

## Welcome!

Chances are you picked up this guide because you, or someone you know, want to be an author. Here's the good news, there are so many free resources that can help you on this quest!

The bad news? There is *a lot* to learn!

For the ease of navigation, I've dividing this guide out into topics. I'd suggest you browse the whole guide because the topics bleed into one another, but if you're looking for info on a specific topic, here's a quick list of what I go through.

The Importance of Finishing  
Story and Writing Mechanics  
The Business of Writing  
Who to Hire  
Tools I Use

Now let's get started!

## The Importance of Finishing

According to a 2012 survey, approximately 81% of Americans believe they have a book in them. However, a huge percentage of people never actually sit down to start their novel, and of the elite group who even start, only 3% ever finish their manuscript.

Those numbers are a little sketchy—I couldn't track down a specific source besides the articles that mention them—but it gives you a pretty good idea of how vital and important it is to finish your manuscript.

It's more important than getting all the mechanics right, it's more important than creating the most epic world possible, and it's more important than grammar, spelling, and all the details that go into writing. Why? *Because if you never finish your manuscript, you'll never graduate to the next step.*

You can edit your manuscript to make it better and shore up your weaknesses. You can get beta readers and editors to find your typos, consistency problems, and developmental issues. But you can't do any of that if you don't finish your story.

So while this guide has all sorts of references that will help you become a better storyteller, the most important thing you can do to get you that much closer to being a published author is to *FINISH* your story.

This might take time. When I first started writing it took me about a year to write the first draft of a book. I'm friends with a number of authors who now write fulltime, but it took some of them upwards of five years to finish their first manuscript.

It doesn't matter how long it takes you to finish your story, and you don't have to finish the first story you start. Just make sure your main goal is *to* finish a book and be in that 3%!

Motivating yourself to finish a book is an extremely personal process, so I can't give you any fool-proof methods to get you on your way. But I do have a few common tips that might get your brain rolling so you come up with your own system!

### **Practice Makes Perfect**

Finishing a novel can be a pretty daunting task, so often I recommend first time writers try writing short stories within their story world. (You can use secondary characters as your protagonists in these short stories, or perhaps you can explore a side quest/arc with your main characters that happens off the pages of your book.)

Regardless of what you decide to do, short stories will set you up for success because they let you cross that finish line so much faster so it becomes a habit.

Any short stories you write are bound to be useful in the future, too! Given the extensive use of social media, you can use your short stories in the future as bonus content for your readers. (Think of it like the blooper reels they add to DVDs, or behind-the-scenes content Youtubers sometimes load onto their channels. It's something extra for their fans.)

### **Chunk your Book**

If you're short on time, try writing in increments of 10-15 minutes. Don't re-read your work from the previous session, just *go!* As I mentioned above, you're not shooting for perfect accuracy and fluency, you're aiming to finish!

Write during the ten minute wait you have when you're in the carpool lane waiting to pick your kids up. Write during your five minute coffee break, or during your subway ride to work. Or maybe you should try getting up 15 minutes early or going to bed 15 minutes late and working in those tiny increments.

You write a book one word at a time, so those slivers of time will eventually add up!

### **Try Voice-to-Text**

Another popular writing method for people who are short on time or always on the run is to use a software that converts everything you say into a text file.

Warning: no software—including the popular Dragon software—is perfect. Your voice-to-text writing is going to be filled with errors and mistakes.

But! If your only chance to write is during your drive in to work, having error-filled words is so, so, so much better than no words at all!

This method takes some time to learn because speaking a book is a very different art form than writing it, so don't be discouraged if it takes you a week or a month to hit your stride. Keep trying!

However, I'm going to add a caveat to this. I struggle big time with dyslexia, so voice-to-text is the worst possible method for me to write because I can't pronounce words correctly. Reading so many of the words I know and use has made it that I don't know how to pronounce them because I can't read the actual word patterns. If you have similar pronunciation struggles, this method might not be for you.

### **NaNoWriMo/Accountability**

A lot of writers find that they're a lot better about getting their words down if they have a goal they're working towards, or if they have some method of accountability.

National Novel Writing Month provides both of these by giving you a goal (writing 50,000 words in a month) a sweet word tracker, and a graph to chart your progress, as well as an amazing and supportive community!

