

My Writing Process



Necessary Writing Tools

There are as many ways to write a book as there are authors. I have talked to bestselling, traditionally published authors who don't know the plot or story when they start writing. We call these writers "pantsers" because they write by the seat-of-their-pants.

There are other writers who plot and outline the entire story before they write the first word. We call these people "outliners."

There are dozens of degrees of each of these categories in between. Whatever works for you is the correct way to write.

Me, I'm an extreme outliner. I come from a software engineering background. During my years designing and building software and web applications for Fortune 500 companies, I learned that I wanted to know all the answers before I started coding. I didn't like to be hit with surprises mid-project. Our axiom was "It's cheaper to fix it in the design stage than it is in the build stage."

The same applies to writing. I've known pantsers who found a glaring plot error in their story and ended up ripping out hundreds of pages and starting again. I rarely have such problems.

I bring that software engineering discipline to writing. I want to know the story, the characters, the plot and all of its twists before I start writing. That way, I prevent myself from putting inconsistencies in the story and end up with a cohesive whole.

This is not to say I'm rigid in my writing. Often times a character takes over the story in ways I never imagined and I have to make changes to my outline. When my beta readers read the manuscript and don't understand something, it usually means I need to add another scene to explain what's happening. Perhaps, during research on a specific item, I make new discoveries that take me off in a new direction. I go back and modify my outline to accommodate them.

The sample outline I have posted on my website is for my newest novel, *The Cartel Strikes Back*. If you compare the outline to the book, you will find many differences. I can't give away the ending, but it occurred to me halfway through the writing process, necessitating making changes further upstream in the book. You may view *The Cartel Strikes Back* outline [here](#).

After I complete the outline, I sit down to start writing and something magical happens. My mind goes blank. I don't have to think about what I'm writing or how I'm writing it. The letters and words just flow from my fingers, from my sub-conscious.

At this point, I know the story so well; I don't have to think about what I'm writing. The words just appear on my computer screen. And know what? I have the same excitement and enthusiasm as a new reader reading the book for the first time.

It's an exhilarating feeling. I only hope you can achieve this in your writing.

Now we get to the blow-by-blow of my process. Remember: this is how I write. Your method may be something different.

I copy and paste articles that I find helpful into a Word file so that I can refer to them later.



Leading a discussion with a book group

Beat Sheet

The beat sheet is a screen-writers tool I use to work through the plot of a novel before I start writing the outline. It helps me visualize the story before I get bogged down in details.

The beat sheet concept is adapted from Blake Snyder's book *Save The Cat!* If you haven't read *Save The Cat!*, get a copy today.

You can download a sample beat sheet from my novel *Bikini Baristas* [here](#).

By the time I've completed the beat sheet, I have a pretty good handle on how the story will unfold. I also know most of the characters that will appear in the book.



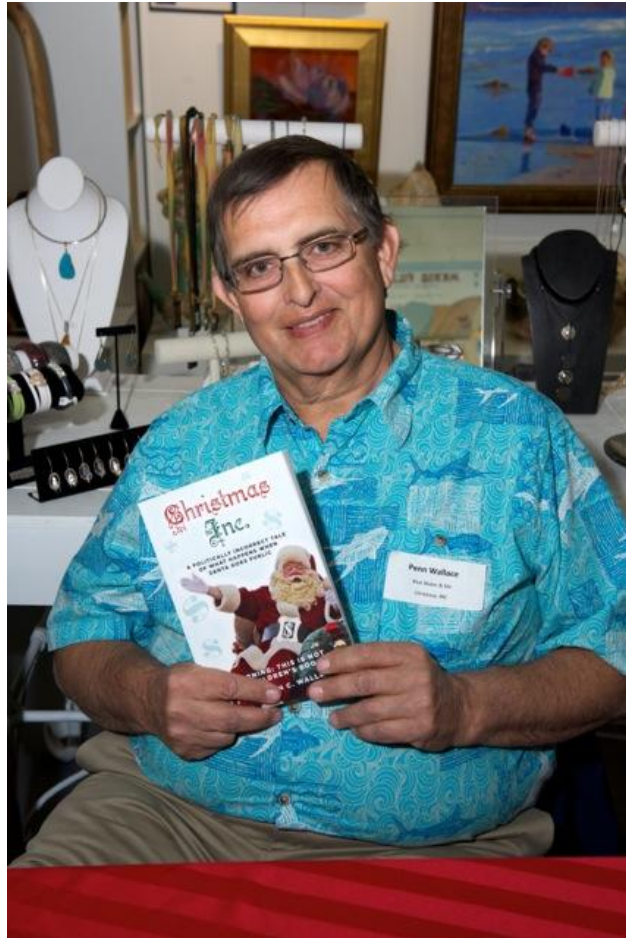
A real character

Character Sketches

My next step is to write character sketches for all of the major characters. If a parking valet is going to appear in chapter two, then never again, I don't bother with him. But, I do want to know the butler's background. Where was he born, where did he go to school, what was his parent's religion? All of these things will determine how he speaks and acts in the book.

