

~~~delia's publishing doc~~~

Hi! Hopefully this is helpful or at least fun for you in a voyeuristic way. For context, I wrote and published [one single novel](#) in 2023, so obviously this is all based on my experience with that process (and the fiction world specifically). A lot of people were very generous with their time and advice when I was going through all that, so I wanted to make a free and accessible little doc to pass the wisdom on. xoxo delia (come find me @ [Deez Links](#) if you want)

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## Part 1: FAQs

### 1. How do I get people to read my book?

If anyone actually knew the answer, the publishing industry would be very different, if not imploded entirely. Realistically, what I can tell you is that everyone will harp on how important it is to “build a following,” and it’s unfortunately probably the only thing within your agency to do, unless you have \$40k to spend on a freelance/external publicist (some people spend a chunk of their advance on this; it’s *probably* worth it if you care a lot about critical acclaim/awards/lists...)

But *can* you build a “following” if you’re not willing to do the TikTok thing or totally debase yourself online? Yes, you do have to be “out there” on the internet, but also consider being out and about in your local literary scene (i.e. your local indie bookstore’s events page) and the community in general. Get a lot of practice with identifying as a writer and talking about your writing and interests so it doesn’t feel so self-promotional, but rather as if you are simply being helpful. With a lot of time, patience, and relationship-building, the people who are interested in you as a person will also want to know what you have to say. You *probably* should have a newsletter if only to have it as an email marketing device; make it on whatever platform you’d like and use it to send updates about your writing and your book the way you’d inform a long-distance college friend.

Getting blurbs is a big part of it, supposedly. But this is a tough game to play, too, because unfortunately, a lot of book promotion comes down to “do you have any famous/clouted friends? Can they make a post about your book? Do you know dua lipa?” But most of us do not have social relations with Dua or Lena Dunham or Reese Witherspoon. Still! Make a giant spreadsheet of all of the friends and acquaintances to whom you can send a copy of the book (or at least an email about its impending release) with their addresses, emails, etc. Try to do as much of the reachout as you can yourself, rather than just forwarding that spreadsheet to your publisher’s PR team.

### 2. How to do a novel?

Think about someone who has wronged you, or how you wronged someone, or what you want to tell your mother, or what you think she wants to tell you, or how you think high school should

have gone, or how you wish you could have done it differently, or what if you hadn't done it differently? Stew over this for a few years, and then start writing stuff down.

### **3. Have you published fiction prior to your novel? How was it writing the first manuscript?**

I wrote a *lot* of fanfiction and eventually original fiction between the ages of 12 and 18, which did not make me a very cool or fun teen BUT because I was posting a new chapter every week on this online community (Quizilla.com, kind of like Wattpad of its time), I got a lot of practice writing on “deadline” and also getting feedback from readers (AKA other middle school girls interested in Draco Malfoy) on a regular basis.

Went to college for journalism and put fiction aside until 2019, when I was 26 and going through a “bad breakup” lol and decided I'd write a short story about it. At the time, I had the luck of having a friend who worked at an indie literary zine (*Catapult*, RIP) who was willing to spend many months editing this story with me for publication. That story came out September 2019, and it caught one of my future agents' (more on this in a sec) eye. She DM'd me, we connected over coffee, and she basically told me to get in touch once I had something to show her (i.e. a completed novel manuscript). I started writing that ms a few months later, around December 2019.

That first draft was written under two highly specific conditions: 1) quarantine, and 2) a time of employment at a very cushy desk job that did not require much of me. (It was, crucially, *not* a writing job — I was on the very chill audience development team at BuzzFeed). So it was easy to designate Saturdays as “writing days,” wherein I would try to pound out roughly one chapter (I did not say it was a *good* chapter) each week. This was my old fanfiction pace, and I fell back into that routine pretty easily because I mean, that was basically the thing I did for six formative years lol. That first draft was obviously terrible, but the only measure of success for a first draft is finishing it! It doesn't have to make any sense, the characters' names might change midway because you forgot who they were supposed to be, etc. Doesn't matter. Once it's done, THEN the work begins. But it's still easier to build on something than to pull it out of thin air the first time around.

### **4. How did you find your literary agent?**

I have the incredible luck to be co-represented by both [Caroline Eisenmann](#) and [Jade Wong-Baxter](#) at Frances Goldin. Jade and I connected after that 2019 short story came out; I knew Caroline because she repped a close friend, and so she and I followed each other on Twitter. I think at one point I tweeted/mentioned in DeeZ Links that I was working on a novel, and eagle-eyed agent that she is, she messaged me and was like, yeah make sure you send me that.

So when the time came to send my manuscript around (~January 2021), it so happened that both Jade and Caroline now worked at Frances Goldin together, so we got to make our arrangement a rare literary throuple.

(TL;dr, start publishing or self-publishing stuff that might feel small, because people are always looking for new voices/writers. And pay attention to your author friends' social circles!)

Also, if you buy yourself a subscription (or get someone to share their login) for [Publishers Marketplace](#), you can look up who reps which authors, and also vice versa if you want to see, for example, who did Sally Rooney's book deal. (A less expensive way to do this is to buy an author's book and look at the acknowledgements section)

### **5. Does journalism help market you to publishers or do they care more about story content?**

My cynical take is that anyone with some kind of established "following" is going to have a leg up when it comes to publishing a book (see: every bad celeb memoir), but if the book sucks, it's embarrassing for everyone involved.

