

Conquering the Assault Course

Writing a novel is like tackling an assault course: some parts are terrifying, others are exhilarating ... and then there are those sections where you feel completely stuck and need rescuing!

Firstly – and at the risk of stating the obvious – have you got an idea? Don't just go with the first thing that comes into your head: play around with different themes. Ask yourself why character X behaves in a certain way, or what will happen when they clash with character Y. Is your idea big enough to fill a novel, or would it be better suited to a short story?

There's nothing wrong in writing for your own amusement (although bungee jumping would be quicker and less scary), but if you're hoping to get published at some stage, it's important to consider your potential audience. A novel aimed at seven to eleven-year olds will have a very different feel from one written for adults. Try and take genre into consideration, too: if you were placing your book in a library, for instance, whereabouts would it fit?

A few more suggestions (particularly if you're bogged down in the "stuck" phase):

- Writers are first and foremost readers, so read widely in a variety of genres. Examine why some stories work, and others don't. What does the writer do to grab your attention?
- Turn off your inner critic until you've finished the first draft. Putting words down on paper without worrying about the editing side can be very liberating. Try setting a timer and seeing how much you can write in the allotted time, or join a mass participation exercise such as [NaNoWriMo](#).
- Don't feel obliged to copy someone else's writing habits: find out what works for you. Some authors insist on getting up early to write, while others prefer to work late into the night. Planners like to have all the details mapped out before they start, while "pantsers" tend to plunge straight in and allow their characters to dictate what happens.
- Persevere, and do your best to ignore the dissenting voices in your head. All writers – however experienced – have to do battle with the "this is rubbish and no one will ever read it anyway" dragons.
- Joining a writing organisation such as ACW can provide motivation and inspiration. If possible, I'd recommend joining a local group where you can receive support, advice, encouragement (and, if necessary, a shoulder to cry on).
- When you finally complete your first draft, have a cup of tea / bar of chocolate / large glass of wine to celebrate ... and tuck your manuscript away for a couple of weeks before you start editing properly. It's much easier to spot typos and inconsistencies once you've had a bit of breathing space.

And if you've made it to the end – congratulations: you have done something amazing! If you decide at this stage you'd like to try and get your work published, you can find advice on submitting to publishers (or self-publishing) elsewhere on this site.

Fiona Lloyd is vice-chair of the Association of Christian Writers and is married with three grown-up children. Her first novel, [The Diary of a \(trying to be holy\) Mum](#), was published by Instant Apostle in January 2018. **Fiona has also written for Woman Alive, Christian Writer and Together Magazine.** She has a passion to encourage others to grow in relationship with God. Fiona works part-time as a music teacher and is a member of the worship-leading team at her local church.

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