GoalTodo

Write a book in 50 weeks: a 60,000-word draft, then a second draft

Write a book

50 weeks · Mon, Nov 30 → Sun, Nov 14

Week by week

Tick a box each time you do a session.

Nov 30–Dec 6
Week 1

Decide what the book is

Plan

- [ ] [ ] Write one paragraph on what the book is: who or what it's about, what's at stake, and how it ends if you know
  30 min
- [ ] Count the words on three typical pages of a book like yours, and multiply by its page count
- [ ] Put five writing slots in your calendar for every week from week 4
  long enough to write 500 words

Done when: Your one-paragraph description is written, and five writing slots a week are in your calendar

Sticking point: Don't wait for the perfect idea. Pick the idea you keep coming back to; the draft will improve it.

Dec 7–13
Week 2

Sketch the shape

Plan

- [ ] [ ] Write the beginning, the middle turning point and the ending in a few lines each
  45 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] List the scenes or chapters you can see, one per sticky note or card
  45 min

Done when: You have 20 to 30 scenes or chapters on cards, from the opening to the end

Sticking point: Writing non-fiction or a memoir? List chapters instead of scenes, with the question each chapter answers.

Dec 14–20
Week 3

Finish the outline

Plan

- [ ] [ ] [ ] Put the cards in order and write one line for each chapter
  45 min
- [ ] [ ] Write a test scene from anywhere in the book
  300 words

Done when: Your outline has one line per chapter, start to finish, and you've written a test scene

Sticking point: The outline will change as you write. It's a map, not a contract.

Dec 21–27
Week 4

Your first words

First draft

Write the next part of your draft
300 words

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Done when: Your draft has 1,500 words

Sticking point: Don't reread and polish yesterday's pages. Read the last paragraph, then carry on.

Dec 28–Jan 3
Week 5

Building the habit

First draft

Write the next part of your draft
400 words

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Done when: Your draft has 3,500 words

Sticking point: Write at the same time each day if you can. The habit does more work than willpower.

Jan 4–10
Week 6

Full pace: 500 words a day

First draft

Write the next part of your draft
500 words

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Done when: Your draft has 6,000 words

Sticking point: Some days 500 words come quickly and some days they take much longer. Both count.

Jan 11–17
Week 7

Keep going

First draft

Write the next part of your draft
500 words

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Done when: Your draft has 8,500 words

Jan 18–24
Week 8

Past 10,000 words

First draft

Write the next part of your draft
500 words

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Done when: Your draft has 11,000 words

Sticking point: If you're stuck on a scene, leave a note like [fight scene here] and write the next one you can see.

Jan 25–31
Week 9

Into the story

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 13,500 words

Feb 1–7
Week 10

Catch-up week

First draft

- [ ] Write only the words you're short of. If you're on target, write nothing new this week
  up to 500 words, only if you're behind
- [ ] Read your outline and update it for what you now know about the story
  30 min

Done when: Your draft has at least 13,500 words and your outline is up to date

Sticking point: On target? Then this week is a breather: update the outline and come back fresh next week. The week's target stays the same either way.

Feb 8–14
Week 11

Steady

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 16,000 words

Feb 15–21
Week 12

Nearly a third

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 18,500 words

Feb 22–28
Week 13

Keep the pace

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 21,000 words

Sticking point: Missed a day? Don't double up tomorrow. The catch-up weeks are where missing words go.

Mar 1–7
Week 14

Towards the middle

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 23,500 words

Mar 8–14
Week 15

Past 25,000 words

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 26,000 words

Mar 15–21
Week 16

Catch-up week

First draft

- [ ] Write only the words you're short of. If you're on target, write nothing new this week
  up to 500 words, only if you're behind
- [ ] Read your outline and update it for what you now know about the story
  30 min

Done when: Your draft has at least 26,000 words and your outline is up to date

Mar 22–28
Week 17

The middle

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 28,500 words

Sticking point: Drafts often sag in the middle. Check your outline for the next turn in the story, and bring it closer.

