

The 9–5 Novelist
A Novel Hustle Course

Plan Your Novel in a Day

A Step-by-Step Workbook

by Patricia Marques

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Introduction

This guide is designed to help you plan your novel in a single day. Whether you're preparing for a new writing project or need a clear framework to develop an idea that's been brewing for a while, this step-by-step resource will walk you through the key elements you need to shape your story — idea, structure, characters, and setting.

This guide distils the planning phase into one focused day, so that by the end you'll have a concrete, flexible plan and a clear direction for your draft.

Let's begin.

Suggested Schedule: Plan your novel in one day

Below is a sample 8-hour day plan to help you work through each section of this guide. You are absolutely encouraged to adapt this to your needs — spread it over a weekend, split it into shorter sprints, or work through a single step at a time.

But if you'd like to commit to the full *Plan Your Novel in a Day* experience, this structure is designed to help you do just that with space for breaks and reflection built in.

Time	Activity
09:00 – 10:30	Step 1: Find your idea and commit
10:30 – 12:00	Step 2: Build your story's core
12:00 – 13:00	LUNCH BREAK
13:00 – 14:30	Step 3: Create memorable characters
14:30 – 16:00	Step 4: Build your world and establish tone
16:00 – 16:30	Reflect, organise notes and review exercises
16:30 – 17:00	Final notes and what's next?

Note: Each 90-minute block includes time for reading, reflection, and short breaks. The exercises themselves may take around 60 minutes, leaving room to absorb the concepts, pause as needed, or expand on areas that need more development. Flex this to suit your own pace!

Step 1: Find your idea and commit to it

Every novel starts with a spark. Sometimes it's a character, a situation, or even a single image. A great way to grow an idea into something with narrative potential is to ask:

["What if...?"](#)

This simple question helps you stretch your idea, see its possibilities, and test whether it has enough substance to become a novel.

A viable idea is one you can't stop thinking about. If it excites you or refuses to leave you alone — you likely have the beginnings of a novel.

Some people, once they have an idea, prefer to launch right into the writing journey. Others prefer to dig in a little deeper into their idea first, which is where outlining comes in.

Outlining doesn't mean writing your novel in stone. It's meant to be a roadmap, not a contract. Choose the method that suits you:

- Synopsis Outline
- In-Depth Outline
- Snowflake Method
- BookEnd Method

Remember: It's perfectly fine to veer off course later — this is just your launchpad. If you're unfamiliar with the methods mentioned above, I'd encourage you to spend some time exploring them, there are plenty of free online resources which take the time to explain each one.

Exercises

Suggested time: 09:00 – 10:30

- 1 a. Write a one-paragraph pitch for your novel (10 mins)
- 1 b. Expand your idea into a one-page summary (20 mins)
- 1 c. Choose your preferred outlining method and jot down a rough sketch using it (30 mins)

Before you can write your novel, you need to know what you're actually writing and commit to it. By completing these exercises you're testing whether your idea has legs and gives you a clear starting point to work from and a roadmap to follow when you get stuck.

Step 2: Build your story's core

To ground your story, focus on these three foundational elements:

- Protagonist: Who is your main character, and what do they want?
- Conflict: What stands in their way (both externally and internally)?
- Resolution: How might things end — what questions will you answer?

If structure helps you write more confidently, try shaping your story around one of these:

- Three-Act Structure
- Hero's Journey
- Save the Cat

Again, if you're unfamiliar with the structures listed here, pause here for a moment and take the time to familiarise yourself with them.

You don't need a polished plan to start writing. Some writers prefer a lean, fast "[skeleton draft](#)" — a basic version of the story with key scenes and dialogue, knowing they'll deepen it later.

The aim is momentum, not perfection.

Exercises

Suggested Time: 10:30 – 12:00

- 2 a. Outline your story in 10 bullet points (20 mins)
- 2 b. Write a 'day in the life' scene for your protagonist (30 mins)
- 2 c. Map your 10 bullet points onto a chosen story structure (20 mins)

A story without a spine will collapse in the middle. Here you've identified the essential elements that will carry your novel from beginning to end.

