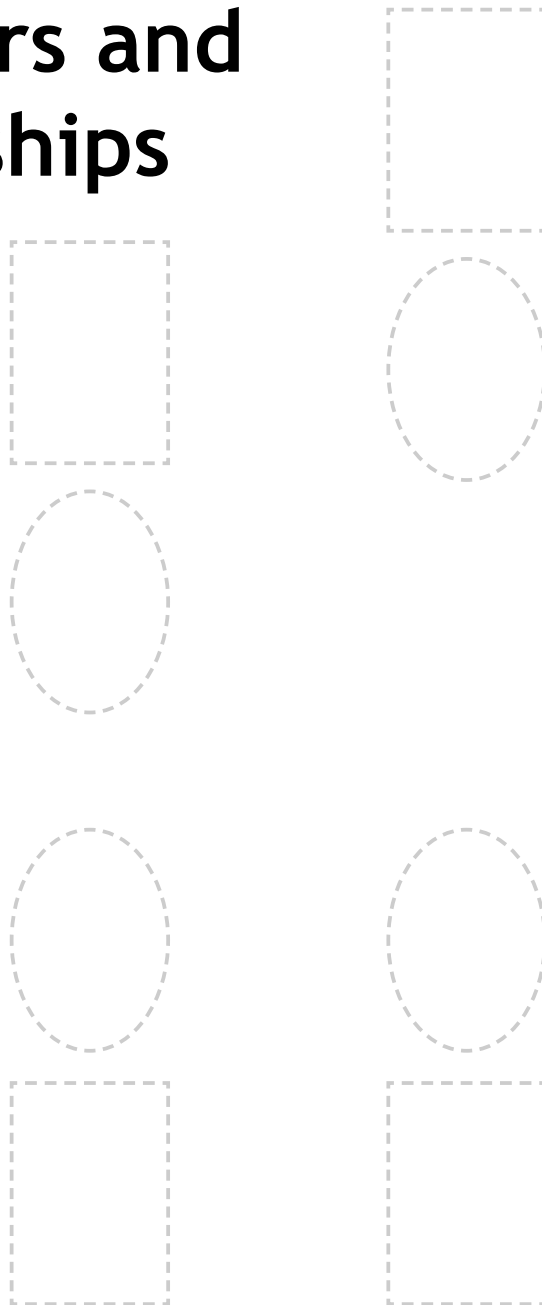
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# Characters and Relationships

Draw faces on the little ovals, make notes in the little boxes, and draw lines to show inter-relationships! You might draw them when planning the novel, or just use it when writing to quickly note who has a moustache and who has an eyepatch!

- hairstyle •
- hair colour • facial hair • glasses •
- eye colour • nose shape • cleft chin? • earrings •
- other jewellery • clothes style •
- age •
- temperament •
- likes • dislikes •
- job • family •
- build • weight •
- relationships •
- life events •
- birthplace



# Useful Websites

[www.nanowrimo.org](http://www.nanowrimo.org)

The home of National Novel Writing Month. Sign up to take part in novel-writing during November! Keep an eye on the site next year for details of two new official spin-offs from the main event - one devoted to creative non-fiction (e.g. autobiography), and one devoted to screenwriting.

[www.silveragebooks.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/mag/ns/november\\_spawned.htm](http://www.silveragebooks.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/mag/ns/november_spawned.htm)

Here you'll find a pdf file of this handout, a copy of the Excel spreadsheet that can be so useful for monitoring your progress, and probably, later on, photos of meet-ups.

<http://spacejock.com>

Home of ywriter2, free novel-writing software that comes highly recommended by a lot of November novelists. I might try it myself this year.

[www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org)

Free desktop software package, including a word processor and spreadsheet software.

[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

A great source of semi-accurate information on everything in the universe! Anything found here has to be carefully checked later, but it's great for getting a quick handle on things.

<http://writing.teiru.net>

Tim Yao (aka NewMexicoKid), a wise and respected ML, has a page here of useful links to things like name generators, so I'm not going to redo his work - I'll just point you in the direction of it.

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/temptblocker>

Visit here to download Temptation Blocker - choose the programs likely to tempt you during writing hours, say how long you want to work for, and it'll stop you accessing them till you're done.

