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My Guide For Surviving NaNoWriMo

Part I: Advance Preparation

Before you begin, there are a few things you need to do to set yourself up for success.

Finding Time:

- In advance of NaNoWriMo carry a small notebook with you and track how you spend your time. You need to find a minimum of 2 hours a day to write for the month of November. Each day you'll need to complete about 1666 words in order to hit 50,000 words by the end of the month. If you have a strong story idea, 1666 words is a completely achievable word count in 2 hours a day. So, how do you do that? You need to find those two hours by figuring out what your time stealers are in each day.
 - Can you get up earlier or stay up later to write? A small change in routine can allow you the time to put words on the page.
 - Could you find an extra half hour a day by planning your meals so that you spend less time cooking? Why not try a service like www.plated.com in the United States or www.chefsplate.com in Canada. They send you everything you need to cook a gourmet meal in less than 30 minutes. You can feed your brain with creative recipes and fuel your body with delicious food. If you are Canadian, you can get two free meals from me if you sign up to try Chef's Plate. Use the referral tag [#2mealsFromPamSmith](https://twitter.com/2mealsFromPamSmith) (\$44 value). Use that saved time to write!
 - Why not try splitting your writing time into smaller chunks. Can you write for one hour while you eat your

lunch and 1 hour at another time of the day?

Alternatively, maybe you can squeeze out two half hour sessions and four 15-minute sessions a day? Busy moms often find this easier. Remember, Alice Munro did most of her writing in 10-minute chunks when her children were small.

- If that isn't your thing, plan to "binge" write. If you can only spare a half hour a day during the week, but can force yourself to spend 6 to 8 hours a day on weekends for the month of November, you can still get the necessary words on the page.
- What commitments can you cancel or say "NO" to for the month of November? Can you arrange to have someone else take your children to their dance lessons this month? Can you call in a favour to have someone else cover your volunteer commitments? I recommend that you share your plan with your close friends so they know that you won't be available for your regular social activities in November. Don't worry, you'll join them again in December and they can help you celebrate finishing the first draft of your novel! Who knows, maybe they'll drop off a casserole or two during November so that you can write instead of cooking dinner!
- Do you spend too much time on the Internet? In November commit to turning off the Internet, email and TV during your writing time. If you need extra help, try Self Control for [Mac](#) or Freedom for [Windows](#). They'll put external boundaries on you to keep you writing instead of checking your Twitter account.

Pre-Planning Your Work:

- In order to be 100% ready for NaNoWriMo you'll need to do a bit of pre-work to ensure you don't waste your precious writing time in November.
 - Determine how you will write. Do you prefer to write by hand? Then make sure you have notebooks and extra pens/pencils on hand. Do you prefer to write on your computer? Then make sure you have downloaded whatever writing program you intend to use. There is a

learning curve with some programs so you'll want to have time to play with it before November. I use Scrivener and they are offering [a free trial right now](#). However, don't get hung up on programs with lots of bells and whistles. All you really need is a distraction free program and there are plenty that are free if you do a Google search. I have heard very good things about [OmmWriter](#).

- Decide how much preparation you will do. Some people like to have a complete outline written before they start. Google The Snowflake Method or The Paper Clip Method for some ideas on how to create a thorough outline of your story. You can visit my [Amazon Store](#) to find my favorite books for writers. In particular, look for *The Plot Whisperer* and *No Plot, No Problem*.
- If you prefer not to plot, consider doing a very loose outline that includes a general idea of your story along with some characters that you have fleshed out using character sketch worksheets. The more you know your characters, the easier it will be to write about them. If you have never used a character worksheet you can download [one \(plus a few other worksheets\)](#) from the team at Writer's Digest.
- Make a decision on where you will write. Adapt that space to be a comfortable, quiet place to work. If you can find a space to write that has a door you can close to reduce interruptions, even better. Write out some inspirational quotes on index cards and stick them on wall around you to motivate you. If you've done some research on the setting and characters (I like to pull pictures off the internet that help me visualize) then put them up in your writing space as well. My favorite quote is:

'All good writing is swimming under water and holding your breath.' -F. Scott Fitzgerald

Part II: In The Trenches of NaNoWriMo

During the month, there are a few things to keep in mind so that you stay on track and finish strong.

- Designate someone to help ensure you always have what you need this month. Perhaps it is a spouse or a friend, but this person's job is to run out and get supplies if you start to run short on pens, pencils, sticky notes, food, coffee, treats, etc. If you do a good job preparing before November, their job will be easy.
- Write as much as you can at the beginning of the month when you feel excited and inspired. You'll need to put some words in the bank to cover you when you start to feel like you are getting bogged down in the middle of the story. Yes, we all hate the middle...
- Create your own set of resolutions for how you will write this month and put them up on the wall of your writing space. Read them every day before you start writing. I recommend the following which are loosely based on teachings of Natalie Goldberg:
 - I will keep my hand moving (i.e. I will not stop to edit)
 - I won't cross out my work
 - I won't worry about punctuation or grammar
 - I will lose control (i.e. I will let the story go where it wants to go and I won't worry about it)
 - I won't think. I won't get logical. (Your logical brain is your internal editor. Turn it off for 30 days)
 - I will go for the jugular! I will write something real and honest even if it scares me.
 - I will give myself permission to write a s**tty first draft (p.s. all first drafts are sh**tty).
- Put your butt in the seat and write. Regularly. As much as possible, stick to the routine you created in Part I.
- Set a timer and write in 15-minute bursts with a 5-minute break to stretch or grab a snack in between. Allowing yourself to have uninterrupted time to write with planned breaks tricks your brain into thinking that it is a manageable goal and you are more likely to stick to it. Stop half way

through a sentence so that when you sit back down, it's easy to start again.

- If you get stuck, allow yourself to jump around in the story and write scenes that you find interesting. You can always go back and arrange them into the correct order when you finish. There are a lot of published writers who write that way. Once you have the bones of the story, you always can go back and flesh it out later in the month.

Part III: After NaNoWriMo

December 1st has arrived. What next?

- The secret to NaNoWriMo is that it just tricked you into a writing routine. You may chose to continue to write at that pace, or you may decide to reduce the daily word count but keep the schedule. Either way, continue that creative burst and “Just Write!”
- Celebrate!! Do something fun. You just finished the first draft of your novel!
- You will meet many people if you are engaged with the NaNoWriMo social network. Consider inviting some of them to form a writing group with you, either in person or online. It's amazing what you can accomplish with a Facebook group, a Skype account, and an email account.
- Go back to my Amazon bookstore and look at my recommendations for books on revision. Finish fleshing out this draft that you've written and then set it aside for about 30 days to clear your head. At that point, you'll see it with fresh eyes and be able to begin the revision process. Sarah Selecky has a great [5 part free tutorial](#) on the revision process. I highly recommend that you read it before you begin the revising.

Also, don't forget to connect with me on my [website](#), on [Facebook](#) or on [Twitter](#). I share news, tips and tricks for writing and lots of other fun stuff for writers.

P.S. Good Luck and Happy Writing