Of course, I do think it's objectively helpful to be a journalist specifically, because that means you probably have a lot more connections in the media industry than the average person, and you know who to hit up for a potential interview or Q&A or even shout-out in a magazine when it comes time to promoting the book. I've also been told that publishers like working with journalists because they tend to understand deadlines/the nature of editing. But otherwise, it's not *really* a huge plus in the fiction world necessarily (whereas in nonfiction, of course, you're more of an obvious expert on the topic matter). It just positions you in a way where you can ask for a lot of favors.

### **6. Were you nervous to have people you know read your book?**

Oh yes. Though the whole point of fiction, to me, is that you get plausible deniability for airing out grievances/fantasies/memories galore.

There were a few characters in my novel who were obviously based on people I knew as a teenager; I was not in touch with them at the time of writing and had not for several years in one case, so it didn't seem worth telling them (I imagine they have since found out.) Whereas I did print out separate copies for my parents and mailed it to them many months before publication; they both read it and we never spoke of the contents for longer than a few minutes total :)

### **7. How did you learn to pace a novel? To keep the story engaging but not rushed?**

Literally this book (weird title but it'll make sense when you read it): [Save the Cat! Writes a Novel](#) tells you what beats to hit in a basic fiction narrative (across various genres) and in what order. This is the only book I read about how to write a book, and you don't even need to read the whole thing. Very useful, and you'll never watch a movie the same again without noting how they hit the exact beats every time.

#### **8. How much of a “following” is it helpful to have when publishing your first novel?**

I don't think there is a magic number. Having some kind of "presence" on social media (I would count that as IG, TikTok, Substack in this day and age) and a few published clips (AKA articles written for media outlets, can be mainstream or indie) is certainly a lot easier for your publisher's PR and marketing teams to work with than a total blank slate. (Unless your book is totally Ferrante-level brilliant, and then you can afford a ton of mystique and no need to promote it!)

But it's not like being an influencer, I don't think, where if you don't have 10K followers at minimum it doesn't matter. If you have a newsletter with 200 loyal readers, that's still a big deal.

#### **9. Is it realistic to have a 9-to-5 and still write enough to become an author?**

Yes! Most authors I know wrote their books while holding down their day jobs. It just depends on the particulars of that 9-to-5. Ideally it gives you enough money to not worry too hard about money and is also not too mentally taxing and does not infringe upon your weekend/weeknights. I personally could not have written a novel if I was a full-time writer/reporter...a person is only capable of emitting a set number of words/thoughts per day if you ask me!

But I know a lot of writers who write for their day job AND they're working on a book, too, and those people are the real sickos (a compliment). I imagine that it takes a lot of patience, discipline and sacrifice to do that.

FWIW, I wrote each Saturday morning and eventually also Tuesday nights, for 2-3 hours at a time, over six months to get a first draft. Pretty efficient TBH but remember I was a fanfiction savant!!!

#### **10. Did you ever get bored of your own novel?**

Oh my god yes. I tried reading it through the days before it came out, and my takeaway was "Hmm, not bad. But I never want to read this again." For this reason, I am in favor of scheduling your work in a series of sprints (more on that below) with a lot of breaks in between that you can look forward to. I don't think it serves anyone's writing to treat it like a daily drudgery that never ends.

### **11. How much outlining did you do?**

A lot! That book I referenced earlier (*Saves a Cat...Writes a Novel!*) tells you the basic 20 or so beats that every narrative plate hits, so I outlined around that. Not everyone likes/needs to work that way, but making an outline was basically making a bunch of mini deadlines/tasks that could be completed, which made everything feel more feasible.

### **12. How did you know when your manuscript was ready?**

I did a round of revisions on my own and then sent a copy of that draft to two friends whom I trusted deeply to be honest with me (along with gift cards as thanks for their editing work!) I sent them like 4-5 questions to consider, such as “do you think it makes sense that character X is doing this?” I gave them a month and then asked them to send the manuscript back with their notes and responses to my questions. After I addressed all of those notes, I was like, *Okay I honestly don't know what else this ms needs, so it's time for some professional eyes on that.*

TL;dr if you still know what needs to be fixed, it's not ready yet.

### **13. Did you join writing clubs before or when you started writing your novel?**

No, but that's because I like to go off on my own when it comes to writing. If you're motivated by a little group pressure (this [framework](#) can help you understand what kind of motivation works best for you), I imagine it can be extremely helpful and probably less lonely. Even if you like working on your own, I do recommend making friends with at least a few writers in your niche/region/stage of career so you can commiserate on a semiregular basis.

### **14. Can you talk about query letters? At what point did your agents come on board?**

I got to take a shortcut in that I never had to query, and I think this was the biggest boon of being a journalist already with a tiny bit of name recognition in New York media/publishing circles. My agents Jade and Caroline got in touch with me first, and we kept in touch until I had a full ms to send them (which was at least a year after we first met). I spent that year writing/revising the ms on my own (and with my beta reader friends) before I felt like the ms was as far as I could take it alone, and that's when I emailed it to Jade and Caroline (it was like right after the new year, January 2021). We hopped on zoom to chat within a week or so, and I signed with them pretty quickly after that.