[www.nanowrimo.org/modules/newbb/viewforum.php?forum=157](http://www.nanowrimo.org/modules/newbb/viewforum.php?forum=157)

The NaNo Technology section of the NaNoWriMo forums is where I first heard of the Dvorak keyboard, the Temptation Blocker, the Alphasmart, and many other bits and bobs that I find so useful now.

[www.peltorro.com](http://www.peltorro.com)

A website devoted to the unofficial patron saint of NaNoWriMo - the Reverend Lionel Fanthorpe, who wrote dozens of novels, taking less than a fortnight for each of them. (Pel Terro was one of his many, many pseudonyms.) Look here for inspiration!

[www.nanofimo.org](http://www.nanofimo.org)

During National Novel Finishing Month, an unofficial spin-off, you work on novels-in-progress, instead of starting from scratch.

[www.birminghamwords.co.uk](http://www.birminghamwords.co.uk)

A thriving and rapidly growing website, Birmingham Words is a great place to go to keep up with literary activity in Birmingham.

[www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk)

From September to December, Alphasmarts will be selling at vastly inflated prices on ebay because of the demand from other November novelists. Wait till April, June or July, and pick one up cheap.

writing hours - and let someone else set the password.

### Build up a good rhythm

If you have been writing a regular amount every day, and if you miss a day, don't necessarily increase your goal amount for each day remaining. You will have developed a rhythm of writing which may well be thrown off by trying to write even one or two hundred words a day more. It might be better to schedule an additional shift at the weekend.

### Keep your momentum high!

If you have made mistakes, make a note to fix them and carry on writing as if they had already been fixed. In fact, instead of writing notes, why not start an appendix where your narrator apologises for the inconsistencies in his or her story and promises to fix them in a second edition? That way, your goofs will only add to your word count!

Similarly, don't do research during writing hours. That's what the rest of the day is for! Keep a notebook by the desk and make a note of anything you need to check up on (and that applies to things you need to check in your own book too, consistency issues, etc). Leave a space or write something silly to fill the gap.

### Weekends

Be wary about planning to write too much extra at weekends - they can sometimes turn out to be the hardest times to write. You might have nanowrimo meet-ups to attend, dates to go on, films to watch, and so on.

### A meal a day

Try dividing the action of your novel into portions that correspond to the number of times you will sit down to write. Having

one clear goal for each writing session makes it easier to focus on the task at hand.

### Really really stuck?

Use the unstucker in this handout! Guaranteed to get you out of a jam with three rolls of the die.

### Support

For encouragement, visit the NaNoWriMo forums - but only outside writing hours! And watch out for anyone who tells you that anything is verboten (e.g. so-called Mary-Sue characters) - anything goes in November! Ridicule is nothing to be scared of!

### Word can help

It's possible to customise Word so that the Word Count toolbar is parked on one of the main toolbars. Tools-Customize, Toolbars, tick Word Count, and then drag it where you want it. Then click Close.

