

Ten Common Novice Novelist Errors

You can prevent making the mistakes first-time novelists often make by avoiding the following.

1. Inadequate foundation. Is the background of your world—imaginary or not—researched or thought out well enough so that every point is coherent with each other point? Is it visible in your mind to the point where you can walk down its streets and defend its political/social frame of reference?

2. Contradicting data. Have you double-checked that time lines and biographical details are all in agreement?

3. Characters acting out of character. Do your characters behave in line with the persona you have created for them?

4. Unsupported plotlines. Have you introduced plot lines for which no prior foundation has been laid in the story?

5. Unresolved plot elements. Have you resolved all plot elements that *have* been introduced?

6. Overuse of flashbacks. Are you using flashbacks where forward action can be employed? Flashbacks always halt the forward action, so use them as seldom as possible.

7. Unnecessary time gaps. Are there time gaps in the action that could be cut? Time gaps slow the action, leaving the reader to wonder what the protagonists were doing in between.

8. Nonessential plot elements. Are every one of your scenes and characters absolutely essential to the development of your plot? If a scene or character can be deleted from the story without affecting the rest of the plot, do it. Anything superfluous is a distraction.

9. Unrealistic action. Are your action sequences not just physically possible, but realistic?

10. Stopping too soon. Have you stopped before the story is finished? Too many beginning novelists have a great idea or theme for a book, but stop too soon in developing it.

If any of the above strikes a familiar chord, don't get discouraged. Just go back to the drawing board—or computer screen. If you've made it through without a single slip, pat yourself on the back. You are well on your way to a publishable first novel.

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