### **15. What do you wish you'd known before starting the process?**

This is probably obvious to everyone else, but I wish I'd known that writing a novel would not solve all of my personal problems. In fact, it sort of deepened a few existing ones (I was too isolated, too in my head, too checked out on friendships. She should have been at the club!!). I thought that finally publishing a book would make me feel some kind of lightning bolt moment — like YES, I ROCK!!!!!! I AM WORTHY!!! — but honestly, that capital-M moment never came. It was more so little waves of nice feelings about achievement, but even those waves never lasted longer than a few days.

The joke I always have with people who put out a book is “so, how long did you feel good about it for?” and the answer is without fail maybe a month, tops. And then life moves on. Everyone moves on, and you're kind of like, wait, shouldn't everything feel different? Am I not an entirely different person now???????

I do feel proud of the book, and I do feel like my career followed a slightly new angle in its aftermath, but almost no one writes an instant bestseller that gets them a house upstate (or a house at all). Mostly you just buy yourself some time and Google results and if you're lucky, new friends/induction into a nice sorority of readers and writers.

I think the reason we hear so many authors wax rhapsodic about “craft” or “the work” all the time is not because they're humble-bragging usually (I mean, some of them are). But it's more so, in my view, a sign that even really big literary success does not feel all that gratifying for the long term. I mean, I'm sure Zadie Smith etc. are very happy. But mostly, the publishing process feels like being put through a strange song-and-dance where you are shilling and hoping and wishing people will understand you and like you enough to buy your product (the book). It grinds you down mentally, even when you have a perfect team and publisher. Writing is such a sick type 2 fun but promoting/hustling is the antithesis of even that — it's only worth doing if you liked the first part.

So: I wish I knew writing WAS the fun part. It does not get more fun once that document leaves your private little laptop.

**16. I'm writing a novel, and I'm worried I should have clips for trying to get published. Any advice for getting started?**

I would focus on the novel! You don't want to be generating clips in a half-assed/distracted way if it doesn't come naturally to you (or the dictates of your day job). Nonfiction really depends on a lot of supplementary writing so that you can position yourself in media as an expert, but getting press for a novel is a different beast. I wouldn't waste time sweating it until you're actually done with the novel and ready to think about promotion. Fiction, as I understand it, relies more on placing an excerpt somewhere good, anyway...

**17. Can I ask about \$\$? How does payment work?**

For fiction you have to have the entire manuscript before you sell it, which also means you may go back and forth with your agents on edits for a while before they take it to market (“go on submission.”) Your book “deal” gets broken into several payments—maybe two, maybe three, maybe four. These payments are tied to specific milestones (i.e. when you turn in your ms, when it finally gets published, the paperback date), so they are often spread out over years. Your agent(s) get 15%, the tax man gets his share, so it’s almost never the kind of situation where you can quit your day job as soon as you sell the book. (Though I did negotiate an unpaid leave at Vanity Fair, which I funded with some of my book deal money.)