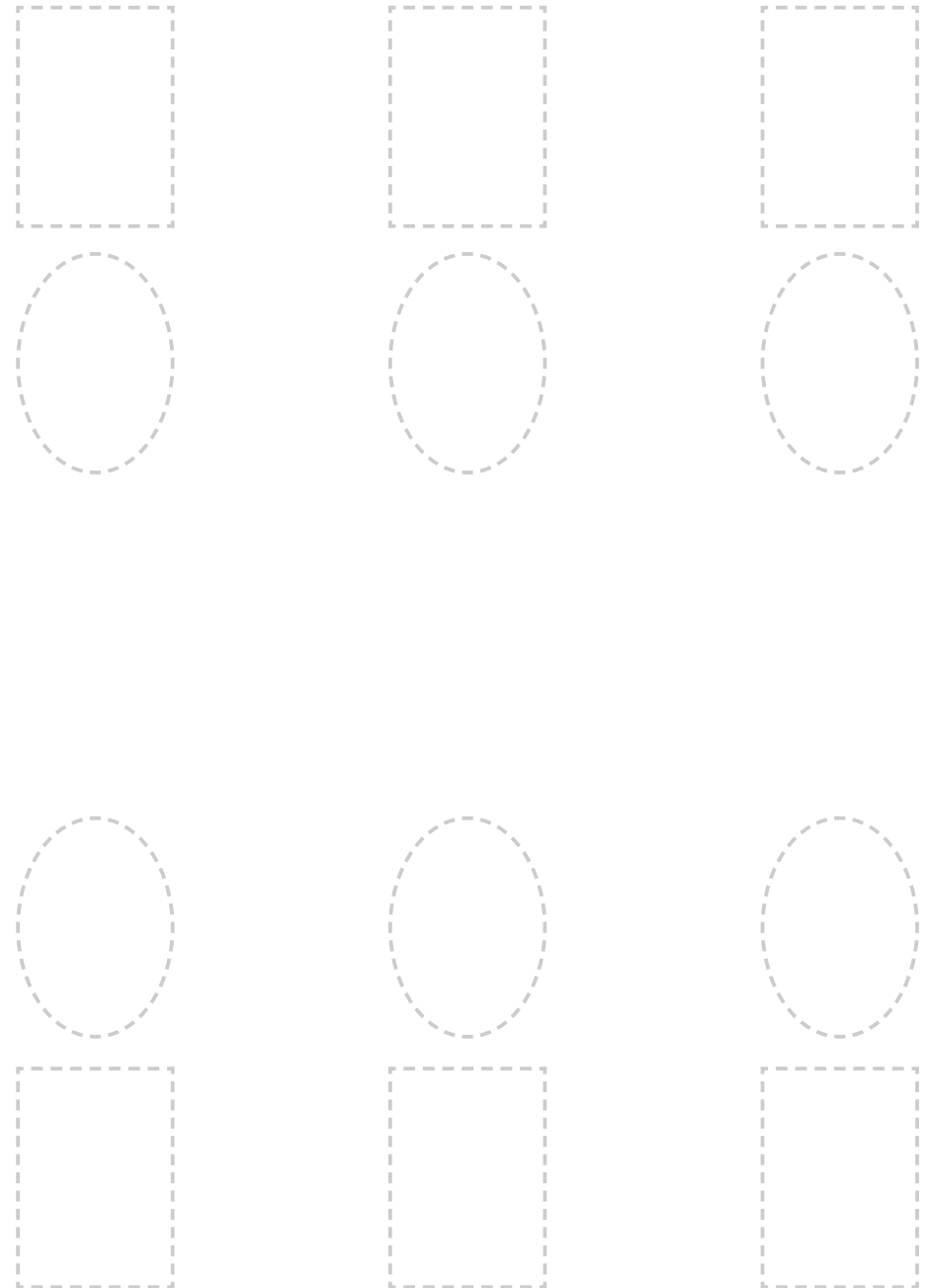
Recount regularly, and celebrate like an idiot every time you write a hundred words!

