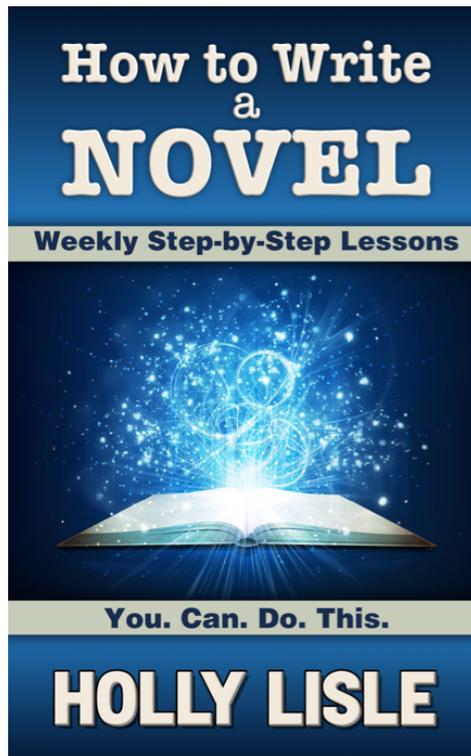


# How to Write a Novel

## THE CLASS OUTLINE



**HOLLY LISLE**

<https://HollysWritingClasses.com>

**Thursday, September 07, 2018, at 1:30 PM ET**

[Live Class Q&A \(& Video Replay Link\)](#)

# Hi. I'm Holly Lisle.

I'm a full-time professional writer, and have been since 1991. I write novels, short fiction, and writing classes. If you're new to me, you can find me here:

Personal site: [HollyLisle.com](http://HollyLisle.com)

Writers' site: [HollysWritingClasses.com](http://HollysWritingClasses.com)

Podcast: Alone in a Room with Invisible People ([AIARWIP.com](http://AIARWIP.com))

Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/hollylisle>

I've sold more than thirty novels to commercial publishers, am now an indie publishing my own work, and I create writing courses and hang out with the writers in my private writing community.

And this download is about a class I am, as I write this, creating. (It might already be done and live by the time you read this, so if it is, you can go here:

<http://howtowriteanovelclass.com/>

If it isn't, you'll have the exciting opportunity to download this PDF again.

Yes. Smart-ass humor. That's me. Anyway, you're here to find out what kind of class How to Write a Novel is going to be.

So just go to the next page.

Cheerfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Holly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, thin tail on the letter 'y'.

# My Objectives for This Class

**I have three objectives I want to hit in creating this class. They are:**

- That by the end of the class you will be comfortable using the different steps it takes to write a good novel
- That you will get the help you need to get past any previous attempts that failed, starting fresh with a new project on day one, but learning how to go back later and figure out when wrong with any past crashes
- That by the end of the class (approximately 35 weeks from the time you start), **you will have finished the first draft of your novel**

**So that means:**

- **Each week there will be a lesson that you'll read.** I'll do my best to keep it short, succinct, and targeted to JUST the subject of the week, so that you can move quickly from reading to doing
- **Each week, you'll learn one technique that you'll employ in that week's fiction writing,** so that you get both the concept of the technique and hands-on experience with it's practical application
- **Most weeks, you'll have either a worksheet or a demo** (and sometimes both), to show you exactly what I'm describing in the lesson
- **Each week, you'll have a writing assignment, with a specific word count to hit.** Don't panic. You choose the word count, you set up your own writing schedule (though I'll show you how to do both of these things and give yourself a workable schedule, and you use the HTWAN forum to touch bases to get both encouragement and help when you need it

The first four weeks are preparation and setup — and once you've mastered the techniques and concepts involved, you'll be able to work through this part in a day or two.

After that, you'll be writing your novel for the next thirty-one weeks. That part? Well, it depends on you, on the book, on how big you want it to be when you're finished, and on LIFE, and what life decides to do while you're writing. But you can spend a year (or more) writing bigger books if you want, or a month writing shorter novels if you're so inclined.