Mar 29–Apr 4
Week 18

Halfway

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 31,000 words

Apr 5–11
Week 19

Over the hump

First draft

Write the next part of your draft
500 words

Done when: Your draft has 33,500 words

Sticking point: The urge to start again from page one is strongest around here. Don't. Note what you'd change and keep going.

Apr 12–18
Week 20

Keep the pace

First draft

Write the next part of your draft
500 words

Done when: Your draft has 36,000 words

Apr 19–25
Week 21

Past 38,000 words

First draft

Write the next part of your draft
500 words

Done when: Your draft has 38,500 words

Apr 26–May 2
Week 22

Catch-up week

First draft

Write only the words you're short of. If you're on target, write nothing new this week
up to 500 words, only if you're behind

Read your outline and update it for what you now know about the story
30 min

Done when: Your draft has at least 38,500 words and your outline is up to date

May 3–9
Week 23

Two thirds

First draft

Write the next part of your draft
500 words

Done when: Your draft has 41,000 words

May 10–16
Week 24

Building to the end

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 43,500 words

May 17–23
Week 25

Keep going

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 46,000 words

May 24–30
Week 26

Past 48,000 words

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 48,500 words

May 31–Jun 6
Week 27

Past 50,000 words

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 51,000 words

Jun 7–13
Week 28

Catch-up week

First draft

- [ ] Write only the words you're short of. If you're on target, write nothing new this week
  up to 500 words, only if you're behind
- [ ] Read your outline and update it for what you now know about the story
  30 min

Done when: Your draft has at least 51,000 words and your outline is up to date

Jun 14–20
Week 29

The run to the end

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 53,500 words

Sticking point: Write the ending you have in mind, even if you're not sure it's right. You can change an ending; you can't revise one that isn't there.

Jun 21–27
Week 30

Nearly there

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 56,000 words

Jun 28–Jul 4
Week 31

The last chapters

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: Your draft has 58,500 words

Jul 5–11
Week 32

The end

First draft

- [ ] Write the next part of your draft
  500 words

Done when: You've written the last scene: your first draft is finished, at about 61,000 words

Sticking point: Your draft may end before or after 60,000 words. The story decides. Write until you reach the last scene.

Jul 12–18
Week 33

Put it away

Rest

- [ ] Save a copy of the draft somewhere you won't see it, and close the file
- [ ] Read a book like the one you're writing
  30 min

Done when: The draft is saved and closed, and you haven't opened it since

Sticking point: Finishing a draft can feel flat rather than happy. That's common. Celebrate anyway: tell someone, take a day off, mark it.

Jul 19–25
Week 34

Read, don't reread

Rest

Read a book like the one you're writing, and notice how it moves from scene to scene
30 min

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Done when: You haven't opened the draft this week

Sticking point: Ideas for fixes will keep coming. Write them in a notebook, not in the draft.

Jul 26–Aug 1
Week 35

Write something else

Rest

Write something short that isn't the book: a story, an essay, a letter, a journal entry
20 min

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Done when: You've written five short pieces and haven't opened the draft

Aug 2–8
Week 36

Keep your distance

Rest

Read, or write something short that isn't the book
30 min

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Done when: You haven't opened the draft this week

Aug 9–15
Week 37

Still away

Rest

Read, or write something short that isn't the book
30 min

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Done when: You haven't opened the draft this week

Sticking point: Six weeks feels long. The point is to forget enough of the draft that you can read it like a stranger.

Aug 16–22
Week 38

Get ready to read

Rest

- [ ] Sort your notebook of fix ideas into one list: story, characters, setting, small things
  30 min
- [ ] Print the draft, or send it to an e-reader, so it looks like a book and not your document
- [ ] Book the time for next week's read-through
  four sittings

Done when: Your fix ideas are in one list, the draft is printed or on an e-reader, and next week's reading time is in your calendar

Aug 23–29
Week 39

Read it as a reader

Second draft

- [ ] Read the whole draft, start to finish, without fixing anything
  a quarter of the book a sitting
- [ ] Write the biggest problems on one page: what's confusing, slow, missing or not needed

Done when: You've read to the last page and have one page listing the biggest problems

Sticking point: You'll find pages you're embarrassed by. Every first draft has them. Keep reading; you're looking for the big things, not the sentences.

