

VERITY PROOFREADING AND
EDITING

10-STEP GUIDE TO FINISHING YOUR FIRST DRAFT

YOUR ROADMAP TO FINALLY COMPLETING THE STORY
YOU'VE BEEN DREAMING OF WRITING.



INTRODUCTION

You have a story to tell. Maybe it's been living in your mind for months—or years. You've jotted down a few scenes, brainstormed characters, or even written a killer first chapter... but somehow, the finish line still feels miles away.

Here's the truth: starting is hard, but finishing? That takes grit, consistency, and a little strategy. The good news is, you don't have to do it alone—and you don't have to be perfect.

This guide from Verity Proofreading and Editing is designed to walk you step-by-step through the process of completing your first draft. Whether you're writing a novel, memoir, or even a nonfiction book, these ten actionable steps will help you push through doubt, silence your inner critic, and finally type "The End."



STEP 1: COMMIT TO ONE IDEA

Writers are creative creatures—our minds overflow with ideas. But one of the biggest challenges is choosing just one to focus on.

Pick the idea that excites you the most right now. Not the one you think will sell. Not the one you think you “should” write. Pick the one that won’t leave you alone.



Then, make a commitment to stick with it. Write it down. Say it out loud. Tell a friend. This is the story you’re going to finish.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Which story idea keeps popping into your mind?
- What excites you most about this story?
- What’s holding you back from fully committing to it?

Micro-Challenge:

Write a one-sentence pitch for your story. Bonus: Post it somewhere visible to remind yourself what you're writing.

STEP 2: SET A DEADLINE

A dream without a deadline is just a wish.
Decide when you want to finish your draft—then break that down into a writing schedule.



Example:

If you want to write 50,000 words in 3 months, that's about 555 words per day or ~3,700 per week.

Be realistic, but firm. Your deadline is a promise to yourself.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- When do I want to finish my first draft?
- How much time can I reasonably commit to writing each week?
- Do I write better with daily goals or weekly goals?

Micro-Challenge:

Choose a deadline and write it on a calendar or sticky note.
Then, schedule your first three writing sessions right now.

STEP 3: CREATE A LOOSE OUTLINE

Don't panic—this doesn't have to be a full blueprint. Think of it as a map. You just need a few signposts to guide your way.



Consider a simple 3-act structure:

- Beginning (Setup, Inciting Incident)
- Middle (Obstacles, Growth)
- End (Climax, Resolution)

Knowing your character's goal, conflict, and what's at stake can help you avoid getting stuck halfway through.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What's the main conflict in my story?
- Where does the story begin, and how might it end?
- What major turning point will happen in the middle?

Micro-Challenge:

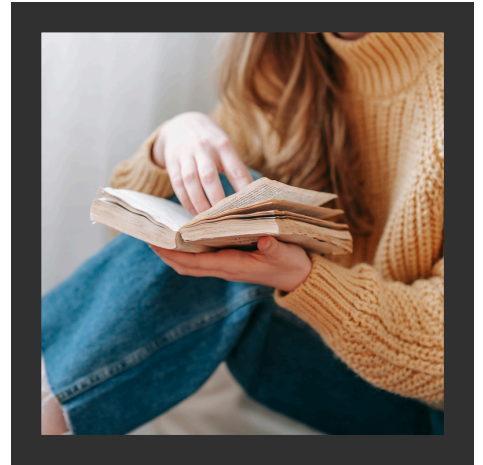
Sketch out your story using just five bullet points—beginning, three key events, and ending.

STEP 4: KNOW YOUR CHARACTERS

Before you dive into your draft, take time to get to know your main character (and maybe your antagonist, too). The more clearly you understand who they are, the more naturally your story will unfold.

A well-developed character has:

- A goal – Something they want desperately
- A fear or flaw – Something internal that holds them back
- An arc – A way they will grow or change over the course of the story



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What does my main character want more than anything?
- What belief or fear is holding them back?
- What emotional journey will they go through?

Micro-Challenge:

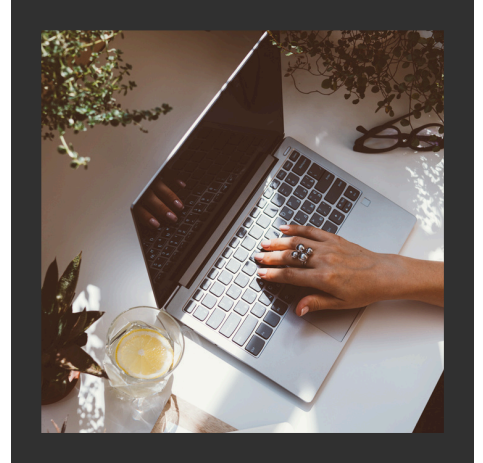
Write a journal entry from your character's point of view the night before your story begins. Let them vent, dream, or confess something they'd never say out loud.

STEP 5: BUILD A WRITING HABIT

Consistency beats bursts of inspiration every time.

Try writing:

- At the same time each day
- In the same location or using a ritual (like lighting a candle or playing music)
- With a daily or weekly word goal



Track your progress—seeing those words add up is incredibly motivating.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What time of day do I feel most creative?
- What's one distraction I can remove from my writing time?
- What motivates me more: streaks or rewards?