### **18. Do you plan to write another novel? Where do you see your career going?**

I definitely want to write another novel, but the one thing that the first book taught me was to really try to take my time. I think of *Central Places* as the book my 26-year-old self wrote, and I love her (the book) like I love a project that a little sibling made. Good for her, so cute. I’m glad it came out when it did instead of having myself stew over high school for another eight years or whatever, but the next novel needs a lot of life lived between now and then.

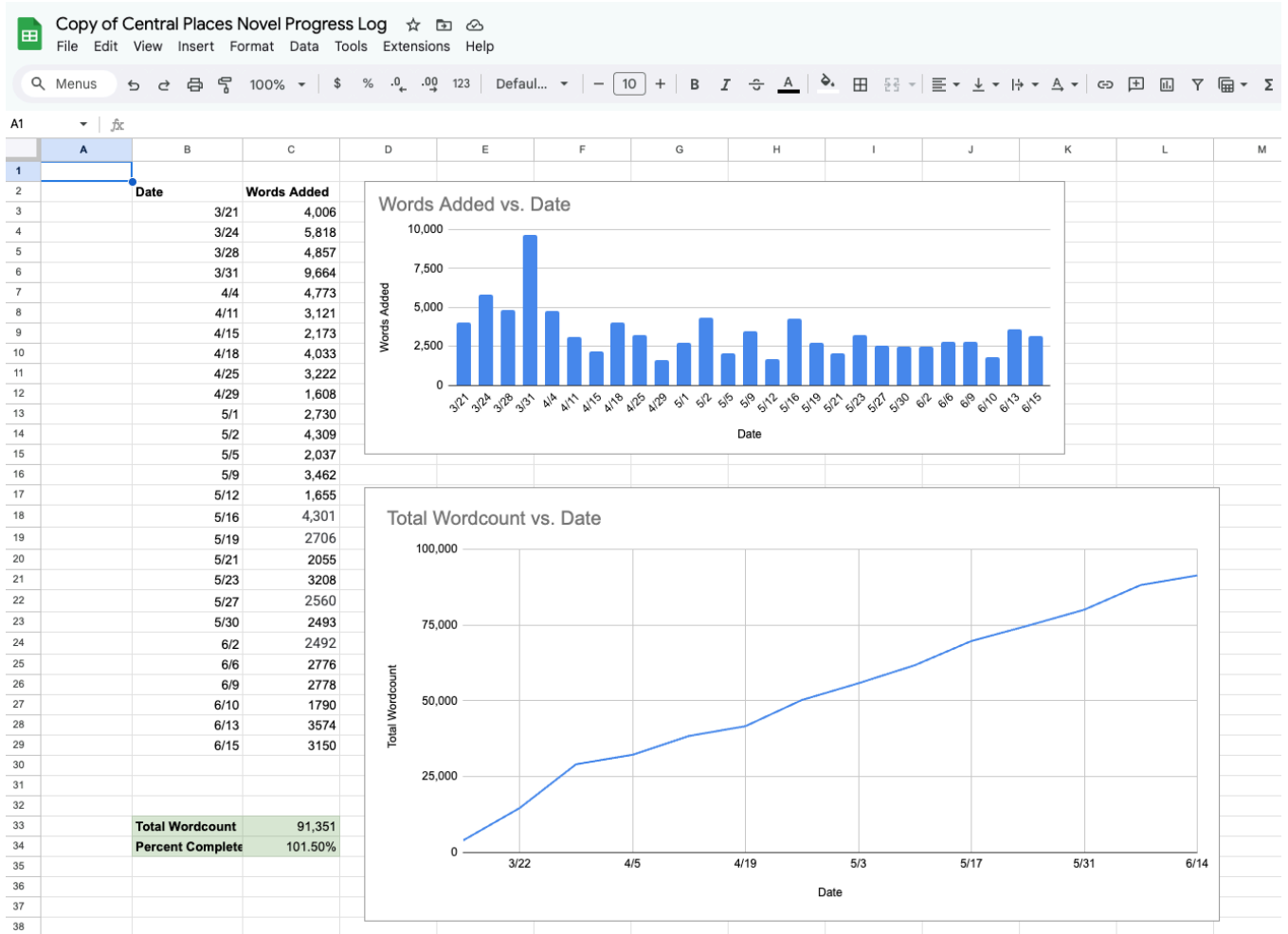
I have an idea for it, but I’m basically only “working on it” in the form of journaling and observing how I feel about certain life events. And testing some theories out with friends. At the moment, I’m trying to take work a few months at a time. Freelance life has stabilized a lot over the past year, but the idea that I would one day get disciplined enough to do freelance AND work on a novel on the side is now hysterical to me. That was never going to happen. But I probably have to get it together at some point, unless I luck into a chill full-time job in media in 2025 ...

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## **Part 2: The Spreadsheets**

### **[The Little Spreadsheet:](#)**

Some people like to keep track of their wordcount (bc you need ~90K words for a novel manuscript), so I first started tracking [that via this sheet \(The Little Spreadsheet\)](#) after a few months of writing out of curiosity. (But it also helped me with the “one chapter/week” pacing, because it helped me figure out that I needed roughly 20 chapters if one chapter was ~2500 words, and that helped me with the outline / novel pacing itself )



## The Big Spreadsheet:

Later, I started using this sheet to keep track of my work on an hourly basis. It turned out that I felt most productive when I started thinking of it as akin to a contract job — one where I had “billable hours” that I had to keep very close track of (you’ll notice the 0.25-hour increments....I was billing my 15 minutes ok!) This became how I started to structure my writing schedule: I would decide how many “hours” to allot to each task, over several months (averaging roughly 4-5 hours a week, picking up more “shifts” when I could but not feeling the pressure to if I was “on track” with whatever I was supposed to get done that week or month).

By giving myself quite a specific schedule—one that accommodated travel or moving apartments or whatever given the month—I could also plan “sprints” (periods of intense work, a thing I copped from BuzzFeed) with breaks, which incentivized me a lot more than like committing to an hour/day for years. This way, I also felt productive even if all I did for a day was stare at a screen and fix one sentence, though the time “limit” also helped me not be too precious. If I knew I only had a week to “fix” a certain problem, I would just try my best and then when time was up, it was time to move onto something else.



