

STUFF YOUR NOVEL IN A DRAWER:



A Mini-guide to the Life of Your Novel *after* NaNoWriMo

by award-winning teen author

Lauren Hallstrom

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Introduction

The first time I wrote a novel during National Novel Writing Month, I finished seven days early. Then I was so eager to make my novel great that I jumped right in during the final days of NaNo and went through the entire editing process in the next eleven days. Yay, all done! Not bad, huh?

I then proceeded to spend the next eleven months doing both what I thought I had already done and learning about parts of the writing process I hadn't even known were necessary.

Okay, so perhaps the entire-finished-novel-in-one-month package was a little too hopeful, but it is still entirely possible to turn your fresh-out-of-NaNoWriMo first draft into a published book (or perhaps simply a polished piece you'll no longer hide in the deep confines of your Documents folder)!

This mini-guide is for the dreamers, readers, writers, and try-your-hand-ers who went through National Novel Writing Month in November and want to know what to do next with their novel. This is especially for the new novel-writer and teen writers who may have been told they can't publish a novel at a young age. Let's prove them wrong.

Maybe you finished NaNo and completed your word goal, maybe you ran out of juice and didn't quite make it. Doesn't matter! Either way, the goal is to not bury your novel on December 1st. We want to see it again beyond the month of November!

So what is NaNoWriMo anyway?

If you've sought out this guide you probably already know, but just to make sure we're on the same page: National Novel Writing Month is an annual challenge to write a novel in 30 days. You can complete the adult challenge of 50,000 words in a month, or as a young writer in the Young

Writers Program, you can choose whatever word goal you like. My first year, I chose 20,000 words and ended up with a nice novella-size story.

The goal of NaNo is not to have a finished novel at the end of the month, but to have a start. You may not particularly *like* your novel after dropping words all over it for a month, but you now have a first draft. After NaNo, your job is to fix up that draft into the vision you've had for your book all along.

Check out this interview of a 9-time teen participant in NaNoWriMo as she discusses her experiences and advice for NaNoWriMo and what to do afterward!

[The Noveling Process: Advice from a NaNo Participant](#)



[Great! So How Do I Start? Common-Post NaNo Misconceptions](#)

First, we must dispel some myths about post-NaNo so we can hopefully go into this process with a mind more at ease:

Word Count Is Everything

This was true in November, but no more! Yes, there is a specific word count that most published novels have (around 70,000 is a common first published book length), but we must get rid of our mentality of adding all the words we possibly can. That whole page describing the flecks of color in Grandma's rug may have to go, and perhaps your minor character's 5-page soliloquy reciting the U.S. Constitution is not *entirely* necessary. You'll find yourself cutting out a lot during post-NaNo. But never fear! You may be surprised how much you add, too. In my first novel, I ended up almost 5,000 words higher after editing than I was at the end of my NaNo first draft.

After NaNo, All We Need to Do is Proofread Our Novel, Put Some Pretty Fonts in There, and it's Ready to be Published!

Nope, nope, nope! No matter how perfect you think your novel may be, it's just not. Make sure you take this process seriously. I'll give you some tips and things to focus on during the editing process!

I Don't Need to Edit – I Can Get an Editor for That!

I wish. Yes, an editor is super helpful, and yes, mine did a lot of great editing with me, but it is a collaborative process. She makes the suggestions, you have to actually implement them. And even before you have an editor, you need to polish your piece as much as possible so you can get the interest of that cool publishing house (more on that later) where the editor also lives, if you want to traditionally publish.

Where Most Young Writers' Novels Get Stuck

Well, first of all, most novels written by kids or teens don't even happen at all—maybe because young writers think, “Oh, I can't do something as fancy as writing a novel,” or, “I can do that when I grow up.” So, many young writers are discouraged early on and never actually write that

novel—many congratulations to you for defying that and for being in the minority—you got to *The End* on the first draft of a book!

I think after NaNo is over, most young writers stick their novel in a drawer or in the Random Stuff folder on their computers and never get around to pulling it out again. That is a mistake. That is where this guide is picking up from—the moment on December 1st, when your novel hits that metaphorical bottom of the drawer.

So You Wrote a Novel...What Now?

The first thing I'm going to say is that drawer is your friend...for a week or two, at least. Yes, I'm not telling to stop storing your novels away—it can actually be helpful to put your novel away for a week or two. After NaNo, you are probably exhausted and too wrapped up in your writing to tell what's working and what's not. So take a break from your novel, even if it's just a few days. In that time, your mind may wander to it and you'll come up with new ideas you didn't think of during the chaos of NaNo.

Whatever you do, make sure you DO come back to your novel. Don't leave the poor thing abandoned there in the drawer! When you come back, you'll have refreshed eyes, and you'll be ready for Post-NaNo!

Now, the next step is to READ through your entire novel. You're the reader now—experience the piece from the reader's perspective. You'll find sections that are weaker, places where the plot sags, and maybe events that could happen earlier in the story. Note those, but don't fall into changing commas and fixing spellings errors! You'll be making bigger changes with those sentences anyway, so you don't want to waste your time on grammar when those sentences or paragraphs might not even be there after you do some bigger editing, anyway.

As you read through, the only thing you need to do is make a to-do list for your novel. On it, note all the places where your novel is weak and all the things you want to do with your novel. Or think of it as listing what you want your novel to do that it's not yet quite doing.