### What about next year?

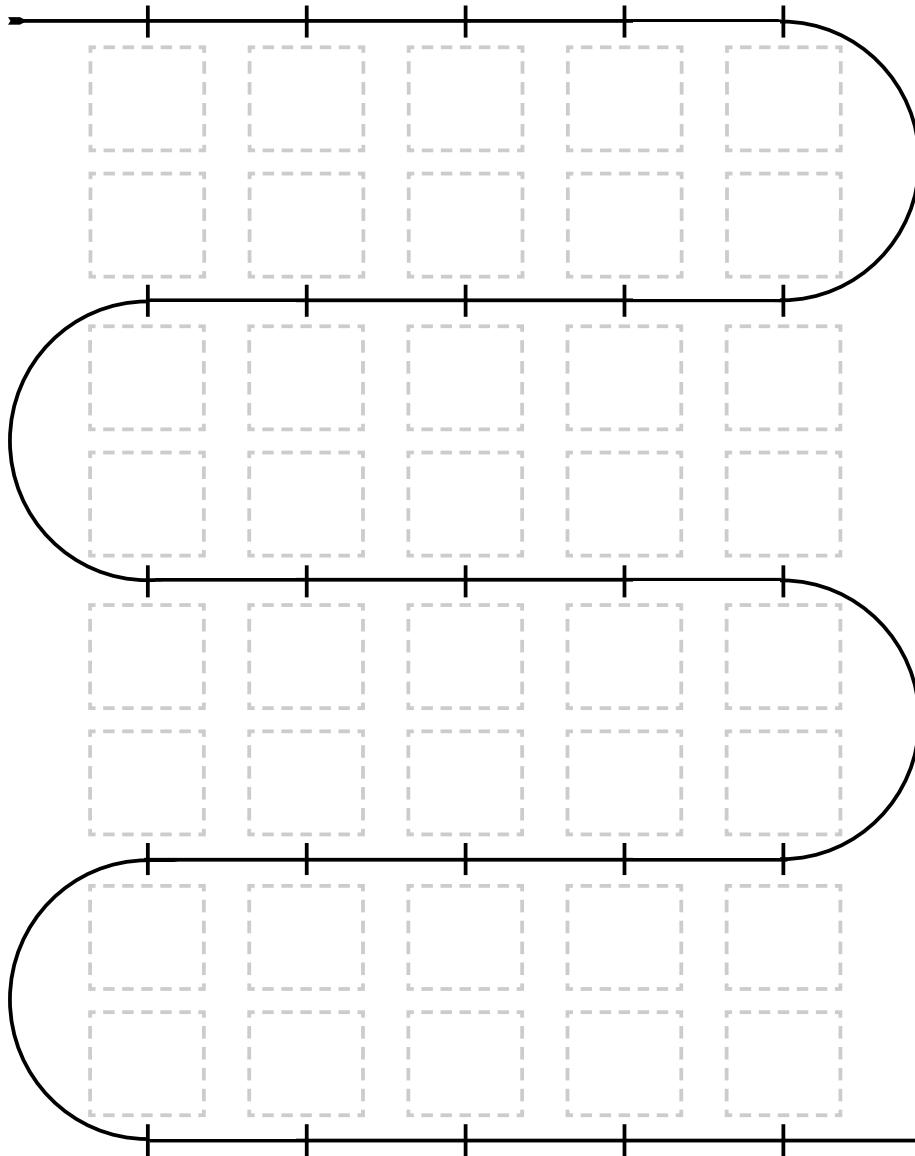
When this year is done, think about next time - would it help to learn how to touch-type, or to learn the Dvorak keyboard layout? If your typing speed has held your writing up, now's the time to start planning to make it easier next time.

### Ignore what everyone says!

Ignore all advice and write the novel the way you want to. People write their novels in a thousand different ways, in a thousand different circumstances. Yours is going to be the best of all.



# Timeline



# Novel-Writing Hints and Tips

## Try and write regularly

You can't write a novel in a single day. Even Michael Moorcock takes two. One big heave won't get you there. Do a little every day.

## Attend your local meet-ups

They may well seem to be a waste of valuable writing time, but the sense of camaraderie and support that results will help you when you need it the most. Plus, there's bound to be someone there that you really don't want to succeed while you fail! Pick your enemy and grind their noses into the dirt all month with your incredible word count!

## Ignore the nay-sayers!

Be ready to fight anyone who says that novel-writing is not a noble pursuit and an end in itself!

## Names don't matter

Names don't matter very much at this stage, so just use the first words that come into your head, and make a note to change it later. If you are really stuck, you could use a name from your spam folder. Or you could take a normal name and change the first letter - for example, Stephen could become Astephen - something that opens up whole vistas of naming possibilities.

## The most important tip of all

Never ask yourself what *should* come next - ask yourself what *could* come next. (I

Here are some hints and tips - don't be concerned by any contradictions, and don't worry if something here is utterly opposed to the way you write or plan to write - everyone is different, and writing in different circumstances. These are just some things that we've found helpful.

always think of Alain Robbe-Grillet describing peas on a plate, though I don't know if he did that because he was stuck.)

## Turn off the TV

If you really want to give yourself a brilliant chance of finishing, record all your tv during November. Catch up on it during December and January, when it's too cold to do anything else, or at least don't watch anything till you've done your 1,666 words.

## Chatterboxes

Give your characters reasons to talk - dialogue can fill up pages easily. Give them different viewpoints, different takes on the world. Think of Friends, and how each episode is basically six people reacting one after the another in amusingly different ways to a few fairly insignificant events.