Aug 30–Sep 5
Week 40

Plan the second draft

Second draft

- [ ] Make a new outline: one line per chapter, marked keep, cut, move, add or rewrite
  45 min
- [ ] Check the order of events, the pace and the ending against your problem list
  45 min

Done when: Every chapter in your new outline is marked keep, cut, move, add or rewrite

Sticking point: Fix the big things before the small ones. There's no point polishing a sentence in a scene you may cut.

Sep 6–12
Week 41

Rewrite the first eighth

Second draft

Revise the next part of the book against your new outline: cut, move, add and rewrite scenes
about an eighth of the book a week

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Done when: You've revised the first eighth of the book and ticked it off your new outline

Sticking point: Work from your new outline, not from memory. Big changes first: moves, cuts and new scenes.

Sep 13–19
Week 42

Rewrite the second eighth

Second draft

Revise the next part of the book against your new outline: cut, move, add and rewrite scenes
about an eighth of the book a week

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Done when: You've revised the second eighth of the book

Sep 20–26
Week 43

Rewrite the third eighth

Second draft

Revise the next part of the book against your new outline: cut, move, add and rewrite scenes
about an eighth of the book a week

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Done when: You've revised the third eighth of the book

Sticking point: Rewriting can mean starting a scene again from a blank page. That's often quicker than patching it.

Sep 27–Oct 3
Week 44

Rewrite the fourth eighth

Second draft

Revise the next part of the book against your new outline: cut, move, add and rewrite scenes
about an eighth of the book a week

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Done when: You've revised the fourth eighth of the book

Sticking point: Halfway through the rewrite. If you find a new problem in a chapter you've done, add it to the list and keep going.

Oct 4–10
Week 45

Rewrite the fifth eighth

Second draft

Revise the next part of the book against your new outline: cut, move, add and rewrite scenes
about an eighth of the book a week

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Done when: You've revised the fifth eighth of the book

Oct 11–17
Week 46

Rewrite the sixth eighth

Second draft

Revise the next part of the book against your new outline: cut, move, add and rewrite scenes
about an eighth of the book a week

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Done when: You've revised the sixth eighth of the book

Sticking point: Some scenes you've marked 'add' will still be missing. Write them now at 500 words a session, as in the first draft.

Oct 18–24
Week 47

Rewrite the seventh eighth

Second draft

Revise the next part of the book against your new outline: cut, move, add and rewrite scenes
about an eighth of the book a week

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Done when: You've revised the seventh eighth of the book

Oct 25–31
Week 48

Rewrite the last eighth

Second draft

Revise the next part of the book against your new outline: cut, move, add and rewrite scenes
about an eighth of the book a week

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Done when: You've revised the last eighth of the book

Sticking point: Check your ending against your beginning: does the book answer the question it opened with?

Nov 1–7
Week 49

Tighten the sentences

Second draft

Read a chapter aloud and cut every word, line and paragraph that doesn't earn its place ☐☐☐☐☐

45 min

Done when: You've been through every chapter once for sentences, cuts and dialogue

Sticking point: Reading aloud catches what reading silently misses: clumsy rhythm, repeated words, dialogue nobody would say.

Nov 8–14
Week 50

The second draft

Second draft

Read the whole book through and fix typos, names and small slips ☐☐☐☐

a quarter of the book a sitting

Save it as a new file with 'second draft' in the name ☐

Done when: You've read the revised book start to finish and saved it as your second draft

Sticking point: It won't feel finished. Second drafts rarely do. It's finished enough to show a trusted reader, which is the next step.

How the plan works

You write five days a week, Monday to Friday. Move the days to suit your life, as long as you keep five sessions a week.

The pace is 500 words a session. That's the target the National Centre for Writing gives if 1,000 words a day is too much, and the one novelist Matt Bell sets his students: 500 words a day, five days a week, or 2,500 words a week. Some days 500 words come quickly and some days they take much longer. Both count.