Digging Out and Tearing Up – The Editing Process!

So now, you've identified the big things that need to be changed. Time to edit! In the editing process, always go from the biggest things to the smallest details.

The BIG Stuff: Story Editing

These are hopefully the things you've just identified. Go through your novel, changing around the plot and the overall story structure of your piece, in any order you want (you don't have to go linearly from beginning to end). Maybe you realize nothing much happens except backstory on the first ten pages of your novel, and then the action really starts to pick up on page 11. Great! Make page 11 the new beginning and pull details from the first ten pages to incorporate backstory here and there as the story progresses.

Maybe you realize one of your secondary characters isn't really doing much for the story. Now is the time to give him a bigger role, round him out more, or maybe delete him entirely.

There are a couple ways you can handle this editing step. If you're writing on the computer, some people I know open a new blank document and copy pieces of their draft into it. They use this new window to really work with the sections they like and add in new stuff where they're not yet happy with it. The advantage is that this way ensures you are making big edits to your story.

The way I like to do it is by using Word's "Tracked Changes" tool, which allows me to edit directly on my first draft. If I make a change I later regret, I can see the changes I've made in a different color, and I can go back to how I had it before.

Know that this story editing step takes time. You won't get it right the first time and that's okay. I sometimes think this is the most fun step of the writing process too, because you're still doing a great deal of raw writing, but you already have the skeleton of your story there to guide you, and that way, I don't feel like I'm writing aimlessly.

Stay on this step until you're generally satisfied with how your story is rounding out. Don't get discouraged—this is making huge progress!

Copyediting

Nope, still not the same as proofreading. Now it's time to make changes that come down to how each paragraph and each sentence sound. You could notice that you have a paragraph that's a page long and decide you need to break it up. Or you use the word "realize" three times within two lines and need to find a different way to say things. Or maybe you always structure your sentences the same way, like "I went to the park and cried after he broke up with me." That's the typical subject-verb-object order. Switch around the structure of your sentences, add in phrases or modifiers with commas, like "After he broke up with me, I went to the park and cried." You'll be surprised how much not starting a sentence with "I" all the time helps.

After all this thinking and decision making, you'll be happy to read through your story once more and proofread, fixing grammatical errors that have only one clear "right answer" in terms of the change to be made! Make sure to read your novel aloud to avoid skipping over typos and to fix phrases that don't sound smooth.

Publishing—The Pot of Gold at the End of the Rainbow

And now, what we've all been waiting for! A lot of people will tell you to not rush to get to publishing when you're writing a book, and I agree with that. It's a bad idea to not take the editing

process seriously just because you want to publish right away. There are too many disappointing, typo-ridden books out there, and we don't need to add to that. However, some authors take this mentality so far as to say teens should wait to publish until they are adults. The idea is that they're not ready to publish, that they don't have the writing experience, I guess.

I am very against that idea, and understandably, considering I was a published teen author myself. I say go for it if publishing is what you want and you are willing to put in the effort.

So, the first and perhaps most important decision to make is how you want to publish your novel.

Self-Publishing

Many first-time writers go this route, and the advantages are clear. It is much simpler now with a variety of self-publishing platforms, such as CreateSpace, BookBaby, Lulu, etc., and anyone can do it. While you do have to pay out of pocket, if you make your own cover art and do your own editing, you sometimes only need to pay printing fees, so the pricing is great. However, self-publishing is also extremely difficult to set your book apart from the crowd. You have to be willing to learn how to market yourself as an author, like the amazing Amanda Hocking. Self-published books can be successful, but it's on you to set it up for success.

First steps: research publishing platforms to find the right one for you and start thinking about a marketing plan.

Traditional Publishing

The other main option is going the "traditional" route with a publishing house. This means you must "query" an agent, or basically formally ask them to represent you. Once you have an agent, they help send your book to publishing houses, and if one is interested, you sign a contract with them. They provide an entire team to work with you on the book—editing, marketing, graphic

design, etc. The advantage is that you don't have to do this yourself, and traditionally published books are usually better promoted, reach a wider audience, and earn more money. The downside is that you'll have less say in what happens to your novel, and the entire process to even get an agent can be a challenge that takes years.

First step: write a query letter. This is really not as daunting as it sounds. Query letters are mainly composed of an exciting synopsis of your book, information about you as the author, and information about how it fits into the genre or what other books it is similar to.

Query Letter Resources:

[Jane Friedman's Complete Guide to Query Letters](#)

[Manuscript Wish List](#)

[Query Letter Clinic](#)

Best of Luck!

Phew, whoever said writing a book was easy, right? But it's really quite doable, both for adults and young writers. As you embark on this fantastic and chaotic journey, remember why it is that you write. We have this amazing ability to touch people with the written word, and this entire post-NaNo process extends the reach of our words to acquaintances, strangers, and the *world*.

Lauren Hallstrom is the CIPA EVVY award-winning author of two novels for young adults. She wrote her debut novel, *Dreamweaver*, at age 15 during NaNoWriMo and it won a local contest to be sponsored for publication. She won during the second year in a row with her historical fiction novel, *One Hundred Words*, and has since then developed a passion for encouraging young novelists in any way she can. She is currently pursuing an English degree at Colorado State University.