## Block the internet

If you have a cable router, programme it to block access to the internet during your

# Previous Years in Birmingham

The first meet-ups in Birmingham took place in 2003, when Nottingham uber-ML Raeble, at that point effectively the ML for all of England outside London, flew in to meet up. A couple of people were there, but I'm afraid we don't have photos of this historic event.



The following year, in 2004, a small group met up regularly at the Martineau Place Starbucks, with almost all of them finishing their novels, followed by very boozy (at least on the ML's part) TGIO drinks at the Malt House by the canal.

In 2005 a much larger group met for a kick-off meeting at the same pub, followed by a number of excellent write-ins at Starbucks on New St and a not-so-excellent TGIO at Bacchus - it was too busy and there

was nowhere for anyone to sit.



# This Year's Plans

This year in Birmingham there will be write-ins every Sunday lunchtime. They will probably be downstairs at Starbucks on New St, but check the local forum to confirm each week.

There will also be a kick-off party on the last weekend in October, location tbc.

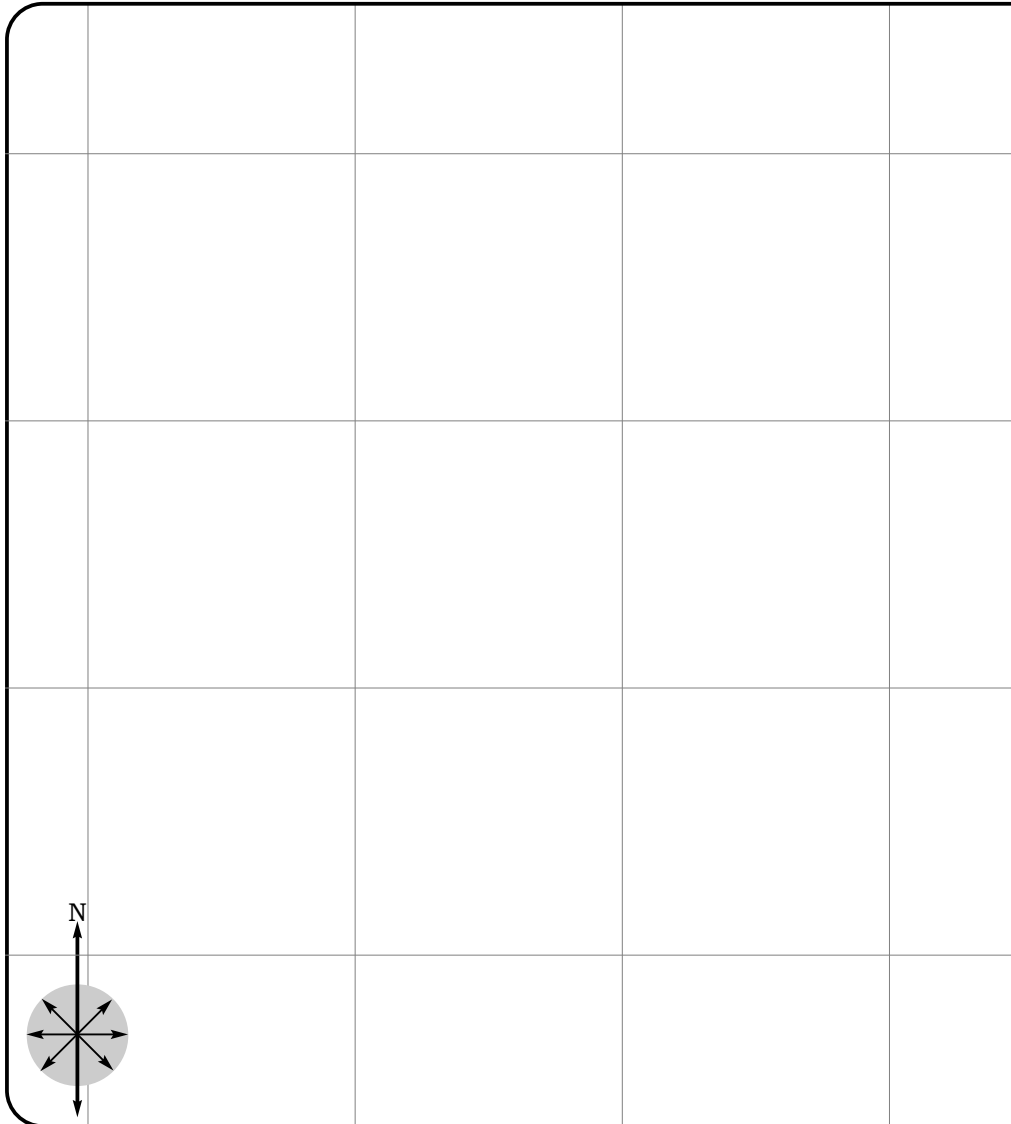
Finally, we will have a Thank God It's Over party, probably on the first weekend after November. Check the forum for details.



