

Novel Writing Prompt Guide



A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Use large language models (LLMs) like Claude and ChatGPT to build your novel.



Start Here

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This isn't a guide about using AI to write your novel for you. A large language model (LLM) like Claude or ChatGPT can't replace your storytelling ability (no matter what you might hear on social media).

This guide gives you a step-by-step process and specific prompts I used to plot and outline novels. Use it to enhance your storytelling skills. The goal is to help you test your ideas in the market, fill in plot holes, round out character backstories, and get moving when you feel stuck. It's not going to write a novel for you.

Pro tip: Keep all the prompts in one chat thread so it “remembers” answers as you go along.

Remember, you make the decisions. **The story is yours.**

In this guide:

- Learn to validate your ideas in genre and market environments
- Outline novels using proven story structures
- Expand and fill out your ideas before you commit
- Pressure-test and collaboratively build your draft

Write what you know.

IT'S THE FIRST LAW OF STORYTELLING FOR A REASON...

Before you open a chat window, do the human work first. Brain dump your ideas in a document. What's the (rough) story you want to tell? What characters have been floating in your imagination?

LLMs give you better output when you give it specific inputs. Doing this pre-work helps you get better results. Don't ask it to invent your story and characters from scratch. I promise you'll end up with something so generic and boring that you'll lose interest in before you finish drafting a full book.

Instead, ask it to help you develop characters you've already started sketching. You'll get better output when you shape and refine your own ideas rather than asking it to invent things by itself.

What I did: I started with an idea I'd been sitting on. It was a rough idea about a group of friends and their various relationship situations. I had rough character sketches, but nothing formal. I knew I wanted to write a light summer beach read. Maybe a series. That was all I had.

SAMPLE PROMPT:

You are a top 1% expert developmental editor who specializes in [*the genre you're working in*], and I'm a novelist who needs help with a new book idea. Here is a story I'm developing: [paste your sketch]. Ask me 10 questions about this story to help me build out a plot and character maps. Ask the questions one at a time.

WHY IT WORKS:

Each of your prompts should do three things:

1. Give the model **context**, so it understands its job: "you are an expert developmental editor."
2. Give it **specific directions**: "ask me 10 questions ... ask questions one at a time."
3. Tell it the **result** you're after: "help me build out a plot and character maps."

This prompt helps you narrow down a rough story and main characters. Engage in conversation until you have a good sense of where you want to go with both.

Validate the market.

YES, THIS MATTERS.

Before you write a word, make sure there's a market for your novel. I know it's not sexy, and maybe you want to write it regardless of market. But if you're hoping to sell this book, then you need to understand your market. Once you've gone through the ten questions exercise, you should have a good sense of your genre and core concept.

What I did: I used Claude to research women's fiction trends, identified what readers in my target category were buying, and looked for gaps between oversaturated topics and ones that are underserved. This step saved me from writing myself into an oversaturated corner.

If you're writing genre fiction, you'll want to find a twist or unique angle so you're not competing with 7,859 other novels with exactly the same premise.

SAMPLE PROMPT:

This project will be a [genre] novel with [core concept or premise]. Find any relevant book sales data you can find over the last 2-3 years and tell me:

- **What subgenres or reader audiences are currently underserved in this space?**
- **What themes are oversaturated?**
- **What comparable titles have performed well?**

I'm looking for a distinctive angle, and I don't want to chase saturated trends.

WHY IT WORKS:

You're narrowing down the angle and premise here. If needed, engage in a conversation with the LLM to ask questions about subgenres and underserved audiences that could give your novel a fresh approach. You also want to look at the competition to see what's performing and where you can bring something different to the table.

For example, in the course of my conversation with Claude I discovered a fast-growing subgenre of midlife werewolf romance novels. I opted not to go down that path, but I validated the idea on Amazon. Sure enough, that was a legitimate subgenre. The books exist. You never know what you'll find.

Outline with a proven story structure.

PICK YOUR POISON.

Here's where you get the value from LLMs. Tell it what plotting method you prefer, and it'll generate an outline you can work from.

What I did: I used the **Save the Cat** beat sheet method to structure my novel, which breaks a story into 15 specific beats across three acts.

If Save the Cat isn't your preferred method, tell the model to use **Three-Act Structure** (setup, confrontation, resolution), the **Hero's Journey** (call to adventure, trials, transformation, return), or your favorite method.

Pick the framework that matches how you think about story structure.

Pro tip: Give the model the framework *and* your idea. Don't just ask it to "outline a novel." Ask it to map your concept to specific beats.

SAMPLE PROMPT:

Now help me outline this novel using the Save the Cat beat sheet method. Here is my core concept: [your idea]. Here are my main characters: [brief sketches].* Walk me through each of the 15 beats and suggest what might happen at each one based on what I've given you. Flag any beats where my concept creates a structural problem.