|    | B                        | C                                   | D                                                              | E            | F |
|----|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---|
| 2  |                          |                                     |                                                                |              |   |
| 3  |                          | <b>Central Places Revisions Log</b> |                                                                |              |   |
| 4  |                          |                                     |                                                                |              |   |
| 5  |                          |                                     |                                                                |              |   |
| 6  |                          | <b>Date</b>                         | <b>Work</b>                                                    | <b>Hours</b> |   |
| 7  |                          | December 2019                       | Write ch 1-5 and basic outline                                 | 11           |   |
| 8  |                          | January/February                    | Write plot treatment                                           | 9.5          |   |
| 9  |                          | March                               | Write ms: ch 1-5                                               | 9.75         |   |
| 10 |                          | April                               | Write ms: ch 6-9                                               | 11.25        |   |
| 11 |                          | May                                 | Write ms: ch 10-16                                             | 19           |   |
| 12 |                          | June                                | Write ms: ch 17-20                                             | 8            |   |
| 13 | <b>Round 1 Revisions</b> | <b>Break (July)</b>                 |                                                                |              |   |
| 14 |                          | August 1                            | Plan revisions & write abstract                                | 2.5          |   |
| 15 |                          | August 4                            | Chapter 1 revisions                                            | 1            |   |
| 16 |                          | August 6                            | Paper edit ch 2                                                | 1.5          |   |
| 17 |                          | August 8                            | Paper edit ch 2-6                                              | 2.5          |   |
| 18 |                          | August 9                            | Paper edit ch 7-8                                              | 0.75         |   |
| 19 |                          | August 10                           | Paper edit Ch 9                                                | 0.3          |   |
| 20 |                          | August 11                           | Paper edit Ch 9-11                                             | 1            |   |
| 21 |                          | August 13                           | Paper Edit 11-13                                               | 1            |   |
| 22 |                          | August 15                           | Chapter 1 revisions + edit ch 14 & 15                          | 2.5          |   |
| 23 |                          | August 16                           | Paper edit ch 16 & plan next week of edits                     | 0.5          |   |
| 24 |                          | August 18                           | Paper edit 17-18                                               | 1            |   |
| 25 |                          | August 20                           | Paper edit 19-20                                               | 0.75         |   |
| 26 |                          | August 22                           | SPRINT: computer edits (ch 1-2)                                | 4            |   |
| 27 |                          | August 23                           | SPRINT: computer edits (ch 2-3-4)                              | 4            |   |
| 28 |                          | August 24                           | SPRINT: computer edits (ch 5)                                  | 1.75         |   |
| 29 |                          | August 25                           | SPRINT: computer edits (ch 6)                                  | 2            |   |
| 30 |                          | August 27                           | SPRINT: computer edits (ch 6 & 7)                              | 2            |   |
| 31 |                          | August 29                           | SPRINT: computer edits (ch 7)                                  | 2.5          |   |
| 32 |                          | September 1                         | Computer edits: ch 8                                           | 1.75         |   |
| 33 |                          | September 3                         | Computer edits: ch 9                                           | 1.5          |   |
| 34 |                          | September 4                         | Computer edits: Ch 9                                           | 2            |   |
| 35 |                          | September 5                         | Computer edits: ch 10-11                                       | 2.5          |   |
| 36 |                          | September 7                         | Labor Day - Replotting, computer edits ch 11-12                | 3.25         |   |
| 37 |                          | September 9                         | Computer edits: ch 12-13                                       | 1.5          |   |
| 38 |                          | September 10                        | Computer edits: ch 14                                          | 1.5          |   |
| 39 |                          | September 11                        | Draft letter to friends, Ch 15 & 16                            | 1.5          |   |
| 40 |                          | September 14                        | Computer edits: ch 17, edit timeline                           | 1.5          |   |
| 41 |                          | September 16                        | Computer edits: ch 18                                          | 2            |   |
| 42 |                          | September 19                        | Computer edits: ch 18, 19, 20                                  | 3            |   |
| 43 |                          | September 20                        | Proofread 1-2                                                  | 2.75         |   |
| 44 |                          | September 21                        | Proofread 3-4                                                  | 2            |   |
| 45 |                          | September 22                        | Proofread 5-6                                                  | 2            |   |
| 46 |                          | September 23                        | Proofread 7-8                                                  | 2            |   |
| 47 |                          | September 25                        | Proofread 9& 10                                                | 1            |   |
| 48 |                          | September 26                        | Proofread 11,12, 13                                            | 3            |   |
| 49 |                          | September 27                        | Proofread 14, 15, 16                                           | 2.5          |   |
| 50 |                          | September 28                        | Proofread 17-18                                                | 1.75         |   |
| 51 |                          | September 29                        | Proofread 19-20, finalize email send to printer                | 1.75         |   |
| 52 |                          | <b>Break (October, Beta reads)</b>  |                                                                |              |   |
| 53 | <b>Round 2 Revisions</b> | October 30                          | Plan schedule + buy Scrivener                                  | 0.25         |   |
| 54 |                          | October 31                          | Organize everything into Scrivener + read through ch 1, expect | 3.8          |   |
| 55 |                          | November 2                          | Read through, fix tense, organize notes (2) **take out work st | 2            |   |
| 56 |                          | November 7                          | Read through, fix tense, organize notes (3-5)                  | 2            |   |
| 57 |                          | November 8                          | Read through, fix tense, work on chronology (6-9)              | 2.5          |   |