The book is built in four steps, the same as the steps on your board:

1. Outline (3 weeks): what the book is, its shape, and one line per chapter.

2. Write 10,000 words (weeks 4 to 8 from scratch): you build up to 500 words a session and get the draft moving.

3. Finish the first draft (to week 32 from scratch, catch-up weeks included): about 60,000 words in all, written forwards, without going back to fix things.

4. Second draft (12 weeks): read it through, plan the changes, rewrite it an eighth at a time, then tighten the sentences.

Between the first draft and the second, you rest for six weeks. The draft goes in a drawer, so you can come back and read it like a stranger. The National Centre for Writing advises giving a first draft six weeks before you read and edit it. Every level keeps all six weeks, and the plan never shortens them to catch up.

Catch-up weeks come every six weeks in the first draft. Use them only for words you're short of. If you're on target, write nothing new that week: update your outline and come back fresh. A shorter plan leaves some catch-up weeks out, never the rest weeks or the last weeks.

Which level to pick

- I haven't started yet: you have an idea, or a few pages, but no outline and fewer than 10,000 words.

▪ I have a partial draft: you've written 10,000 words or more but haven't reached the end. The plan assumes about 20,000 words and adds about 40,000 more. If you have more, you'll reach the end early: go straight on to the rest weeks.

▪ I've finished a first draft: you've reached the end, however rough. If the draft has already been put away, untouched, for six weeks or more, the rest weeks are done: tick them off and start reading. If it's been less, count those weeks and rest only for what's left of the six.

If you're between two levels, pick the earlier one.

Before you start

Know roughly how long your book will be. Published adult novels are usually 70,000 to 120,000 words, and so is most non-fiction (Jericho Writers (https://jerichowriters.com/average-novel-wordcount/)). Young adult novels are shorter, about 50,000 to 70,000. To check, count the words on three typical pages of a book like yours and multiply by its page count.

Why a 60,000-word first draft? A first draft doesn't have to be full length. Novelist Hannah Mary McKinnon, for one, writes her first drafts at about two thirds of the final word count and fleshes them out later, and this plan follows her example. If your book is shorter, a children's book or a short memoir, your draft ends when the story does, and you move on to the rest weeks early.

Find your five slots now. An hour before work, a lunch break, after the children are in bed. The same time every day makes it easier.

The plan is written for a novel, but you can adapt it for a memoir or non-fiction. Chapters take the place of scenes, and the outline lists the question each chapter answers.

Tools

▪ A word processor that counts words. A free one such as Google Docs is enough. Writing software like Scrivener helps with long books but isn't needed.

▪ Sticky notes or index cards for the outline: one scene or chapter per card, so you can move them around.

▪ A notebook for ideas and fixes that come while you're drafting, so they don't pull you back into the draft.

▪ A printer or an e-reader for the read-through. The National Centre for Writing suggests reading and editing the rested draft in hard copy.

▪ Backups. Save the draft somewhere other than your computer at the end of every session.

Common mistakes

▪ Editing as you go. The first draft's job is to exist. Polish later; you may cut the scene you're polishing.

▪ Starting again from page one. The urge comes around the middle of every draft. Write down what you'd change and keep going forwards.

▪ Waiting for the perfect idea, or the perfect outline. The outline is a map, and it will change. This plan gives it three weeks, then you start writing.

▪ Catching up with marathon days. This plan doesn't ask for double days. Missing words go in the catch-up weeks, and Penguin's advice is not to be tempted to overwork.

▪ Comparing your draft with published books. Those are many drafts in. Compare it with nothing until the second draft is done.

▪ Showing the first draft to people. Their opinions arrive before you know what the book is. Wait until after the second draft.

After the second draft

▪ Celebrate. Take a day off and mark it with someone. You've written a book, twice.

▪ Find a reader you trust: someone who reads widely in your kind of book, or another writer. Ask what confused them and where they got bored, not just whether they liked it.

▪ Write a third draft from their notes, after another short rest.

▪ Then decide what the book is for: to send to literary agents, to publish yourself, or to print a few copies for the people it's written for. Each one is a project of its own.

If you fall behind

Missed 1 week: Carry on with the current week's task. In first-draft weeks, write from where your draft stops and don't double up sessions: the missing words go in the next catch-up week. In outline or second-draft weeks, finish the task you were on, then go on. A missed rest week still counts if you didn't open the draft.

Missed 2 weeks: Repeat the last week you finished, then carry on. In first-draft weeks, read your outline and the last scene you wrote first; in second-draft weeks, reread your new outline and the last part you revised. If your plan has no catch-up week left to take the missing words, or the repeat runs past your date, move your finish date back. Never shorten the six rest weeks or the second draft to catch up.

Missed 3 weeks: Restart gently. In first-draft weeks: one week at 300 words a session, then back to 500. In rest weeks: count the weeks the draft has stayed closed and carry on until there are six. In outline or second-draft weeks: go back one week and redo it. Then enter your finish date on the plan page to see if it's still realistic, or pick a later one.

Missed 4 or more weeks: Pick up where your book is, not where the calendar says. Choose the level that matches what you have now (a partial draft counts, and a finished draft that has rested six weeks can skip its rest weeks) and set a new finish date on the plan page.

Sources

National Centre for Writing
`https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/writing-hub/how-to-write-an-award-winning-novel/`
“If that’s too much, then go for 500 a day for 180 days.”

National Centre for Writing
`https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/writing-hub/how-to-write-an-award-winning-novel/`
“That’s 3-6 months work, that’s a very very energetic and satisfying way to manifest a first draft.”

National Centre for Writing
`https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/writing-hub/how-to-write-an-award-winning-novel/`
“But doing a lot of research and having a plan or plot outline before you write is one way to make sure you are more likely succeed when you do start writing your first draft.”

National Centre for Writing
`https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/writing-hub/how-to-write-a-novel-a-step-by-step-guide/`
“Let your first draft settle; give it six weeks before you read and edit it in hard copy form, then make notes and start draft two, and likewise draft three.”

Literary Hub
`https://lithub.com/dont-overthink-it-the-argument-for-just-starting-to-write/`
“In the generative novel-writing class I teach, I ask students to write 500 words a day, five days a week, for twelve weeks in a row, which adds up to 2,500 words per week and at least 30,000 words total by the end of the semester.”

Literary Hub
`https://lithub.com/dont-overthink-it-the-argument-for-just-starting-to-write/`

"When I drafted my first-ever novel—a book I never tried to publish but that taught me I could write the necessary number of words—I did it in six months by writing five days a week, two hours each session, scheduled around my job as a restaurant manager."

Curtis Brown Creative
`https://www.curtisbrowncreative.co.uk/blog/how-to-write-the-first-draft-of-your-novel`
"My own first drafts are basic; about two thirds of the final word count, short descriptions and hardly any dialogue tags (I know who's talking, so who cares?)."

Curtis Brown Creative
`https://www.curtisbrowncreative.co.uk/blog/how-to-write-the-first-draft-of-your-novel`
"Writing a 60,000 word rough draft I can flesh out, already feels more achievable."

Jericho Writers
`https://jerichowriters.com/average-novel-wordcount/`
"The average word count for adult fiction is between 70,000 to 120,000 words."

Jericho Writers
`https://jerichowriters.com/average-novel-wordcount/`
"Non-fiction word counts sit between 70,000-120,000 words."

Jericho Writers
`https://jerichowriters.com/average-novel-wordcount/`
"For children's fiction, the general rule is the younger the audience the shorter the book, and for YA novels the average is 50,000-70,000 words."

Geist
`https://www.geist.com/advice-for-lit-lorn/let-it-rest`
"Our advice is to set the completed draft aside for at least two weeks and preferably for two months."

Penguin Books UK
`https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2022/12/how-to-start-writing-a-book`
"Remember to take breaks and don't be tempted to overwork – giving yourself some space from your book can actually generate some fresher ideas and help you read your draft from a new perspective."

This plan online	`https://goaltodo.com/write-a-book`
Reach it with others on Welang	`https://welang.com/goals/write-a-book`
Reach it on your own in HourLife	`https://www.hourlife.com`