The process will fit what you want to do with it.

So let's look at the process.

# *How to Write a Novel* is a learning-by-doing class

No one learns to write by reading about writing. We all learn to write well by first writing... ahhh... not so well. By failing, getting back on our feet, and trying again. Some folks find the learning process simple, some find it incredibly difficult, but if you're willing to dig in and push yourself, to not make excuses, and to work hard — and believe me, HARD WORK will be required — you CAN do this.

## INTRO & SECTION ONE: BUILDING YOUR NOVEL'S BARE BONES

### **LESSON 01: Starting Right — Developing Novel-Sized Ideas**

If you've ever asked the question, "Why do I always end up trying to figure out what goes in the middle of my book?" the answer is, "Your idea wasn't big enough for a novel."

And the answer to the follow-up question, "How do I make sure I have a novel-sized idea before I start writing?" is the step-by-step process in Lesson One.

### **LESSON 02: Concept Testing — Planning Before Writing (The Path to Cleaner First Drafts)**

Once you have an idea that's big enough and rich enough to support a novel, you need to work through some different ways

the story could go. This is not outlining — it's in fact a sort of anti-outline thought process that is friendly to both planners and pantsers.

### **LESSON 03: LESSON — Novel-Worthy Characters: How to Make Yours Measure Up**

With some places where you can take your story figured out, you're now ready to bring in characters who are big enough and deep enough to sustain 40,000 words (or more) of fiction without ever once falling prey to "the conflict argument" or the dreaded "big misunderstanding."

### **LESSON 04: Immersive Conflict — Grabbing Readers and Not. Letting. GO.**

Now it's time to figure out the conflicts (not conflict arguments) that are going to push your characters forward in spite of fear, anger, loss. This is where your own passion comes front and center, and where you make sure that the story you're writing matters to you.

## **SECTION TWO: BUILDING YOUR WRITING PROCESS**

### **LESSON 05: Writing the Killer First Page (and All the Ones that Follow)**

First lines do matter. But I have almost never written my FINAL first page in first draft. And my first-draft first page is almost

always the heaviest-revised page in my revision, AFTER I know what the story has become and needs to be.

However, there are specific things you have to do in your first page to allow you to keep your story flowing, and even if you don't get them perfect in the first draft, you can still make sure your story starts with a strong opening.

## **LESSON 06: Novel Structures, and How to Work Inside Them**

Where writing a novel is concerned, there are rigid structures, flexible structures, seat-of-the-pants structures, and mix-and-match processes that can work if you're careful. There is no One True Way to write, but there are a lot of good ways to help your novel turn out the way you want, and this week you'll learn a number of approaches to help you make that happen.

## **LESSON 07: Getting Words On The Page: Building Your Daily Process**

By the time you get to this lesson, you've been writing your actual book for a couple of weeks, and you will have had the chance to see where you're strong, and where you're weak. You do not write a book. You write pages. And how you embrace the process of doing this determines your success or failure.

## **LESSON 08: Genre at Novel Length: What HAS to Be There**

First, what you want in the story determines its value to YOU, and I'll be blunt here. What you want is what matters most in the story. But once you know that, you do need to be able to figure

out who else might want to read it, and you need to be able to figure out what needs to be in the story for those folks to find it and love it. This lesson... is how to do THAT.

## SECTION THREE: BUILDING YOUR BASIC TECHNIQUE

### **LESSON 09: Pacing the Plot — Building and Maintaining Suspense**

Getting the suspense into the story is enormous fun, and one of my favorite things about writing fiction. It takes so focus, a bit of planning (but nowhere near as much as you might think), and a willingness to be mean to your characters. But this is where you start building the rewards for the readers who will come to love everything you do.