| 58 |                          | November 9                          | Read through, fix tense, work on chronology (10-11)            | 1.5          |   |
| 59 |                          | November 11                         | Work on timeline for H1                                        | 1.75         |   |
| 60 |                          | November 13                         | Work on timeline for H1, reframe H1 structure                  | 4.5          |   |
| 61 |                          | November 14                         | Rearrange first half, edit ch 1                                | 3            |   |
| 62 |                          | November 17                         | Read notes, Ch 2, line edits for ch 1 & 2                      | 2            |   |
| 63 |                          | November 18                         | Ch 3 - line edits, figure out restructure                      | 1            |   |
| 64 |                          | November 21                         | Restructure Ch 3-6, fuller edit for Ch 3 & 4                   | 3.75         |   |
| 65 |                          | November 23                         | Edit ch 4                                                      | 1.5          |   |
| 66 |                          | November 25                         | Ch 5 edits/restructure                                         | 4            |   |
| 67 |                          | November 26                         | Ch 6 & 7 & 8                                                   | 3.75         |   |
| 68 |                          | November 27                         | Ch 9 & 10 & 11                                                 | 2.75         |   |
| 69 |                          | December 1                          | Read through, fix tense, make edits for Ch 12 /13              | 1            |   |
| 70 |                          | December 3                          | Read through, fix tense, make edits for Ch 14 / 15             | 1            |   |
| 71 |                          | December 5                          | Read through, fix tense, make edits for Ch 16-20               | 3.75         |   |
| 72 |                          | December 8                          | Go over feedback notes & make list of assignments "to do"      | 1.5          |   |
| 73 |                          | December 9                          | Assignments - work on second half's timeline                   | 1.5          |   |
| 74 |                          | December 12                         | Assignments - continuity stuff                                 | 3.5          |   |
| 75 |                          | December 15                         | Assignments - K as a character stuff                           | 1.5          |   |
| 76 |                          | December 16                         | Assignments - K as a character stuff                           | 1.5          |   |
| 77 |                          | December 19                         | Assignments - K timeline H2, B&A relationship                  | 4            |   |
| 78 |                          | December 20                         | Assignments - B&A relationship                                 | 3.15         |   |
| 79 |                          | December 22                         | Draft query letters                                            | 1            |   |
| 80 |                          | <b>Break (7 Days)</b>               |                                                                |              |   |
| 81 |                          | December 30                         | Polish 1-2-3                                                   | 2.5          |   |
| 82 |                          | December 31                         | Polish 4-5-6                                                   | 2.75         |   |
| 83 |                          | January 1                           | Polish 7-8-9                                                   | 3.5          |   |
| 84 |                          | January 2                           | Polish 10-11-12                                                | 2.75         |   |

Everything is on the first tab "everything on one sheet," but if you want to see how the hours/tasks were broken out over the ~6 stages of drafting/revising, you can also click around the Rounds 1-6 tabs to see what those looked like...

Some notes for you to navigate around this sheet (re: the tabs from *right* to left)

- Manuscript drafting - This is how I decided how much time and when to dedicate to writing the first draft. Note I scheduled myself a birthday break lol. It all originally started with a regular two-hour chunk on Saturdays around December 2019. My rule for myself was that I was not allowed to do anything on Saturday until after I'd hit my hours, except to exercise (a really interesting mind game to play with yourself: do I want to do this torturous but ultimately satisfying thing, or the other one). Then, if I hit my hours, I was allowed to do fuck all for the rest of the week, guilt-free. Until the next Saturday rolled around.

This was, in retrospect, a decent way to start off. Once I had a few chapters (very) roughly drafted (an 11-hour job), I had a sense of my pace (about 2.5k/[3K words a week](#), or one chapter) and could chart out a deadline to work toward in order to get the whole draft done.

I estimated it would take ~10 hours (about 5 weeks) to write a plot treatment (outline) for the rest of the novel. *That* process (helped in large part by the *Save The Cat...Writes a Novel* book) helped me figure out that I needed 20 chapters, so then I started apportioning those out over the next few months: March would be for drafting chapters 1-5, April would be for chapters 6-9, and so on.

Obviously, there were weeks when a chapter took longer to finish, or when I wasn't able to hit my hours. I'd move a writing block around, so maybe it wasn't on a Saturday but a Sunday, or I'd pick up an extra "shift" by writing for a block on Tuesday night, for example. But I kept careful records of all the hours I spent on every part of the task, and that helped me feel a sense of achievement and accomplishment no matter how "good" the chapter was (AKA, really bad). Plus, giving myself a weekly deadline helped me not be precious at all about the actual quality of the writing or plotting. I just needed words on the page and to fulfill my "hours."

- Round 1: Personal Revisions - This is the schedule / time log I kept for going through the manuscript on my own before sending it to my beta readers. After I finished this round of edits, I printed out a copy for each friend and also sent them a few questions to consider, such as "Does Audrey feel like a believable character," etc. Also gave them gift cards for their time and a strict deadline.

You can see that I scheduled a "sprint" for myself from August 22-29, wherein I worked on the book every day for a week—notice how my valiant attempts to do a four-hour

chunk petered out after like, the second day. (In the later months/years, you will probably notice that I scheduled a nice break or two after such a “sprint;” these were very good for morale and motivation).

- Round 2: Beta Revisions - I had my beta readers mail their marked-up copies of the ms back to me, and then I went through all of their feedback. Once I finished here, I knew that the manuscript felt “ready” to send to my agents — only because at this point, I finally didn’t know what else the book needed. (I think if you have a ms and know there are still certain plot issues or things to fix, you should tend to that the best you can before sending out!)
- Round 3: Agent Revisions - After I signed with them, Caroline and Jade had plenty of notes and suggestions, so we took a few months to work on those edits together.
- Round 4: Editor Revisions - We sent the novel out on “submission” in May, and I had a book deal within a few weeks of that. By July, I had the initial edits from [Anne Speyer](#), my editor at Ballantine Books (now at Scribner) in hand, and spent the summer and fall of 2021 working on them.
- Round 5: Line Edits - I used PTO plus the holiday break at Vanity Fair to give myself a “book leave,” AKA four weeks where I worked on the book every day. Turns out, I really topped out at around 5 hours of working on the book per day...thought I was going to be crushing 8-hour workdays LOL. This was a really lonely time. I did not get out of the apartment nearly enough. But I used this time to address the meticulous line edits from the publisher, so it was a lot of sentence-level wrangling. My goal was to hit around 20 hours each week of this dedicated month, and so that allowed me to be a bit more flexible with myself on a day-to-day basis.