You can find the character sketch I use [here](#).

The template is two pages long. By the time I fill it out and write the character synopsis at the bottom, it's about four or five pages per character.



I'm lovin' it

Outline

With the beat sheet and character sketches in hand, I begin the outline.

My outlines have a section for each scene in the book. This way I can follow the plot through its machinations and keep characters and scenery consistent.

I write from a third-person single character point-of-view. Each scene is told through the point-of-view from only one character. I note in the outline whose point-of-view will be used in each scene.

I use Christopher's Vogler's *The Writers Journey* as the template for my outlines. This is another must-read for aspiring authors. I have a section for each stage of the story Mr. Vogler describes and fill in chapters and scenes below it.

For a copy of my outline template [click here](#).

For a copy of the completed outline for *The Cartel Strikes Back*, [click here](#).



This makes it all worthwhile

Writing

My goal is to write about two thousand words a day. This is about eight pages. There are few days when I don't make this goal. I have had great days where the words roll off my fingers when I written six or eight thousand words in a day.

Every day, I go back and read what I wrote yesterday. I give it a quick edit and make sure it's consistent with previous chapters. Then I go on to my first scene for today.

I hear of people claiming to have “writer’s block.” I don’t know what that is. Since I’m writing from an outline, I always know what the next scene is about. When I sit down to write, I check my brain at the door. I put my fingers on the keyboard and the words just seem to flow. I watch the story appear on my screen and get the joy of reading it for the first time.

Remember: this is a first draft and not ready for human consumption.

My next step is the first re-write. (You say: FIRST! How many times do I have to write this book? Answer: until you get it right. I re-wrote *Blue Water & Me* fourteen times before it was ready for publication.) Mama sent me a quotation that read “There is no such thing as great writing, only great re-writing.” I’m not sure who said this, but I’ve been lead to believe that it was either Hemmingway or Steven King.

While I’m reading, editing and changing the story, I send out a call for beta-readers to my readers list.

I’m fortunate to have a loyal band of followers who want me to succeed. I usually get a couple dozen or so people to volunteer to read the rough draft and send me their comments. I ask them to find inconsistencies, tell me how they feel about the characters, what they liked and didn’t like.

When I get their feedback, I go back through the book making changes and corrections where needed. There have even been instances where a beta reader suggests a new plot twist or asks for an explanation that necessitates writing a new scene.

This is the second draft.

At this point, I’m ready to send the manuscript to my editor. When I get it back, I begin the third draft.

When the third draft is complete, I put out a call to Advanced Readers. I give my followers a free Advanced Reader Copy (ARC) in exchange for an honest review on Amazon.com.

This has worked extremely well for me. I usually have twenty to thirty reviews posted on the first day the book is for sale.

While I’m waiting for the reviews to be returned, I send the book out to my proof-reader. She usually gets it back to me in a couple of days.

When I get the proof and feedback from the ARCs back, I begin the final copy. I label it “Master Copy” and guard it jealously. No changes are made in any of the previous copies. The master copy is the version that will be published.

When I've finished my review (and correction) of the master copy, I go over it again for format. All chapter titles must be the same distance from the top of the page. The table of contents must be updated and approved. I add marketing material at the beginning and end of the book.

Now we have the finished copy.

The next step is to format the book for Amazon and upload it.

I always tell people that writing the book is only 50% of the process. I spend another 50% of the time publishing the book. The final 50% of the project is the marketing. That deserves a whole treatise on its own.

You can read more about marketing your books [here](#).

So there you have it, my process for writing. From idea to publication may take from three to six months, depending on what's going on in my life. According to my marketing plan (to see my marketing plan template [click here](#).) I'm supposed to write three books a year. Sometimes I make that, sometimes I only get two done. You have to be flexible.

I'm glad to share this information with you. If you wish to discuss this further contact me by [clicking here](#).

Happy writing and good luck.



When the long day's done