### **LESSON 10: Immersive Dialogue — Fixing Talking Heads and Other Conversational Disasters**

The dreaded “Floating Heads of Fiction Syndrome” — in which long strings of dialogue happen in the middle of no place by characters doing nothing — are counterbalanced by the equally horrific “Compulsive Choreographer Disease,” in which each character’s every thought, movement, facial expression, and emotion are detailed inside of settings so overburdened by detail that Victorian maidens hardened to flowery excess would be driven to their fainting couches. Writing good dialogue, which

usually lives somewhere in the middle, is an attainable first-draft skill, and this week you'll learn that.

## **LESSON 11: Writing Good Descriptions (That Aren't Exposition)**

Remember last week's Victorian maidens and fainting couches. Most writers end up either skipping description entirely or jamming so much useless furniture into every scene that the poor reader can't breathe. **You'll** learn how to show your readers what they think matters, and to walk them around what really matters (so you can get the jaw-drop from them later when they see how cleverly you misdirected them) and you'll learn how to do this while never, ever, EVER cheating. Being good at description is so cool it's almost a superpower. This week, you start trying on capes.

## **LESSON 12: The Writer's Guide to Transition Scenes: Shooting "But..."**

So right here I'm going to tell you flat out that in good fiction, there is no such thing as a transition scene. **"But..."** you say, "I know they're boring, but I need to get my characters from Point A to Point B." So this week, you learn how to shoot "But I need to..." and find out all the really cool things you can INSTEAD.

## SECTION FOUR: BUILDING YOUR INTERMEDIATE TECHNIQUE

### **LESSON 13: Finding Your Novel's RIGHT Voice and Tone**

Voice is “single first person, multiple third person, omniscient, alternating first and third” or some other options. TONE is funny, snarky, sincere, smart-ass, scary, creepy, romantic, elegant, and anything and everything else writers have been doing since [Chaucer sent his gang of pilgrims down the road \(Wikipedia link\)](#) to seek the Martyr of Canterbury... and to entertain themselves, had each tell a story in his or her own voice. Some are lovely, some are raunchy, but all of them create characters and a world that are deeply and recognizably real. He did this so well those stories hold up today—630-ish years later. You can learn this skill, and this week you’ll start putting it to work in your novel.

### **LESSON 14: How to Figure Out "What Happens Next?"**

You have a pretty good beginning, and you know that in first draft, “pretty good” is all you’re looking for. But now you’re working into the middle, and you’ve just discovered (perhaps not for the first time) that even small novels are big, and that while your characters are sitting around drinking coffee and thinking, you’re falling asleep. And as it stands, anyone fool enough to pick up your story is going to fall into a coma. But figuring out a GOOD “what happens next” isn’t as hard as it feels. It takes some shifts in your thinking, but you can do this.

## **LESSON 15: Twists: Building Hidden, Revealed, and Other Core Plot Developments**

Short stories have one twist. Novels have a lot of them — smaller reveals that surprise individual characters, the one big twist with which you resolve the ending...

And a lot of these you come up with as you're writing. The actual twists and reveals are pretty hard to plan in advance, but the process of setting up and writing your story so you can come up with them as you need them builds on last week's lesson, and adds some additional, well... twists... that get you where you need to go.

## **LESSON 16: Story Fitting — Having Enough Good Stuff (and No Filler)**

This is the final week of focusing on your story core. This week, you learn how to go through what you've built and make sure that it will hold up, and that there's enough, and that it's good, and that everything fits the story you want to tell, and doesn't go drifting off on destructive tangents that will wreck the books.

## **SECTION FIVE: BUILDING YOUR ADVANCED TECHNIQUE**

### **LESSON 17: Getting Your Character Into GOOD Corners**

There are as many kinds of story corners as there are kinds of fiction, but all of them have this in common. They absolutely must be relevant to the story, to the character, and to the

conflict. These essential limitations make it easier, not harder, for you to get your character into the right kind of trouble every single time.

## **LESSON 18: Getting Your Character OUT of Good Corners**

You've put your character in a tight spot. So far, so good. But NOW that he's dangling off the cliff by his fingertips and the vulture sitting on his head is banging its beak into his skull to hurry along his imminent demise, you know that sending someone along to rescue him is cheating... but you have no clue how to figure out how he can get himself out of the mess on his own. This week, you learn that.