Fill in a timeline, if you need to! Use it in advance to plan out the most time-sensitive five minutes of your character's life, or just use as you go along to keep track. It's a good idea to put the first contemporary event a way along the line, so that there's room later to add flashbacks, birthdays, etc, before it.

# Maps

If you're planning everything out in advance, maps are a good place to start. On the other hand, if you prefer to wing it, it's useful to make a quick note of the places you mention as you go along.



# NaNoWriMo Mechanics

## Know the rules

The challenge is to write a novel of at least 50,000 words, from start to finish, during November, on your own.

There are always quite a few people taking part who aren't quite following the rules. Maybe they are continuing a novel they've already begun (but only including the new writing in their word count, of course), or writing something that isn't strictly speaking a novel. If that's you, don't worry about it too much, though you shouldn't really claim a winner's certificate at the end.

However, please do remember that the rules are there to focus the event, and to help as many people as possible to finish their novels, and that it's really up to Chris Baty and his team to decide on the rules of the challenge that they have set, so do try at least to respect the rules, even as you're ignoring them!

## Read the FAQs on the NaNoWriMo website

Everything you could want to know about NaNoWriMo can be found there.

## Affiliate to your local region and set it as your home

It means you'll get messages from your ML, your local forum will be highlighted on the website, and your word count will be included in our regional total.

## Update your word count

This isn't all that important, but last year some people were a bit disappointed to

realise how this works: the graph of your writing in your profile uses your updated word counts as data points, so to get a nice smooth graph, update every day, even if you only add a single word.

## Remember that you have to verify to be a winner

Every year there are a few people who update their word counts above 50,000, but don't qualify as winners. Remember that to win, as per the rules of the challenge, the length of your novel has to be verified by the NaNoWriMo computers. The method of verification may vary slightly from year to year, but on the whole it means uploading a plain text file of your document to the specified website. The verification process only becomes available towards the end of the month, so if you finish in the first week (not impossible for someone who has the week off), remember to come back at the end and finish the job.

## Help out with costs if you can

NaNoWriMo is a non-profit organisation. Everything is paid for by donations and store sales, with half of anything raised over their costs each year going towards the building of libraries in the Third World. The rest is reinvested in making the following year's event even better.

I know that loads of those participating here in Birmingham are students (see pictures overleaf!), and so don't feel guilty if you can't afford anything, but if you can, please do. The t-shirts from the online shop arrive remarkably quickly, even here in the UK.







# Unstucker

Are you stuck with your writing? Let the unstucker unstuck you! All you need is a six-sided die. Roll it now, and keep rolling till you have your solution!

## 1 Digress!

Roll again to find out how!

- 1 Summarise what's happened so far
- 2 List the questions that are still bothering one of your characters
- 3 Describe a character's [1 shoes 2 hat 3 hair 4 watch 5 coat 6 bag] and explain how it relates to his or her character and motivations
- 4 Describe a childhood memory of one of the characters (use one of your own if necessary)
- 5 One character tells a story about a [1 giant 2 robbery 3 flower 4 alien 5 shark 6 elephant]
- 6 Meanwhile, on the other side of the universe...

## 2 Use this word!

It doesn't matter if it's in the next sentence, or the one after that, or whenever - just get your story to the point where you can use it.