Micro-Challenge:

Set a 20-minute timer today and write without stopping—even if you just write “I don’t know what to write” until the words start flowing.

STEP 6: SILENCE YOUR INNER EDITOR

That little voice that says, “This isn’t good enough”? It’s not invited to first drafts.

Give yourself permission to write badly. First drafts are supposed to be messy, awkward, and full of potential. Editing is where the magic happens—but only after you’ve written the words.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What does my inner critic usually say?
- How can I remind myself that this is just a draft?
- Have I ever regretted finishing something, even if it wasn't perfect?

Micro-Challenge:

Write 500 words today without using the backspace key or editing a single sentence. Just. Keep. Going.

STEP 7: USE ACCOUNTABILITY

Telling someone about your goal makes it more real. Find an accountability partner, writing group, or online community.

You can also:

- Join a writing challenge (like NaNoWriMo)
- Post weekly word counts on social media
- Reward yourself when you hit milestones



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Who could help keep me accountable (friend, partner, writing buddy)?
- How will I reward myself for reaching milestones?
- What kind of encouragement motivates me most?

Micro-Challenge:

Tell one person today that you're writing a book. (Bonus: Invite them to check in on your progress once a week.)

STEP 8: PUSH THROUGH THE MIDPOINT SLUMP

Around the halfway point, many writers hit a wall. Doubt creeps in. The excitement fades. That's normal.

Here's how to fight it:

- Re-read your outline or your character's goal
- Skip ahead to a scene you're excited to write
- Remind yourself: the only way out is through



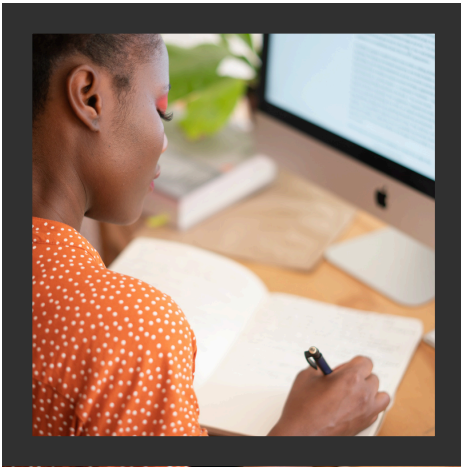
REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What made me excited about this story when I first started?
- How has my character changed since the beginning?
- What's one small scene I can write today?

Micro-Challenge:

Write a scene you've been looking forward to—even if it's near the end of your story. Let the momentum pull you forward.

STEP 9: SKIP AROUND IF YOU MUST



Not feeling the next scene? No problem. Jump ahead to a part you can write.

Writing out of order is like assembling a puzzle. You'll connect the pieces later. The point is to keep the words flowing.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Is there a moment in the story I've been dying to write?
- What's stopping me from skipping to it?
- Could writing out of order help me move past this block?

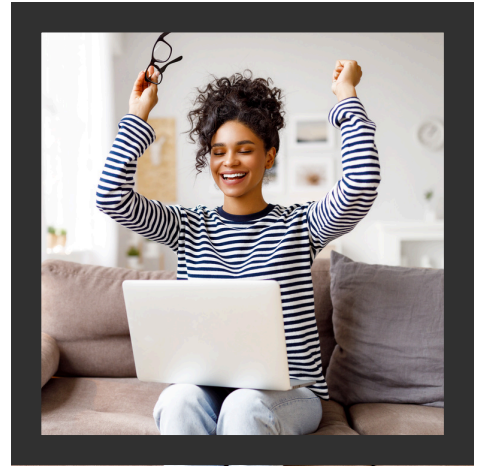
Micro-Challenge:

Pick any scene you know belongs in your story—no matter where it fits—and write it today.

STEP 10: FINISH UGLY, FINISH PROUD

Your draft doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to be finished.

No one sees the first draft but you. Think of it as the raw material for the polished version to come. Finishing is proof that you are a writer—not just in theory, but in practice.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How will I feel when I finish this draft?
- What's one thing I'll learn about myself by completing it?
- What will I do to celebrate once I finish?

Micro-Challenge:

Visualize yourself writing the final sentence of your draft. Now write the last line today—just for fun. Let it inspire you to get there.

CONCLUSION

You have everything you need to write your story. Not tomorrow. Not “when life slows down.” Now. Finishing your first draft is a milestone few ever reach—and you’re on your way. Don’t worry about what comes next (revising, publishing, etc.). Just focus on writing your way to the end.

And when you’re ready to polish your draft, we’re here to help.

Verity Proofreading and Editing offers expert feedback, line editing, and guidance for writers ready to take the next step.

Let us help you turn your words into something truly remarkable.

Contact us today: 812-946-7518
verityproofreading.com



WEEKLY GOAL TRACKER

MONDAY
Notes:
Words Written:

TUESDAY
Notes:
Words Written:

WEDNESDAY
Notes:
Words Written:

THURSDAY
Notes:
Words Written:

FRIDAY
Notes:
Words Written:

SATURDAY
Notes:
Words Written:

SUNDAY
Notes:
Words Written: