

## How to WriMo with #SinC50K during National Novel Writing Month

By Kim Keeline

*A NaNoWriMo veteran compiles tips from fellow Sisters in Crime members and her own experience to help you prepare for and “sink” 50K words this November.*

“I kept my eye on meeting a daily word count and didn't worry about writing badly. I did Nano mainly to get over my fear of writing badly in the 1st draft. I had a tendency to get stuck.”—Sharon Mondragon

“You just have to force yourself to keep writing even if you're tired of it. I never delete anything during November - if I realize I wrote something wrong I just bold it and keep writing. I can edit in December!”—Jane Murray

“Don't forget...30 days goes by quickly and 1700 words per day is more than you think. Better to write fast (don't worry about better) early and get ahead of the schedule. Do not stop writing.”—Jay Kinney

National Novel Writing Month (or NaNoWriMo as most of us somewhat affectionately call it) is coming soon. That community-driven writing marathon to “complete” a novel in 30 days (well, to draft 50,000 words in that time, anyways).

Many of us use it as a good motivator for a writing project. Beloved by pansters, procrastinators, or those of us with a problem of editing or researching too much, NaNoWriMo makes you commit to writing (just writing, no editing!) for a sustained time.

Even if you don't “win” by completing 50k in your manuscript, if you got more writing done than usual in that time period, you still came out ahead. That makes you a winner in my book.

“(1) Outline first. (2) Have a goal of what is realistic to accomplish given family/time commitments. Don't set yourself up to fail by saying you'll do 50K when you really can't. (3) It's just a first draft. Have fun with it!”—Shelley Adina

### Time

1,667 Words A Day makes 50,000 words in a month. It isn't impossible because people have done it in the past. Nobody is saying that it doesn't take a time commitment. Many people spend several hours a day writing to complete their novel before November 30. Or they do longer marathons on weekends to make up for the lack of writing during the week.

You need to look at your schedule, realistically, and figure out when you can spend that sort of time. Consider “banking” some word counts by writing ahead (always expect the unexpected when planning your time). Some people spend the first day writing 3,000 or more words and then each day they can aim for a smaller word count (leaving them room for a day where they may not be able to write—things happen!).

Others already know they can't write on certain days (I don't write on Thanksgiving, for instance) and have to up their daily word count—rounding up to 2,000 or 2,500 words a day for a goal. Do the math with the calendar in front of you. Plan now so that you will finish on time!

“I don't have a secret weapon, but I find that using one of the participant-provided desktop calendars helps me stay on track with the number of words needed daily to reach 50K by the end of the month. I usually end up with 58K-62K words because I write until the story is ended and not just to the 50K mark.”—Jennifer Lewis-Williams

Also, give yourself a break. You can't write all of the time. Set yourself some rewards and/or break times.

Take leave of other commitments. Prepare meals in advance or get someone else in the house to cook more often (or get takeout food more!). Let your home get a little messier than you'd usually allow.

If you have other people in the house, let them know that for 30 days you will have this project and that you will need their patience and help more than usual. Enlisting support always helps.

“Eliminating distractions. Using paper plates in place of dishes, keeping all apps closed, using the playlist of music that I make for the novel, and following my timeline. My house is usually a disaster by the end. So I follow up with a month of cleaning in December.”—Staci Roberts

“Clear all non-essential activities for the month. Let friends and family know what I am doing and that I will not have much free time during the month. Set time aside daily, 3 to 4 hours, and write until daily word goal is met. Use prompts to keep writing when inspiration fails. Write in different places: coffeeshops, libraries, Dunkin' Donuts. If I get tired, get up and move to a different location.”—Amy Propps

“Write every morning, right after (or during) my first cup of coffee.”—George Milburn

“Scheduling the time necessary and pacing myself. The accountability is a huge motivator. I also use motivational tools like sprints and word crawls.”—Anna Ialacci

## **Planning**

Whether you are a planner or a pantsier or somewhere in between, NaNoWriMo can work for you. You can plan in advance of November (outline, character sheets, or other planning tools) or just jump in November 1 and see where your writing takes you.

“Advance planning. I had characters and a very rough outline. There were surprises along the way, and I ended up with a different killer than I had originally planned.”—Wendy Harrison

“Plan beforehand. I'm a pantsier, and for many years I got stuck at around the 17K mark. It's only when I had a definite plan to follow that I hit my target. You have to power through those parts where you think 'I don't know what to write next.' Write something. Flag it up as something to come back to, but I guarantee you'll soon be on to a bit where the words are flowing again.”—Susan Martin

“Preparation—strong outline and a bullet list for what I would write the following day. Character sketch and backstory, plus strong conflict between characters plus giving each a big problem and admirable goal.”—Jenna Kernan

“Do some pre-planning. I'm pretty much a pantsner, but to write quickly you have to have some idea of where you're going. Once you begin, it's a state of mind to tell yourself no editing or rewriting. It's hard at first, but you have to keep your mind on the goal of getting in those 2K words each day. Pick a time to write that will be free of distractions and shut your office door!”—Janet Buck

“Closest to a secret weapon is doing a detailed outline beforehand, so I know where the book is going. That (usually) keeps me from wasting time on scenes that won't go anywhere. But often the book surprises me by going in profitable directions that weren't covered in the outline. So the outline is basically a guide, not an inflexible map.”—Sarah Smith