Step 3: Create memorable characters

Memorable characters are flawed, vulnerable, and driven by deep desires. Readers don't need to like your protagonist — but they must care about what happens to them.

Consider:

- What are their fears?
- What past experiences shape them?
- What do they long for — and what do they need?

Every relationship your protagonist has can reveal different aspects of who they are. Think about:

- Friendships, rivals, family dynamics
- Who challenges them? Who supports them?
- Which relationships shift or stay steady?

MasterClass has a great article on writing character relationships, you can read it here:

[How to Write Nuanced Character Relationships](#)

Don't rely on dialogue alone. Show character through body language, movement, and silence.

Point of View options include:

- First Person: Intimate but limited.
- Third Person Limited: Balanced perspective.
- Multiple POVs: Good for complex stories, but requires clarity and discipline.

Exercises

Suggested Time: 13:00 – 14:30

3 a. Write a dialogue scene between your protagonist and a key supporting character (30 mins)

3 b. Analyse the scene: What is revealed directly? What is revealed indirectly? (15 mins)

3 c. Write a brief character sketch for your protagonist, one ally, and one character who creates tension (15 mins)

Plot is what happens and characters is why we care so these exercises are designed to help you build people who feel real enough to drive your story forward on their own.

Step 4: Build your world and establish tone

Even if you're not writing fantasy or sci-fi, your story still needs a world. Ground your setting with the following:

- What genre are you writing?
- What's the social/emotional landscape your character navigates?
- What cultural or personal pressures shape their choices?

The world should feel lived in, not explained. Let it emerge naturally through scenes.

Sensory detail can instantly shift a scene's tone:

- Weather: Storms vs sunshine
- Sounds: Street noise, silence, birdsong
- Textures: Crisp paper, rough skin, cold glass

Use setting to echo (or contrast) your character's emotional state.

Stuck on a scene? Try changing the weather in a scene. It can reset the tone or unlock something new.

Exercises

Suggested Time: 14:30 – 16:00

4 a. Describe your main setting in three distinct moods (e.g. peaceful, threatening, nostalgic) (15 mins)

4 b. Write your opening scene using sensory details to establish one (30 mins)

4 c. Reflect: What does this setting reveal about your protagonist? (15 mins)

The world your story lives in shapes everything – how the story feels, how it sounds, what's at stake. These exercises help you explore these aspects of your world and help you ground your novel in a setting that does real transformative work for your readers.

Conclusion: You've built a plan

In just one day, you've:

- Found and tested your novel idea
- Outlined your story's structure
- Created layered characters and relationships
- Developed a tangible sense of world and tone
- Written several scenes and summaries to work from

You now have a working novel blueprint. Whether you write a full first draft or begin with a skeleton draft, you have a foundation that will support you through the drafting process.

Want more support?

This workbook is your starting point but if you'd like a structured system to take you all the way from first word to completed draft, The 9-5 Novelist is now open for enrolment.

Early bird price: £197 - closes 18th June 2026. Full price: £297 from 19th June 2026.

Your early bird place includes personal outline feedback from me - up to 2 pages, with written notes returned by email.

[Join The 9-5 Novelist here.](#)

1:1 Support

I also offer writing coaching sessions for writers who want dedicated, focused time on their project.

50 min · £100 · via Zoom

Each session includes feedback on up to 1000 words submitted in advance, plus time to troubleshoot, develop ideas and work through structure.

[Book a session here.](#)

About me

Patricia Marques is the author of the *Inspector Reis* series, published by Hodder & Stoughton. She holds a BA and an MA in Creative Writing, and works as a career coach, workshop facilitator, and employability professional – with experience across institutions including UCL, the Royal College of Art, and the University of Greenwich.

As the creator of *The 9–5 Novelist*, Patricia brings a structured and motivating approach to novel-writing, helping busy writers finally finish the book they’ve always had in them.

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