

# How Many Drafts?

## Jan's Novel Writing Process

I am a 3 or 4 draft fiction author. It took me a long time to find what worked for me in terms of getting that first draft done. I can honestly tell you...if you don't get the first viable working draft done, you will never have a book! Big revelation, huh?

So here is an example of my method madness for almost all my manuscripts. It's a combination of several methods I have studied as well as my own natural bent for writing. I hope it will help you sort out and find a solid method of your own.

### START WITH A STORY IDEA...

I never seem to have trouble coming up with story ideas. If you do, I suggest you watch movies, read a lot, and look up your family history to give you some ideas. Since I write historical fiction, I never run out of stories to tell.

Once I have a story idea in my head, I create characters I will need to tell that story. The characters will drive your plot, so make sure you know who you want to tell this great story of yours.

I jot down a loose outline of how the story will go, then create a short synopsis from there. Once I have a synopsis, I start listing all the scenes I would need to accomplish the story's plot. This is all pretty basic, without too many details. I know my details will come later.

Now that I know more about my story, I go through my character list and get to know them. I do this now because I know enough of my story to have figured out what role my characters will need to play – thus who they need to be. Background, belief system, personality, looks, quirks, wounds, goals, fears, and motivations for what they want from life. I go so far as to find pictures from the web on how I think they look. I print them out and post them by my desk.

### NOW I'M READY FOR MY FIRST DRAFT...

Opening paragraphs are not hard for me – I tend to be a bit poetic about it. I want to set the mood. Once I come up with that, I let the story flow out mostly organically, relying on my notes and synopsis to guide me. As a historical writer, I also have important notes from researching my era to inspire me.

I write without stopping to edit. I have come to even eliminate deciding when new chapters will start, only writing scenes marked with scene dividers.

*Note: I am sort of a fanatic about my first scene. It has to be set and right before I can move on. It's the only place I go back and edit a few times to anchor my story in my head and set the mood and voice I want for my story.*

Most of the time I will go back and take a look at the last several paragraphs I wrote when I'm starting in for the day. Other than that, I just keep going. Once I'm about 1/2 way through my

projected word count, I print it out to read it and look for any major changes, major errors, flow, character descriptions. I mark up the print copy so I know what I want to do on the next draft.

I follow the same process for the second half of the first draft.

TIME TO DO THE SECOND DRAFT...

...which includes making the corrections I found when I read through the entire manuscript one half at a time. I usually find lots of things to change in this round. Things I check are:

Timeline

Character consistency in age, description, name

Cut unnecessary words, phrases, even scenes

Add or detract dialogue, setting, descriptions

Watch for pet words

Determine when where Chapter divisions should come

I don't print it out after this, but read through it on my computer, fixing any of those things I don't like or that is in error, or one of my bad writing habits.

NEXT IS 3<sup>RD</sup> DRAFT...

Here is where I finish creating what some writing coaches call Emotional Layering. This is the draft where I really get in the character's head and make sure I'm telling the story through their eyes - through their emotions. I go as deep as I can. If I'm having trouble doing this, I pick up a copy of one of my favorite books using this technique and read a bit to inspire me.

FINAL DRAFT...

This is when I read through, fine tuning everything. I may still throw out, add, or enhance any of the elements I mentioned above. If I make several major changes here, I will go back and repeat the read though. I have had to do this with 2 of my novels because I discovered either a major timeline issue or historical fact error.

NOW IT'S OFF TO THE EDITOR...

Yes, that is a must.

When I'm done fixing everything my editor says needs fixing, I send it off to beta readers to see if they can catch any typos. They always do.

Once those are fixed, it's ready to either get formatted for Indie publishing or sent off of a publishing house/agent.

That's my process...

Best wishes in your writing!