If you want to learn more, Google NaNoWriMo, or Camp NaNoWriMo!

### **Helpful Feedback**

Often times, when you're first getting started as a novelist, you don't know what your strengths or weaknesses are. Of course, you can ask friends and family to read your work and give you feedback, but unless they love books in the genre you're seeking to write, they might not be able to help you much.

Critique groups—or even critique partners—are a great resource in this area because they'll read your work and give you feedback.

Even better, critique groups can be local, or online, so even if you live out in the middle of nowhere, as long as you have an internet connection there is a way!

However, critique groups can be tricky, and their value greatly depends on who belongs to it.

Authors typically write the kind of stories they love, so there is some danger that they might try to press their favorite writing style on you. Good authors will be able to see the kind of story you're trying to write, and adjust their comments to match *your* goal, but it can be hard to find people like that.

Worry not! There is another way!

You can get feedback from *readers* by posting your manuscript—or short stories—in places like Wattpad.

Wattpad allows readers to leave reviews, and often times they'll talk about the aspects of the story that they love—which is probably going to highlight what you're good at and give you a better idea of your writing style in general.

Some writers are reluctant to share their work for free, but when you're first getting started that kind of feedback is invaluable, so I'd encourage you to think it over.

### **Writing Apps/Sprints**

My last piece of “Finish it!” advice is to find a way to gamify writing. This might mean you do something like timed sprints, or investing in an app or software that will do the gamifying for you.

If you're interested in writing sprints, Google or look on Youtube “Pomodoro Writing Sprints” and you'll find tons of information on it. Pomodoro sprints are the most common sprint technique in the writing industry, but you can research others! (The basic idea is that you do writing sprints for 25 minutes, take a five minute break, and then do another 25 minute writing sprint.)

For writing applications/software, there are some like “Write or Die” which will *delete words* if you stop typing! I personally adore “4thewords” which is an actual online fantasy game where you defeat monsters and finish quests by writing!

### **To Sum it up...**

Those are all of my tips and tricks! But there are a bunch of online writing communities that you can look to for more advice and motivation for finishing. Facebook Groups are where most writing communities are these days. I personally recommend 20Books50k, The Writing Gals, and An Alliance of Young Adult Authors, but there are TONS out there and for all different genres!

## Writing/Story Mechanics

In order to survive as an author, you need to write fantastic books that keep your readers coming back time and time again. Part of the “can’t-put-it-down” book equation is story/writing craft! About every other year I really like to hone in on craft and try to level up my work. Here are the resources I’ve found most helpful!

### **Youtube/Podcast Channels for craft:**

#### *Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy Novels*

I’m going to start by sharing what I consider one of the best resources I ever stumbled upon, a lecture series by the famous fantasy author, *Brandon Sanderson*. Brandon teaches a class on writing at BY U, and he’s so very awesome that he records all of his classes and then reposts them on Youtube for free.

[Here’s a link to his Spring 2020 course](#), which I can’t recommend enough. He discusses plotting, building likable characters, and he even does a general overview of the industry and invites in guest speakers to discuss topics—like independent publishing/self-publishing.

If you want to write fantasy or sci fi, this lecture series is a *must-watch*, but I’d recommend it to any genre author because he builds a great foundation for storytelling. (And how else are you going to get a free course taught by a New York Times bestselling author?!)

As for other podcasts/Youtube channel recommendations, here’s a list...

[Terrible Writing Advice](#): This channel uses sarcasm and wit to dig into clichés and issues that make a book flat and less appealing. If you’re trying to up your storyteller game and you need a laugh, this channel is a much see! (New videos every month!)

[Jenna Moreci](#): Jenna is a very personable (and funny!) author who digs into the craft side of things in her youtube videos—like how to outline your novel and write dialog. She’s most well-known, however, for her “Top 10 Pet Peeves,” which is a series of videos where she dives into cliché/over used bits of writing—like unrealistic characters, overused romance plots, and so on. She does swear, but she has some really great insights.

[The Writing Gals](#): The writing gals cover a variety of topics, from discussing launch strategies to improving romance craft. Their twice-monthly show is available only on Youtube, and is hosted by four sweet romance authors. This is the only show I’ve seen that ever gets into the nuts and bolts of romance and discusses various ways to improve your romance subplots.