- 1 Roll again [1 Discombobulate 2 Desembogue 3 Disembarrass 4 Disinfest 5 Dispassionate 6 Disconsolate]
- 2 Tergiversate
- 3 Abomination
- 4 Antediluvian

- 5 Brobdingnagian
- 6 Roll again [1 Insatiable 2 Intractable 3 Inedible 4 Invincible 5 Indivisible 6 Indelible]

## 3 Take the easy way out!

You might feel cheap today, but holding a finished novel in your hands on December 1st will wash away the stain!

- 1 Write a letter from one character to another
- 2 Introduce a new character (the Random Character Generator on p. 10 can help here) and have someone explain to him or her what's happened so far
- 3 A character has a dream about [1 flying 2 fighting 3 loving 4 eating 5 drowning 6 falling]
- 4 Ask a friend or your partner what happens next in your story - be very careful not to tell them anything about what has happened so far
- 5 Write down everything that happened to you today as if it happened to one of your characters
- 6 Sorry, I've got nothing... your problems are too intractable... I suppose you could try eating a lot of cheese before you go to bed tonight - or don't go to the bathroom before sleeping - then write down any nightmares that result

## 4 Something happens!

- 1 A [1 car 2 motorcycle 3 camel 4 helicopter 5 UFO 6 cat on a skateboard] crashes nearby
- 2 There's an earthquake of [1-2 negligible 3-4 dangerous 5-6 cataclysmic] magnitude!

- 3 A [1 beautiful 2 angry 3 petulant 4 adventurous 5 timid 6 alarmed] girl walks in
- 4 A man with a gun walks in
- 5 There's a thunderstorm, a bad one, with lots of lightning and thunder - your character probably thinks about the oddity of having two words for the same event, depending on whether we see it or hear it
- 6 Nothing happens. It's quiet... too quiet!

## 5 Old standbys!

- 1 Type up all of your chapter headings - if you don't have any, make some up - you can always delete them after the words have been counted - it'll keep you moving forward, and like the title of a school assignment, they will challenge you to come up with ideas, and those ideas will naturally cluster around them
- 2 Write the rest of your novel in one night... this can be a very useful technique - write one sentence, in the proper tense, and with the proper punctuation, to represent each chapter scene or big event that you know about. It could be the punchline of a chapter, a description of a building, or a bit of dialogue. Once you reach the end, find a fruitful spot and start to fill in the gaps.
- 3 Don't waste time being stuck - just write a different part of the book. In a week's time the perfect solution to that bit you're stuck on might have come to mind. In fact, events in the rest of the book will actually end up telling you exactly what you need to put in that chapter.
- 4 You will rely on the power of prayer! You will close your eyes and pray to [1 Chris Baty 2 Pallas Athena 3 Thor 4 Monkey Magic 5 The Great Earth

Mother 6 Terry Pratchett]

- 5 A character browses a bookcase of [1-2 actual books 3-4 imaginary books 5-6 both actual and imaginary books]
- 6 Draw a scattergram (you could use the Notes pages herein) - scribble down everything you want to appear in this chapter (or even the whole book) - events, moods, sounds, smells - and then draw some arrows to thread a line through them all

## 6 Time to get serious!

- 1 Go to bed and get some sleep - tomorrow try writing when you aren't so tired
- 2 Have a bath and think about things
- 3 Make a cup of tea
- 4 Tuck your keyboard behind your monitor - let your frustration at not being able to type build up for a few minutes, then put it back in place
- 5 Email your MLs for help, advice or just to let off steam (birmingham\_england@nanowrimo.org). You could request an emergency write-in! We could even have a virtual one via MSN Messenger.
- 6 You will channel the spirit of another writer, whether he be living or dead! You will channel the quick-writing spirit of [1 Michael Moorcock 2 Honore de Balzac 3 Reverend Lionel Fanthorpe 4 Anthony Trollope 5 Sir Walter Scott 6 Charles Dickens - "so prolific was his output and so frenzied his life, it seems miraculous he lived as long as he did" (Cambridge Guide to Literature in English)].

If, having tried the unstucker, you are still stuck, look at the last word you wrote. Write down the word that you would expect to come next. Repeat this process until you have reached 50,000 words!