

November is fast approaching, and if you've never taken part in [NaNoWriMo](#), you might wonder what all the fuss is about. The aim is to write 50,000 words in 30 days. Some people take the entire month to hit it, knowing if they manage 1,667 words per day, they'll hit their goal.

Others write in spurts. They may write 5,000 words one day and nothing over the next three. Or they may hit their goal number early and stop writing for the rest of the month. Then there are writers who just write, full steam ahead, casting everything else to the side. The aim isn't just to hit the 50k mark, but to finish the draft of whatever project they are working on.

Over the years, I've represented each of these categories. With every new season of life comes different expectations, demands, and free time. My current season permits me to be in the last group of writers. The crazy ones who write from sunup until sundown, and beyond. Those crazy, beautiful humans who have to be reminded to eat and sleep. Hey, when you're on a roll, it's hard to walk away knowing you'll lose all that forward momentum.

Last year, my "roll" led me to write two [Draft Zeros](#) for completely different stories. My writing group stopped asking me if I was done, and just asked for word counts daily as they watched my insanity unfold. I ended the season with 203,912 words, and two mostly completed stories that need a lot of revising. It was a feat I'm not likely to achieve again, but it was with intention and purpose, and a goal I'd set for myself.

Regardless of which category you fall in, here's ten things to keep in mind and help carry you through the wonderful chaos of [NaNoWriMo](#).

1. A Buddy, writing group, or like-minded Friend.

Your family is going to admire the fact that you can write 50,000 words in a month. They will tolerate you jumping up in the middle of a conversation, saying, "Hold that thought. I know how to fix my plot hole!" They may even learn to recognize the dreamy look in your eyes when you're not writing. But there's something about the companionship, camaraderie, and fun of someone who is also writing alongside you.

When you're in a slump, they'll cheer you on, and vice versa. There's nothing so satisfying as throwing [confetti](#) for your fellow writers (literally in my case.) And dragging them over the finish line, kicking and screaming (almost literally) as you rally through the month of November.

Whether you meet in person or online, or some combo of the two, you won't regret having a buddy join you for the fun. If you're not familiar with your local writing group, or aren't aware of other writers in your area, check out the [NaNoWriMo forums](#), and look to see if there are any groups near you.

2. Meal Prep.

Wait, what? I thought this was all about writing. Yes, my fellow writer, it is. But here's the catch: sometimes we get so caught up in writing we forget to stop and eat and the family has to slip notes under the door to remind us. Quick, healthy meals, pulling out your crock-pot, and divvying up the cooking responsibilities can go a long way to keeping you healthy.

My gang is incredibly helpful in [checking the menu](#) and jumping in when, "Mom gets lost in her world of words again..." but taking a break to eat and talk with real people is also healthy. Even [homemade protein bars](#) prevent you from getting one of those "I feel dizzy and I don't know why" moments. Which, in my case, is because I haven't eaten since seven am.

And don't forget, this crazy writing experiment takes place in November, which means it happens during Thanksgiving, too. I like to get my word count in early on Thanksgiving morning, then devote the rest of my time to family and cooking while ignoring the twitching need to write.

3. Fluids.

This might seem like another big, "duh" statement, but seriously, Friends, drink your water. One year, for NaNo, my local writing group's goodie bags included a [cork coaster](#) with our

group's logo on it. That coaster still lives on my desk, and as I write this, it has a quart canning jar on it full of ice and water. Other times, my [flashy purple water bottle](#) is there.

On the rare occasion I forget my water, I'll soon find multiple "[slushy cups](#)" (as my family calls them) sitting on my desk full of ice and water. Each guy will bring me one at random times to be sure I don't dehydrate and end up with a migraine. Drink your water, eat healthy, and try to avoid those incoming cold and flu germs!

4. A Good Playlist.

You already [know how I feel](#) about having a [good playlist of music](#) at hand, but this is your official reminder. If you're one of those talented people who can write to music with words and want to match songs to the story you're inspired to write, now's the time to set up your playlist. I'm in awe of people who can do this and still focus on writing! I'm afraid if there're words coming out of my headphones, I write those instead of the intended story.

5. A Solid Writing Program.

I like [Scrivener](#) for many [reasons I outlined in another post](#). I've already started my file for a new and upcoming story that I may, or may not, tackle in November. If you've never tried [Scrivener](#) and want to give it a go, they offer a 30-day free trial. They even include a template that will help you update your NaNo word count pretty seamlessly.

If [Scrivener's](#) not your thing, [Google Docs](#) is another great option. If you use the heading tool, you can easily flip between chapters with little trouble. [ProWritingAid](#) is another program you can use. It's free, but you only garner a portion of the options available. Having used both the free, and paid version, I'm here to say the free version is just fine. [Pages](#), [Word](#), and [Hemingway](#) are other options, too.

Whatever you pick, make sure you're comfortable with it, and can navigate your way around to avoid overwhelm and giving up. Or, as is often the case, accidentally deleting your hard

work. And **do not** forget to backup your work!

6. Pen, Paper, Post-its.

While most of my writing happens in [Scrivener](#), I love having my notebook beside me which is loaded with minor details, allows me to jot down things I want to tackle at my next writing session, plot holes I may have found, or even things I need to research. It's loaded with blank paper, a variety of [post-it notes](#), [page markers](#), and [flags](#), my timeline, & maps. Yes, all of that is also in [Scrivener](#), but sometimes I need to have multiple things in my line of view at one time.