## **LESSON 19: Writing TIGHT Story Middles at Novel Length**

I want to clear up a common misconception. Writing tight doesn't mean that you're cramming in action scene after action scene, and writing cliffhanger after cliffhanger. It means that you're only writing scenes that develop your story characters and actions that show these characters doing things that move your story forward. Writing tight takes practice, but learning the technique for identifying what fits "tight" and what doesn't is pretty straightforward.

## **LESSON 20: Identifying, Pacing, Tracking, and Resolving Story Arcs**

Very few novels are just one story. In a straightforward shortish romance novel, you have the protagonist's story, the love interest's story, the story of what's keeping them apart, and the

story of what allows them to overcome that, which finally brings them together. Throw in a best friend for each, a meddling antagonist who wants to keep them apart, and some overarching story world conflict, and you're on the path to missing things, losing track of who does what when with whom and how... and you don't want this to happen. So here's where you learn how to write story arcs that interweave, bring what you want to each section of your story, and then resolve at just the right time.

## SECTION SIX: DEALING WITH MID-BOOK PROBLEMS

### **LESSON 23: Invasive Ideas — Protecting Your Novel from Wrong Directions**

You're writing along, words falling on the page beautifully, telling a story that you love, and suddenly you know exactly what the story needs to make it perfect.

You can see how right it is, how much it's going to improve what's already good.

So you jump. And sometimes you're absolutely right. Sometimes, though, the idea is a trap, and will wreck your story. In this lesson, learn how to tell the difference between the genuinely great idea and the wreck you have to fix.

## **LESSON 22: I Turned Right, My Story Veered Left... Now We're BOTH Lost**

Picking up where we left off... You know how to tell good ideas from book-wreckers.

But sometimes... Sometimes in spite of your caution, things happen, and you can find yourself utterly lost and standing in the wreckage of a story you broke.

*Ask me how I know.*

Best case, this doesn't happen to **you** while you're on tight deadline (again, been there, done that). But if you write enough, and love your work enough, sooner or later, you're going to go down the rabbit hole. This week, you learn how to get back out.

## **LESSON 23: The Show, Don't Tell Lesson**

It's the first thing experienced writers tell new writers.

Problem is, *telling* writers to do this is pointless, and SHOWING writers **how** to do this takes time, effort, and demonstrations of exactly what you mean and how you do it.

This week, I show. This week, you conquer "show, don't tell."

## **LESSON 24: Fixing Broken Plots BEFORE You Hit "The End"**

There is no such thing as an irreparably broken book. In revision, if you're willing to put in the work and the project means enough to you to commit the time and effort necessary, you can fix ANY story.

But there are a lot of things you can fix as you write, BEFORE you move to revision, and this week, you're going to work on building "running fixes" to your plot.

## SECTION SEVEN: DEALING WITH LATE and UNEXPECTED PROBLEMS

### **LESSON 25: Thin Prose, Fat Prose: The Jack Spratt Dilemma**

I use pretty much everything in every story I write. Thin prose, fat prose, and middling prose. Thin prose is light, tight, short, sharp, crisp. Fat prose embraces beauty, elegance, metaphor and simile, the scent of rain before a storm, and the angle of the perfect shoulder illuminated and accented by the golden light of late afternoon.

But there's a time and a place for each. And important that you know when, where, why, and how to write each.

### **LESSON 26: Keeping the Story Inside One Book**

Characters tend to want to expand their roles. Plots tend to grow subplots. Conflicts that get bigger and deeper tend to spawn mini-storms in their wake. And the book you planned for 50,000 words (or that your contract requires at 50,000 words) suddenly look impossible to finish in your allotted space.

You have to get tough here. You'll learn to identify what stays, what dies, and what might possibly be salvageable in a second story... AFTER you've written a real ending to this one.