****If you've written a lot, create a document called "Premise and Character Maps" and paste in all the information. Then upload that to the chat and tell the model: I've uploaded a document with the premise and character maps. Use that to create the outline.***

WHY IT WORKS:

You're giving the model specific instructions on how to create the outline, what to include regarding premise and characters, and asking it to point out potential structural problems.

For my idea, the model generated several chapter ideas that seemed like filler, and the first three chapters seemed too slow. Nothing really happened in them.

The first pass was useful, but I had to pick up the pace and cut the flab.

Expand your ideas before you commit.

A NOVEL IS A TIME INVESTMENT.

Once the big picture is in place, create a file called “Outline” and save it, along with your character maps. You’ll use these files to refresh the model’s memory periodically. Next, flesh out the outline and think through the beats of each chapter.

A lot of writers skip this step, preferring to feel things out as they write. If you’re a seasoned writer with several books under your belt, that works because you’ve internalized story beats and character arcs.

If you’re a newer writer, doing this expansion step will save you hours of frustration. You won’t write yourself in a direction that doesn’t make sense halfway through or discover you’ve hit a dead end in chapter eight.

Each chapter should include: a goal, what changes by the end, whose POV it’s in, and how it connects to what comes before and after. Ask the model to justify why each chapter needs to exist. If there is no justification, the chapter probably needs to be cut or merged.

SAMPLE PROMPT:

Here is the outline for Chapter [X]: [paste outline for only that chapter]. What is the narrative purpose of this chapter? How does it raise the stakes or deepen character? If it doesn't do either, suggest how to restructure it so it does or tell me honestly if it should be cut.

WHY IT WORKS:

The goal here is to make sure you have a cohesive structure. Thinking through plot holes and missing elements now gives you a smoother path to the finish line. It also makes for a better reader experience.

The first outline you get will have plot holes and inconsistencies. This step helps you catch and fix them. In my example, I fixed the outline without the model’s help.

Create your draft piece by piece.

EDIT EVERYTHING.

When you're ready to generate prose, manage your expectations. LLMs will produce rough material you can work with. It won't produce polished copy. The output is your starting point, not the destination.

What I did: I drafted chapter by chapter, each time reminding the model of the chapter outline and the overall book outline and character maps. Remember those documents you made? You'll be uploading them repeatedly.

The model won't remember what it wrote three chapters ago. You'll need to refresh its memory. Think of it like division of labor.

SAMPLE PROMPT:

We're drafting chapter [X] of [novel name]. Here's the chapter outline: [paste outline]. The previous chapter ended with: '[final sentence].' Write a rough draft of this chapter in the same tone as the other chapters--I've uploaded another chapter as a reference.* **Prioritize voice and tension. Ask questions if you need any clarification.**

***Once you have one chapter edited as you'd like it, save it as a reference document and upload it as a sample.**

WHY IT WORKS:

You're giving the model a sample of your style and the tone you want for the novel. You're giving it specific instructions and a roadmap, and you're providing all the reference materials it should need.

This improves your chances of getting a decent first draft that you can polish.

Pro tip: Don't try to do more than one chapter at a time. The memory will be strained, and you'll end up with substandard output.

Where do you go from here?

TAKE THE NEXT STEP.

This guide gives you the prompts to get started. You have two paths from here:

1. Finish your draft, then get a manuscript audit by a human developmental editor. I recommend refining your draft with a human editor before publication. (Link to details on the next page.)
2. Prompt deeper with the **LWP AI Story Builder**. It walks you through a repeatable fiction-writing process that goes beyond these prompts.

The **LWP AI Story Builder** is a step-by-step guide that takes you from first idea through first draft. It's built for writers who want a repeatable system they can use on any story idea.

It goes beyond these prompts, and you'll learn:

- How to structure LLM projects and sessions so you don't lose context mid-project
- A back-and-forth conversation framework for developing subplots and character depth
- A chapter-by-chapter workflow that catches plot holes before you start drafting
- A reusable Story Blueprint template you'll customize and use on every project going forward

IS THIS A SHORTCUT?

It shaves time off your first draft, so in that respect, yes. You'll still need to refine the output and think through your characters and plot points to round out your novel.

ISN'T THIS ENOUGH?

It depends on your comfort level. For many writers, the prompts in this guide will get you far enough. You can take it from here. I recommend working with an editor, and there are many on Reedsy and other editing platforms. However, if you want to take your work to the next step, consider a **manuscript audit** or the full **LWP AI Story Builder**.

Links to more details on the next page.

Ready to finish your book?

Choose your next adventure:

[MANUSCRIPT AUDIT](#)

[LWP AI STORY BUILDER](#)