“I start with a general idea of characters, place, and main events. Before NaNo, I do a rough timeline and then a template for each chapter:

1. Purpose of the Scene (what begins, ends, gets done)
2. Conflict: Inner and Outer (goal, conflict, disaster/reaction, dilemma, decision)
3. High Moment (near end; reveals & plays out purpose)
4. How Characters Change by the End of the Scene
5. POV
6. Description & Sensory Details to add later
7. Strong beginning (promise) and riveting ending” —Ann Reh

“Having a writing schedule and sticking to it. Using a story beat spreadsheet to plan ahead of time.”—Jennifer Gottschalk

## Drafting

Once you start writing, there are always times where it will seem more difficult to get words down on the page or where the plot doesn't seem so clear. The dreaded slowdown of the middle strikes where you write “and then magic happens” because you don't know how your character is getting from A to C. Remember, this is normal—keep going. You can write your way out of it and things will start flowing again. Try jumping to the next scene you do know or switching up your POV or setting for a while to see if it takes you somewhere new.

I always call my first rough draft (and that's what NaNoWriMo is all about) the “Dog Draft” because it is “rough, rough.” I'll throw that old dog a bone once I start revising in December.

“The ‘correct’ answer for this, according to NaNoWriMo, is probably ‘turning off your inner editor’ but that rarely works for me. I can only write quickly when I'm excited about what I'm writing. For me, that's mostly when I'm plotting the crime, planting clues and red herrings, and incriminating innocent people. Also, when I get into the place (zone?) where my brain takes over (often ignoring my outline), wonderful things happen.”—Dianne Larson

“‘Light Posts in the Fog’ —know what the ending should be, and know some of the points you need to get there, but leave the rest of the path to discover as you move from one point to another. The path can be straight or it can wind around; you discover that along the way.”—Hawthorn Mineart

“Always forward, never back. Put the inner editor away and just write. Also helps to have at least a rough outline before you start.”—Julie Holmes

“Permission to suck. No editing allowed. Write everything and anything that comes to mind even if it doesn't make sense. It can be edited out later. Write fast and furiously!”—Claire Fishback

“I tell myself that I can fix it later, research it or fact check it later, just GET IT DOWN!”—Yvonne Saxon

“Inserting lots of TBDs and [add more here}s while writing. Normally I do a fair amount of research while writing. Can't do that if you want to complete in a month.”—Tiger Wiseman

“Writing scenes out of order, filling in the plot in a non-linear fashion until I reach 50K words.”—Kelly Horn

“Don't let the perfect (word/scene/character) get in the way of the good enough for now. It CAN be fixed. I revise endlessly, but as the cliché goes, you can't revise a blank page. NaNo is great for spitting it out. In fact, it was essential for me.”—Bonnar Spring

“I don't over plan. I only worry about the backstory after the book ends or I stick in enough to give my readers a taste of personalities/situations. As I write, things just click together or pop up unexpectedly but add incredible value to the story.”— P.I. Barrington

“I have a rough outline, decent character definitions, and general direction of how I think the work will end. And then I get out of the way and write Anne Lamott's ‘shitty first draft.’” —Betsy Ashton

“The three things that help me draft fast: 1) Leave my scene incomplete so I can pick up where I left off the next writing session; 2) Earlier in the day when I'm commuting or doing something else I try to plan what bits I'm going to work on next so that I already have some momentum when I am ready to sit down and write; and 3) I have to have writing dates with someone else where we both show up to do the work (in-person or virtually like Skype).”—Denise Ganley

## **Community**

Part of the reason NaNoWriMo works for so many is the sense of community, the idea that so many others are struggling to do the same thing. Writing can be a very lonely occupation, but groups like Sisters in Crime and events like NaNoWriMo bring the fun of other people into the process.

Make sure you sign up for your region on the NaNoWriMo site. You will get emails from the organizers in your part of the world. As part of Sisters in Crime's #SinC50K, you will also get encouragement from your Siblings.

There are forums on the NaNoWriMo site with great resources, such as tips sent out by region or topic from published writers. People challenge others to word sprints, ask for advice (and give it!), and even donate plot ideas they have had but can't use so that others can take it as an inspiration.

Of course, this year they won't be holding the in-person events they usually would (but do try them in future years) but that just means there will be more virtual options, so take advantage of that and meet your writing goals with community support.

“We have a great regional group that supports each other throughout the month. We have in person write-ins (fingers crossed for 2020) and lots of virtual gatherings via Discord.”—Sharon Boehlefeld

“I sprint with a friend. We try to do 50k every other month now, so NaNo isn't that big of deal anymore. But sprints are a wonderful way to get writers writing!”—Meg Opperman

“Attend write-ins and participate in word wars.”—Ruth Donnelly

“NaNoWriMo is a very freeing experience. You can't look back, can't revise, just keep racing forward. If you're not participating in the motivation-building components of NaNoWriMo, it is harder to maintain momentum. You just have to write and accept mistakes, errors, typos, [and ignore] everything except creating 1700 words a day.”—Lia Skidmore

You can start planning now and start the draft in November. Then you can start the additional research, revision, editing, and all the other things the draft needs in December.

“Write, don't judge, judging comes later when you have something on the paper.”—Faye Snowden

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