## **LESSON 27: The Story That's Bigger than Your Writing Skills**

Sooner or later — if you keep writing regularly — you're going to have the best, most amazing, most compelling story idea you have ever had. It's going to be so far above anything you've ever done that you know it could define your entire career. But as you start writing it, you stall. You know what the story has to be, but you don't know how YOU can make it the story you envision. In this lesson, you'll learn how to know when you've hit that idea, and how to work with it.

## **LESSON 28: Knowing When and How to Cut and Simplify DURING First Draft**

You're running long, or you've suddenly realized you have a dozen separate stories going, or you realize to your dismay that your cast of important characters exceeds the number of extras cast on the movie "Titanic"... And you can't find your way through the thicket of people and conflicts to the part you were excited about when you started. Here's how to clear the chaos with the least amount of damage.

## SECTION EIGHT: HANGING ON WHEN IT GETS TOUGH

### **LESSON 29: Keeping the Faith: Getting THIS Novel Done In Spite of Fear, Doubt, and Distraction**

And then there's this. The moment when you think, "I've made a terrible mistake. How did I ever think this would be a good story? I need to walk away and start something new."

You shouldn't. Finishing the first draft of this book is your promise to your Muse (your creative right brain) that you can follow through. That you can be trusted with another good idea in the future. Finishing what you start is make-or-break. And you can do this. In this lesson, I'll show you how.

### **LESSON 30: Big Book or Story & Sequel?**

Sometimes the answer to "I love what I'm getting, but this book is way bigger than I'd planned," is to up your stakes, increase your tension, and turn it into a magnificent 200,000-word epic. Sometimes the answer is to figure out where you can take it apart and turn it into two books (or more) at the word length you'd planned. I'll walk you through the steps to identifying your best path, and then making the changes that will let you follow through.

## **LESSON 31: Unsticking Stuck Stories**

Way back in Lesson 2, you did some concept testing, and you built some tools you could use down the road if things went wrong.

This is where you pull them out, and here's how you use them late in the game.

## **LESSON 32: Affirming Theme, Allegory, and Passion**

You have a theme, you have an allegory, and you're writing your passion (at least if you didn't ignore me when I walked you through the process of building these way back at the beginning). But have you followed through. You're getting close to the end, and theme, allegory, and passion are what YOU get out of your story — but they're also the part of what you're writing that will make your story matter to your True Fans. So learn how to make sure you have this right.

## **SECTION NINE: FINISHING THE NOVEL**

### **LESSON 33: Endings With Multiple Antagonists and Multiple Climaxes**

There are folks who can only be happy if they're playing a game on the highest difficulty.

Writing-wise, I frequently find myself in this camp. Even if you don't, though, you'll still find a stack of useful fixes in this lesson that make sure your characters resolve well, and your ending and your plot(s) and subplot(s) hold together.

## **LESSON 34: Finding or Building (and Recognizing) Your RIGHT Ending**

I always write with an ending in mind. By the time I actually write the ending, though, I've almost always come up with something better — sometimes something spectacular.

There are things a good ending has to do. There are a few extras that a great ending brings to the story. This week, you learn where to find the keys to your great ending, and how to write it when you get there.

## **LESSON 35: Bringing It All Home: Story, Characters, World, and Promise**

And now we're down to it. This week, you finish the book. You use the elements of your RIGHT ending that you built last week, you wrap it up, you write the end. And when you're done, you go through what you'd planned, you compare it to what you have, and when you've got an ending you can live with, you write THE END.

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You graduate from the class (but you can take it again as often as you like, and use it with every next novel until you know the process inside and out).

**And you celebrate!** You've written a complete novel.

Revision awaits... but before you start into that, savor the joy of your success in writing your book. THIS moment is beautiful, and wonderful, and something you can remember with joy and delight for the rest of your life. You put a challenge in front of yourself, you followed through, and you persevered.

**That's the future... But it's an achievable future. You want to make it YOUR future?**

**You can do this!**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Holly". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a long vertical stroke extending from the bottom of the "y".

Holly Lisle

Class Creator, *How to Write a Novel*