- Round 6: Final/Copy Edits - The easiest part. The publisher had a copy editor read the whole ms and then point out not only typos and misspellings but also continuity errors (such as “she’s inside when she says this, but on the next page she’s outside already?”). Wish I had started working on the “acknowledgements” earlier in the process, because at this point I was too fried to be as eloquent as I wished to be.
- Everything in one sheet - Probably the simplest view of all this in one place!

So! When it came down to it, from the first minute I started the first Google Doc to the moment I approved the final proofreader queries, a total of **463 hours** had passed, or really, 58 full work days, or roughly 12 weeks’ equivalent of working at a full time job.

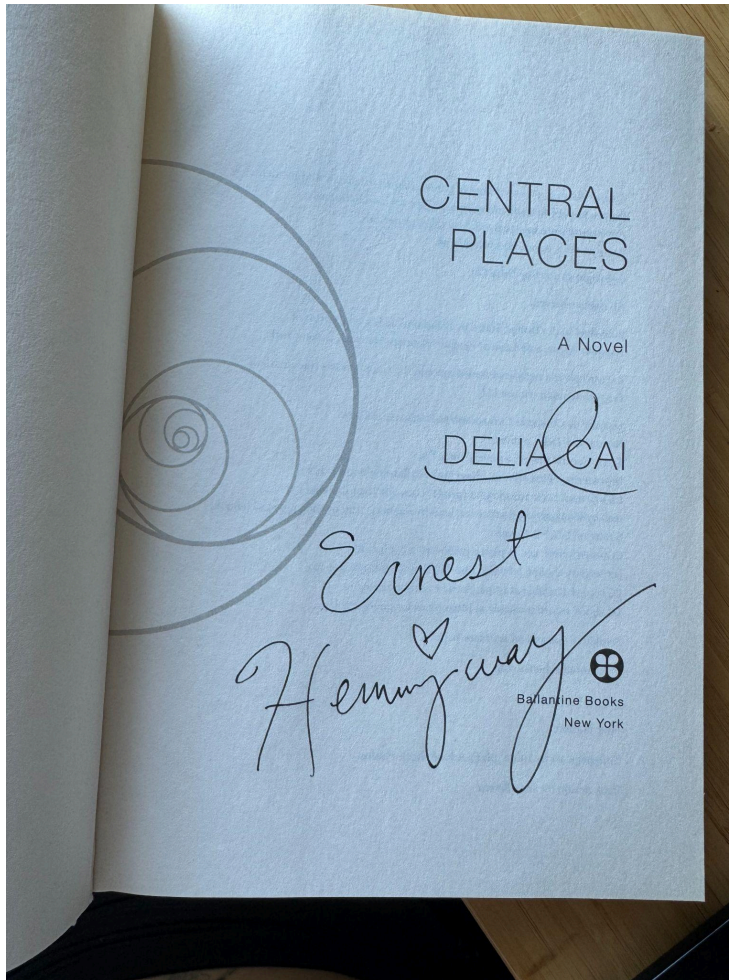
Which is crazy because it seemed...much more than that? A real “how do you measure a life” kind of moment here. Obviously I wasn’t logging in all the daydreaming and general mental noodling that I was doing those years “off-hours,” but I suppose I really liked having this concrete number to look at and have a sense of how much I was putting into this project.

And maybe in a sick way, knowing that number and looking at these sheets can help make writing a novel less intimidating overall, because oh, it turns out it could just take about 3 months if you were to be perfectly locked-in with full-time commitment and discipline. Or roughly 2.5 years, if you are a little bit more human. Something to think about!

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## Part 3: General Advice

- Absolutely, definitely throw a party for your book launch! To be fair, you *will* probably have to fund it yourself, but it's a worthy way to celebrate your accomplishments on your own terms and to have something to look forward to.
- Related: Do NOT throw said party the specific night *before* the book comes out, lest you want to be hungover all day. Or so I've been told. Sounds like that would suck, super glad it was not me who made that choice.
- Whether or not you have a party, you don't *have* to do a reading at a book store as your launch event; all the cool book events, you've probably noticed, are being hosted in interesting venues lately. (Connections with venue owners and bar owners come in reaaaaally handy here). If you do want to do a thing with a bookstore, you should ask around to find out which ones in your area are easiest to work with. I've heard of some bookstores that give you a tight 90 minutes in the space and then kick you out ASAP; it can feel very business-like and not that celebratory. Also, some bookstores prefer to work with writers who have a standing relationship with them, AKA like you've actually bought books from there more than once.
- On the reading itself: I only learned much later that you're *\*not\** supposed to read the first pages as your excerpt of choice when you have a reading, but I kind of quibble with this wisdom, because I kind of find it boring when the author has to set up the context first. Do whatever you want re: this!
- Did you know that when you are asked to sign your book, you're also traditionally supposed to sign it on *this* particular page (and to cross out your printed name)?



I did not know this tradition for most of my book promotion and decided I wanted to sign the dedication page, because I thought it would be cute for it to say "For my mother and father, of course...and you! Xoxo delia". So I think tbh you can do whatever you want, but now you know.

^^Also that is obviously not my signature lol but lately I have been so paranoid about my opsec that it's come to this...what are we even supposed to be putting out on the internet anymore.....