You'll also want some pen & paper handy if you join any writing [sprints](#) or [crawls](#). Technically, you're not supposed to delete anything you write during that time, but it happens. I like to keep a tally sheet just in case I delete something. Or, if I flip over to a new scene, I can quickly jot down my previous word count to add to whatever I put in the new scene. And sometimes, because I get really caught up in what I'm writing, I'll jot down the time we're supposed to stop in case I don't hear the timer go off. Hey, it's happened before.

7. Headphones.

I can't stress this enough, but if you want to concentrate despite all the noise and commotion around you, headphones are your secret weapon. And I'm not talking super fancy noise canceling headphones, either. I'm talking straight up whatever your favorite headphones are. I still use the [good old plug into your computer headphones](#). Although, occasionally I've borrowed my husband's [noise canceling ones](#) when I'm in extra noisy situations.

Mind you, I've also put my headphones on and then failed to turn the music on because I jumped right into what I was doing. Such was the case last night. I looked up from a two hour online write-in and started laughing. When the gang asked what was so funny, I pointed out my error. Which, you know, you'd think I'd have picked up sooner because every now and

again the commentator on the [footy](#) game would intrude on my thoughts, and I'd randomly repeat what the guy was saying.

8. Sleep.

You can't burn the candle at both ends for 30 straight days and walk away without feeling rundown and susceptible to cold and flu germs that are lurking around. Even with adequate sleep, you'll still feel exhausted at the end of [Nano](#), so trust me when I suggest you get your eight hours in.

Choose wisely with the [writing events](#) you want to attend. For example, our group offers multiple choices on the first of November. You can stay until midnight and start writing immediately. Or you can get up at your normal hour, write when you have time, attend the evening [write-in](#), and still meet your goals. The choice is up to you, based on your needs and schedule. Don't feel obligated to attend every event your group offers. Pick what works best for you.

Every year I think it would be fantastic to stay awake until midnight, but then I'm reminded that messing with my sleep schedule is a sure-fire way to bring on a migraine. So, I dutifully resist, and wait to begin my writing journey until the morning. I do cave on the 30th, though, and join the party that goes past midnight cheering each participant on until they reach that coveted 50k marker. This year will be no different. I've already told a group member that she will win, even if I have to drag her over the finish line. (Don't panic, she reminded me of my *threat* at our write in this week, and is determined to make it across the finish line!)

9. Fresh air.

Look, writing is fun. I'll be the first to admit it. Writing is an outlet for all my emotions, and it brings me a sense of peace and joy. While we writers love to claim writing is life, there are other things that are important, too. Fresh air amongst them.

I'm a big believer that a little fresh air every day is healthy, and that means if I can't get outside, I'll still throw a window or two open. Right now, despite my allergies' protest, the window beside me is wide open. The noise from the nearby highway and interstate are background noises I keep forgetting aren't from the docks back on [The Island](#). The fresh air is blowing the curtains, the sun is showing its face, and I'm relishing in all of it knowing in a matter of weeks we'll have dreary skies and I'll need a blanket wrapped around me to have the window open for five minutes.

So, take a break. Step away and go for a walk. Dealing with writer's block? Plot hole you can't solve? Don't know how to get your character out of bed and into the thick of whatever is about to thrust them through the doorway of no return? Go for a walk.

10. A story Idea.

Now, I suspect as you're reading this list, you're thinking, "Why didn't you put this as your number one item?" There's a quote I adore by [Orson Scott Card](#):

Everybody walks past a thousand story ideas every day. The good writers are the ones who see five or six of them. Most don't see any.

Orson Scott Card

Maybe I'm jumping to the conclusion that you walk past hundreds of story ideas and see a few. I've also, perhaps unfairly, presumed if you decided to try your hand at [Nano](#), you have a project in mind. If you don't, that's okay, I've gotcha covered.

Grab the newspaper and look through some stories, see if anything comes to mind. Do a quick internet search for [story prompts](#), or [writing prompts](#), and see where one can take your imagination. Have a book you've always wanted to read, but can't find it? Write it.

Write your life story. Someday, someone you love might appreciate seeing life through your

eyes. Rewrite a fairytale that you've always adored. I'm always impressed when people reinvent fairytales and breathe new life into them. Maybe [poetry is your jam](#), or [short stories](#). If you keep a blog, you could stockpile articles.

If you're a writer, and low on ideas, you could try your hand at a [Christmas story](#) to give to friends and family. My husband swore he didn't need or want anything for Christmas last year, so I wrote him a Christmas Story that's a prequel to the bigger project I've been working on. Whatever you choose to write, do it with wild abandon. Ignore the inner critic. Remember, you can't out write a first draft. And above all, have fun with it.


Author's Note:

I know most of the advice I just gave you is what you'd give someone looking after your [house plants](#). Maybe none of my suggestions were new to you, and that's okay. I hope that if you decide to embark on a [NaNoWriMo](#) journey, for the first time or the 24th, that you have as much fun as possible while avoiding burnout and sickness. [Light a candle](#), grab a [fun snack](#), channel your inner child, and go for it.

Personally, I believe writing should be an enjoyable experience, but I know that's not the case for everyone. The pressure of having to meet a word count every day can be overwhelming for some. Just remember, you're the boss of what, how much, and how long you write.

And if you need a buddy or a little help along the way, look me up on the [NaNo website](#). I'm always game to help push, pull, or drag fellow writers over that finish line.

The Reluctant Author 