[Writing Excuses](#): This is the one podcast that—for the most part—focuses on the art of writing. Each episode is fifteen minutes long, and it’s hosted by the mega-selling fantasy author Brandon Sanderson as well as a few other famous authors!

### **Best Craft books:**

Some of these will be available through your local library, so check there first!

**Wired for Story** by Lisa Cron: This is the only resource on my story mechanics list that is an actual book! It's a pretty advanced resource because it investigates what makes a story good by looking at it from a psychological perspective. Specifically, it explores why our brains crave certain kinds of storytelling, and how authors can craft their books to fit that desire.

**DIY MFA: Write with focus, read with purpose, build your community** by Gabriela Pereira: This is the book to get if you're starting out. The book is designed to help you get your own personalized version of a Master of Fine Arts degree. It runs over how to write your book, editing, how to learn from other books/do research, and it does a great job explaining the publishing industry.

**How I Write** by Janet Evanovitch: This gives you a great, overall picture of what writing a book is like, and how you can make it easier and swiftly improve. (Your local library system more than likely has this book as Janet is a big-name author.)

**No Plot, No Problem** by Chris Baty: This book is useful in teaching you how to push through and finish your first few manuscripts. Bonus, Chris is one of the founders of NaNoWriMo—or National Novel Writing Month, and in this book he explains what drove him to create it! (Your local library system likely has this book as well.)

**The Emotion Thesaurus** by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi: This book is great for character feelings and how to express them in variety of ways—something that can get repetitive really fast.

**Save the Cat! Writes a Novel**: By Jessica Brody: This book is all about story structure! If you love to outline, or have a problem with saggy middles, this book is all for you!

**Dear Ally: How Do You Write A Book?:** By Ally Carter: Calling all young writers, this book is for you! Ally Carter is a huge YA author, and she does a phenomenal job of laying out the entire book writing process in this manuscript. Writers who are specifically looking to get traditionally published will find this book helpful as well.

## Business/Marketing

You've written your book and leveled up your craft skills, now you're ready to look into publishing!

There are two paths you can take with this, indie publishing—which is also referred to as self-publishing—and going the traditional route by finding an agent and pitching your novel to publishing houses.

I'll be frank, it's getting more and more difficult to follow the traditional path as publishing houses are forced to tighten up their budgets and are generally more interested in promoting authors who are proven sellers.

However! It's still a viable path, and for some people it's actually a better match for their temperament/goals than self-publishing.

But since I self-publish, most of my resources focus on self-publishing. But don't be discouraged! You'll find some episodes of the podcasts and Youtube channels I'm going to suggest have some episodes about traditional publishing, too.

With that out of the way, let's get started and take a look at some of my favorite free resources, podcasts!

### **Podcasts/Youtube Shows:**

**IMPORTANT:** If you're a new author, I suggest you listen to/search for episodes on the following topics: Newsletters, building social media platform, writing in a series, reviews/street teams, releasing books wide, releasing books in Kindle Unlimited, blurbs/copy writing, and launches.

There's so much information out there, and currently every author and their neighbor seems to mostly be talking about advertising, but before you can think about that you really need to conquer what I consider the "basics"—things like your newsletter, deciding if you want to release wide or exclusively through amazon, and learning how to launch books. So while it might be tempting, research the above topics *first!*

If you're **advanced**, I recommend you look for episodes about these topics: Pre-orders, launches, the Amazon Algorithm, Newsletters, selling your backlist, writing to market, rapid releasing, dealing with burnout, Amazon advertising, Facebook Advertising, and so on. (And yes, some of those topics are repeats but that's because they're that important!)

Now, on to the resources!

[The Writing Gals](#): I recommended this youtube show in my craft section, but since they cover such a wide variety of topics, it's worth mentioning here again. Dig through the archives of this show to learn more about everything from launch strategies, to a two-week special about taxes, giving by a professional tax lawyer. \*Bonus\* They also have a Facebook Group if you're looking for a writing community to join!

[Six Figure Authors](#): Three hosts—who all happen to be successful indie authors--interview other successful indie authors to discuss what they are doing and why. A new episode is posted every week, and they discuss everything from rapid releasing to improving your series sell through rates.

[Spa Girls](#): The Self-Publishing Authors are a group of New Zealand authors who mostly focus on the business side of writing. They discuss things like best newsletter practices, author branding, and ways to engage your readers! They usually interview other authors, though they have round table discussions as well.

[What I Wish I Knew Then](#): Sara Rosett and Jami Albright interview a slew of interesting and amazing authors. While they focus on asking for tips and tricks, they also ask about blunders and mistakes to avoid.

[The Self Publishing Show Podcast](#): Mark Dawson is most known for his Facebook Advertising course, but his team also runs an excellent weekly podcast. Like most of the above podcasts, they interview authors, but given Mark's fame, he's able to interview lots of authors/officials who wouldn't normally be interested.

[Quitcast](#): Becca teaches that each author has their own individual strengths and weaknesses which affect how they should write and run their business. While she has some books out, I highly recommend her Youtube podcast/show—because it's free, and she has an excellent series on burnout!

[The Creative Penn Podcast](#): Mega-star/indie author Joana Penn tackles a wide assortment of topics in her weekly show. Like most podcasts, she interviews other writers, however, she covers a lot of topics you wouldn't see in your usual indie-author focused podcast. (Like coloring books, having a youtube platform, and writing short stories) She occasionally has guests that look at the nuts and bolts of writing (developing setting, characters, etc) but most episodes focus on marketing or life as an author.

### **Books:**

In addition to all these amazing podcasts, there are a few books that dig deep into specialized subjects.

2k to 10k by Rachel Aaron: This book is the building block for learning how to increase your writing speed.

5,000 words per hour by Chris Fox: This book is especially helpful if you struggle to find time to write!

Writing and Marketing Systems by Elena M Johnson: This book is all about learning to create systems and routines to get you in the habit of writing and marketing!

Write to Market by Chris Fox: Read this BEFORE Launch to market. It takes a look at how/what you should write if you want to snag a lot of readers.

Launch to Market by Chris Fox: The follow up book that takes a look at how to successfully launch a book that has been written for a specific market.

**How to Write Sizzling Synopsis:** by Bryan Cohen: This is the book to read if you're starting to craft your book summary to go up on product pages. Plus Bryan is hilarious, so it's worth reading just for the laughs alone.

**Blogging for Writers** by Robin Houghton: This is an excellent reference book if you're trying to decide what platform to blog with, what to blog about, and more. If you are at all interested in blogging I highly recommend you give this book a peek!

**Writing and Releasing Rapidly:** by Elena M Johnson: If you are interested in the indie phenomenon called rapid releasing, this book is a **MUST READ!** Elena has dozens of case studies and tried every rapid releasing method under the sun so you don't have to! Buy this, and read it!

**QuitBooks for Writers:** By Becca Syme: This is technically a series, but if you've been writing for a while and you feel like it's a personal struggle, or you're constantly exhausted, or you want to change but you don't know what you should change, this entire series is for you!

Becca teaches that each author has their own individual strengths and weaknesses which affect how they should write and run their business. Check out her Youtube show—which I list above!

## Who to Hire

It's impossible for you to be skilled at everything, so eventually you'll have to hire help. This section is going to cover some of the people I've used in the past. They're all *fantastic*, and I highly recommend them! Just make sure you contact everyone months before you need your cover/map/website/whatever as most of them will likely have a several-month-long waitlist.

### Cover Artists:

Deranged Doctor Design: They've done my Timeless Fairy Tale Series and my Fairy Tale Enchantress series

Covers by Christian: Christian did the covers for my Court of Midnight and Deception trilogy.

Natasha Snow: Natasha created the covers for my Hall of Blood and Mercy trilogy.

NibelArt: NibelArt created the custom illustrations for my Elves of Lessa series and my Second Age of Retha series. (Myrrhlynn—one of my assistants—did all the type/fontwork for those books.)

### Map Makers:

[Daniel's Maps](#) made the map of my Timeless Fairy Tale world, and I *highly* recommend him. He's fast, detail-orientated, and simply brilliant at what he does. Ilari Nikkarikoski created my Verglas map—you can reach her at [ilari.nikkarikoski@gmail.com](mailto:ilari.nikkarikoski@gmail.com)

Otherwise, check out the [Cartographer's Guild](#)! You can post about the map you're looking for, and various cartographers will respond with their pitch. I linked up with Daniel and Ilari through this guild, and there are some simply *stunning* mapmakers out there. This place will not disappoint you!

### Website Design:

My nifty website was created by [Design by Insight](#), and runs on a wordpress.org engine. (I think I got that right. Honestly I threw myself at Erin's feet and begged her to help me. She's a Coding Magician, so my website is the end result!) My site is hosted on Siteground—which thus far has been a great place for us.

If you're looking for a cheaper option, you can't beat wordpress.com! If you pay the business subscription (I think it's about \$90 for the year) that will make your wordpress page ad free, and it opens up a bunch of different themes for you to use. If you want to get fancy you could purchase a domain name and forward it to your wordpress.com page. (I use Godaddy.com) I used the wordpress business plan and domain forwarding for several years before launching my new website, and it worked quite well!

### Finding Other Cover Artists/Editors:

None of my editors are available for hire, but fret not! If you're on the prowl for an editor or cover artist, there are still a few ways you can find some great people.

For starters, you can use the searchable database [Reedsy](#) to find an editor or cover artist—and there are hundreds of them on there.

But you can also use the copyright material of a book!

Find a book similar to yours—or a book that you feel has a really good cover or excellent editing—and look at the copyright material, which will appear in the sample section of a book on Amazon. It looks something like this.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST  
Copyright © 2013 by K. M. Shea

Cover design by Deranged Doctor Design  
Edited by Jeri Larsen and Bethany Kaczmarek

Not all books will say who designed the covers or served as the editor, but the majority of books do, so keep looking!

Otherwise, if you're lucky enough you'll find a qualified reader to help you! I am so blessed because Editor #1 reached out to me after she suffered through my first version of *Beauty and the Beast* way back in 2013, and offered to help me edit it.

If you're a little tight on cash you could ask readers to serve as Beta Readers—meaning they'll help you stamp out errors and typos in exchange for getting free, early copies of your book. I know some new authors have had great success releasing the first few chapters of their books on websites like Wattpad, and then contacting knowledgeable readers who leave reviews, and asking them if they would read the rest of the book. Otherwise, try to pay careful attention to your emails and messages. Occasionally you'll get readers who will offer to help you proofread a book!

## Tools I Use

For newsletters, I use and highly recommend [Convert Kit](#), particularly if you or someone you know is good with data.

For some pretty images you can plug into photoshop to create instant images of paperback books, check out [Cover Vault](#)! (It's kind of difficult to describe what Cover Vault is, so just go check it out!)

I use [BookFunnel](#) to give out copies of my K. M. Shea Starter Pack, as well as Princess and the Pea, and I can't recommend them enough! (BookFunnel is also useful to distribute books to an ARC team if you have one, or to use to distribute copies of books to winners of giveaways.)

Rock-Star-Assistant-Meg is the Empress of [Vellum](#), the program used to format my books and make them pretty for both ebook and paperback distribution. (Purchasing Vellum is a lot cheaper than paying someone to do your formatting in the long run, the only downside is you MUST have a Mac to use it!)

For writing out my books, I use good ol' Microsoft Word, and Myrrhlynn uses Adobe Spark to make all the cute little promo images I share on social media!

As I mentioned in a previous section, I'm a big fan of "4thewords," which is an online fantasy game that gamifies writing books.

And that's about it for me! Of course, there are tons of amazing programs I don't use (Like Scrivener, Campfire, and World Anvil) so I suggest you do your own research and get plugged into writing/author Facebook Groups for more ideas. (Facebook Communities I particularly recommend are: 20Books50k, An Alliance of Young Adult Authors, and the Writing Gals, the Six Figure Authors podcast has their own active Facebook Group, as does Becca Syme's Quitcast!)

Good luck, and fight on!

## The End?

While this is the end of my guide, it's really just the start of your adventure! As a fellow writer, I'm so excited for you, and I hope I was able to share a useful resource with you!

To officially end this little pamphlet, I'd like to encourage you to never give up on your dream, and to keep writing *fun*. If you begin to hate writing or listening to marketing podcasts or something similar, step back and take a break.

It's better to make a tactical retreat and recoup than to entirely burn yourself out.

Good luck! And may your ideas flow and the words come easily to you! 😊