- When you get your book deal, I seriously recommend finding a reliable accountant (ask friends/other creatives) who can help you decide what to write off as business expenses for that tax year (and every year to follow, tbh) if you aren't a freelancer with an established tax strategy already. Talk to a few before you decide on going with one. Some accountants are going to be more.....shady interpretive than others. You can decide what you're comfortable with. Speaking of which...
- DO NOT FORGET TO SAVE A GOOD CHUNK OF YOUR BOOK PAYMENTS FOR TAXES!! Put at least at least 25% of that shit in an Ally savings account as soon as it hits

your bank my dear beloved, and do not touch!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

- Be a little bit prepared for your personal life to dramatically fall apart around the time of your book's publication, or at least to feel like it is. It's a Newtonian law of physics! Think of your book pub time as like one giant PMS month. Everything will feel raw and emotional, and it's probably fine even if it DOESN'T FEEL FINE.
- To that effect: Before the book comes out, be extremely honest and direct with the loved ones in your life (family, friends, etc.) about how you would like to be supported during this chaotic and emotional time. (I.e. "I would really like you to travel to New York to attend this launch event if feasible, and it would mean the world if you stayed until the end of the night please.") You will assume a lot can go unspoken, but do not risk playing mind games / having miscommunication about something this important to you. Of course, not everyone can show up for you in exactly the way you'd like, but take note of the ones who try quite hard.
- If you want to go on tour, you will likely have to fund it yourself. Your publisher can help you plan events and set up stuff with local bookstores, but for the most part, you are probably on your own. Of course, there's no rule that says you *have* to do a book tour. (FYI, I only took myself to LA, but my publisher arranged the bookstore event with Skylight). This is also when business expensing come in handy!!
- Plan a nice little vacation for yourself to go on a month or two after the book comes out. Or a staycation, but I recommend the lobotomizing effect of some geographic difference.
- If you're feeling a sense of panic/urgency about being age X or at Y point in your career without having published a book yet, you're absolutely not alone. This is actually the greatest cliché in media, I think lol. But I was just talking to an author last night, and we were like, what people don't know is that they all want to be the cool hot young thing, but even *if* you achieve this, the label of being a once-cool *hot young thing* follows you around for a long time, and it becomes very unhelpful when you get older and want to do more interesting things.

Above all else, I firmly believe you should never ever rush yourself. I think the worst thing you can do in that position is to rush. You should never beat a creative project out of yourself, and you should never punish yourself with strict routines that just make you feel guiltier and more like a "bad artist" than simply one who is going Crock-Pot mode and letting the juices simmer. Let's be honest. It takes a lot of work, especially if you live in an expensive city like New York, to simply get your life to a place where you can think creatively and inhabit the kind of playful trance obsessive state that a creative project requires (also, maybe it's not even a novel! Maybe it's a play or a zine or a sculpture or a song...a novel does NOT have the monopoly on being the only unit of culture worth respecting) (but also, if you're interested in learning more on accessing this state of play re: creativity, you HAVE to read *The Artist's Way*).



If you ask me, as long as you're paying attention to your life and writing stuff down regularly in notes or your journal at the very least, and otherwise just trying to get shit together for yourself, that is 90 percent part of the process. In my experience, you eventually will get to a point where you're ready to vomit on the page, and when the time comes, it will come out of you whether you really want it to or not. (yes that is a threat!)

- If you feel like your agent is not getting your vision/trying to pressure you into writing a book that you don't want to write, get a new agent! (Not my personal experience at *all*, but I've heard horror stories...)
- If your publisher is pushing a kind of racist cover or just a cover you don't like, you can and should speak up. (also not my experience, but oh the *stories* I've heard...)
- Actually, on that note, try to develop some opinions about your book cover *before* you have that chat with your publisher. They obviously know best, but I kind of wandered into that meeting being like "idk haha" and then wound up being really unhelpful in terms of direction/vision. If the book cover is important to you, take the time to develop some opinions on what you definitely do and don't like (both equally important). Definitely make a little moodboard, as silly as it might feel.
- Do *not* read your Goodreads or Amazon reviews. You probably think you're brave enough or creative enough in the self-criticism category already, but I'll tell you right now, no you're not. You can ask your agents to screen all of your reviews, or even to go through Goodreads and cherry pick the nice things people say and email *those* lines to you. Otherwise trust me you 100 percent do NOT need to know what everyone else is saying.
- Don't save the acknowledgements section to write until the last minute. Ideally, you should keep this as a note on your iPhone to add to as you go through the process. Revisit this section often as a way of reminding yourself how many people are in your corner, rooting you on, even if your book is less than perfect. They are already so proud of you :)

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## Useful resources mentioned/that you might enjoy...

- <https://savethecat.com/products/books/save-the-cat-writes-a-novel> ← for literal plotting
- <https://gretchenrubin.com/four-tendencies/> ← for understanding what kind of motivation works on yourself (i.e. a writing group vs. your own deadlines)
- <https://meantforyou.beehiiv.com/p/the-mortifying-ordeal-of-being-published> ← more advice from much more successful authors

- <https://www.penguinrandomhouseretail.com/book/?isbn=9780143129257> (← *The Artist's Way*: you don't have to follow it religiously, but the morning pages + artist dates are to me THE way to live life in general)