

ByteNoise

How to Write a Damn Good Novel

How to Write a Damn Good Novel is the single best book I have read on the subject of writing dramatic fiction. While it doesn't go into as much detail as various books dedicated to single aspects of fiction writing such as Nancy Kress's Beginnings, Middles and Ends or Jack M. Bickham's Scene and Structure, it's frankly amazing how much practical advice the author, James N. Frey, managed to fit into so few pages. This book isn't just a great guide to writing, it's also a shining example of how to convey as much information as possible in as few words as possible. Frey urges you not to waste your readers' time, and certainly sets a good example in this regard.

It's worth noting that, although for brevity's sake the book title claims to teach you how to write a novel, it actually teaches you dramatic writing in general, which *does* apply to short stories as well but *doesn't* apply to lofty literary endeavours.

If you're convinced that you must be naturally inspired by your muse, then this book probably isn't for you. If you want to learn the craft of planning, [writing](#) and rewriting a novel, and it's a task you take seriously, then this guide is filled with indispensable advice.

When you're first sketching out your idea for a story, Frey has advice on articulating and sticking to its main premise, on ensuring every event in the story adheres to cause and effect,

and on pacing both the whole story and each of its individual scenes so that they all slowly rise to a climax.

After you've written your first draft, Frey talks you through rewriting your story until it shines. He gives advice on how to make the dialogue more colourful by making it indirect, and how to engage the reader by describing sounds, smells, textures, tastes and movement as well as the static images that are likely already in that initial sketch of prose.

This book proves that the seemingly mystical process of writing a good novel can be broken down into simple, realistically achievable steps. The main requirements are effort and perseverance, plus a little initial inspiration. With a determined attitude and the techniques revealed in this book, it seems hard to go too far wrong.

This book does indeed live up to its claim of telling you how to write a good novel. As long as you don't expect to write a brilliant first draft, but instead set about your goal methodically and with purpose, you should notice that each time you learn something else from this book and rewrite your novel accordingly, the subsequent draft is slightly better than the last, until finally you're left with a gripping story, featuring tight structure and told with shining prose.

Given its breadth of advice, if you can get only one book on writing fiction, this should definitely be it. If you can get more than one, this should be the first.