

**Lie Down with Dogs:
Practice-based Development in Crime Fiction Writing**

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Creative Enterprise
At Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This project examines the development of the crime fiction novel, *Lie Down with Dogs*. The novel tells the story of a New Zealand police detective, returning to work after a traumatizing undercover investigation. It uses a non-linear narrative structure, which interweaves three stories from different time periods.

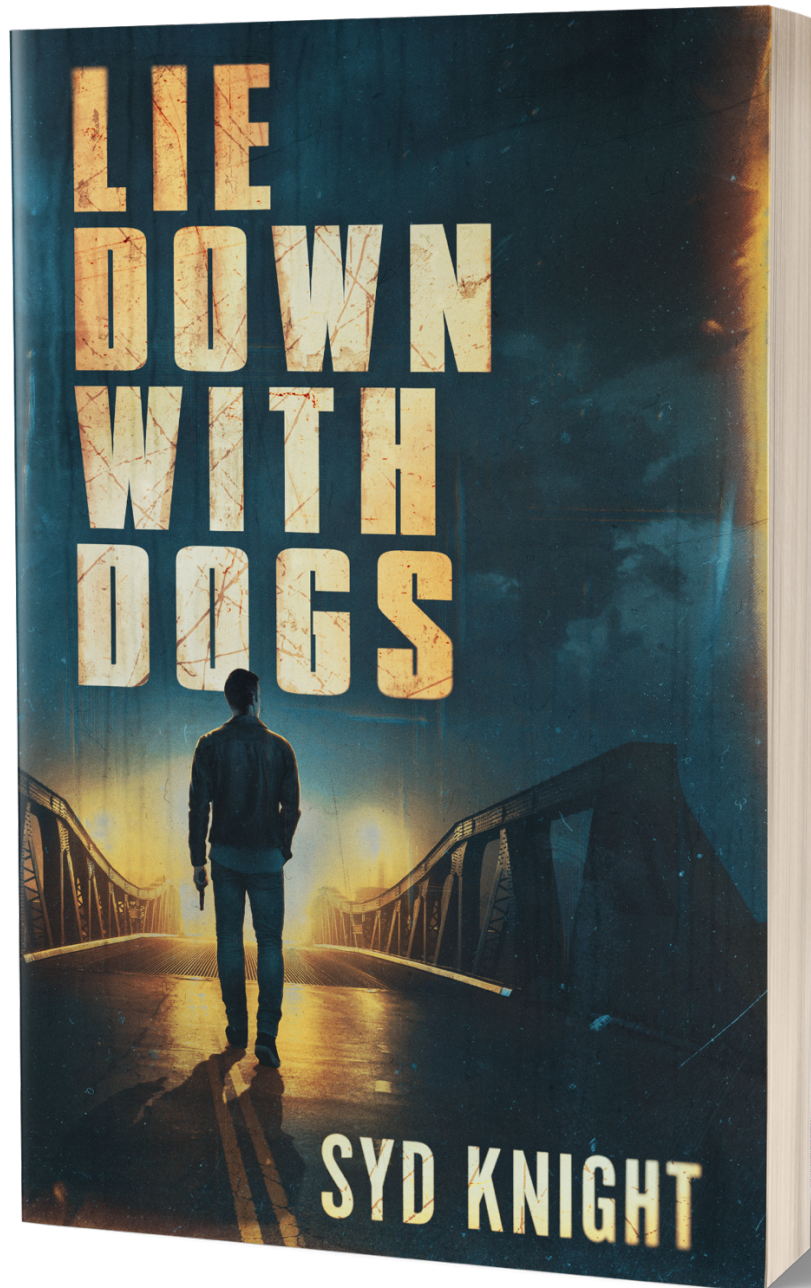
Writing this novel within a research context allowed a scholarly analysis from inside the creative development process. The research focussed on two primary aspects. *Development structure*, examining the methods used to create a full-length novel, and *narrative structure*, examining the development of the story itself.

This project uses practice-based research methodologies which examine the entire creative journey from ideation through to commercialization of the project. The creative practice guided and informed the research, while the research, in turn, informed and contributed to the creative work. The results of these methods are manifest in the creative work and this exegesis.

As part of my practice, the commercialization of the creative work is addressed in a separate business pitch deck document looking at the viability of self-publishing the novel utilising digital distribution platforms enabling a direct-to-market pathway for authors.

PRACTICE-BASED DEVELOPMENT IN CRIME FICTION WRITING

By Mathew Knight



It's the middle of winter and I'm sitting at a desk crammed into my garage in front of the car. Rain pounds on the tin roof and its cold. I'm wearing a black puffer jacket and woolly hat, with a small fan heater providing minimal warmth to one of my legs. On the wall in front of me are one-hundred and five small white cards each representing a chapter of my unwritten book. I've just typed the header, *Chapter 1*, and I'm ready to start writing. Despite the multitude of ideas that have been swirling around my head for months, I'm scared of the blank void sitting before me. I'm not a religious person, but I'm holding onto faith that my will alone can turn these ideas into a novel. Here we go then...

“When Kyle was a boy, he imagined growing up to be a hero like his father. Someone who protected the weak and brought evil men to justice. Looking back on all that had happened, he wondered if his father would be proud, or turn his back in shame at the things his son had done.”

Figure 1 - Narrative reflection journal entry, August 2020

INTRODUCTION

This research examines the process of developing a crime-fiction novel. It explores two primary questions: how to organize and manage a large body of evolving work and, how to develop and build a complex, non-linear story narrative. Both issues presented significant challenges throughout this project. The methods I developed in response to these challenges merit academic research because authors development processes are often not shared publicly nor critically assessed and doing so can assist other authors, academics and students working in creative writing.

This project used practice-based research methods. The creative work guided and informed the research, while the research, in turn, informed and contributed to the creative work. The results of this research can be seen in the novel, while this exegesis explains and critically reflects on the methods and results.

Lie Down with Dogs is a crime fiction, genre novel (S. Knight). It is influenced by a lineage of writing including detective fiction of the 1930s and 40s and modern police procedurals and thrillers. It tells the story of a young police detective returning to work following a traumatizing undercover investigation. Trying to put this experience behind him, he takes on a cold case which offers him a chance at redemption. The story examines what it means to be a hero, and whether the ends justify the means in the fight against crime.

WHO AM I AND WHY CRIME FICTION?

While undertaking this project, I came to recognise that my background and personal life experiences all contribute to the work and it's important to share some of this for context.

I am fifty-two years old and excited to be realising a lifelong ambition to write a novel. Long ago I completed an undergraduate degree in philosophy in my hometown of Christchurch, New Zealand. Subsequently, I spent twenty-five-years working as a cinematographer in the film industry. More recently, I completed undergraduate courses in creative writing at Massey University. Storytelling through the medium of film has been my primary creative work for many years and moving from visual storytelling, through cinematography, to writing a novel, feels like a symbiotic progression. I love dramatic storytelling which deals with strong emotions. My choice of writing genre has been influenced by crime fiction and non-fiction books, and multi-season streaming television and film dramas. Examples are shown below.

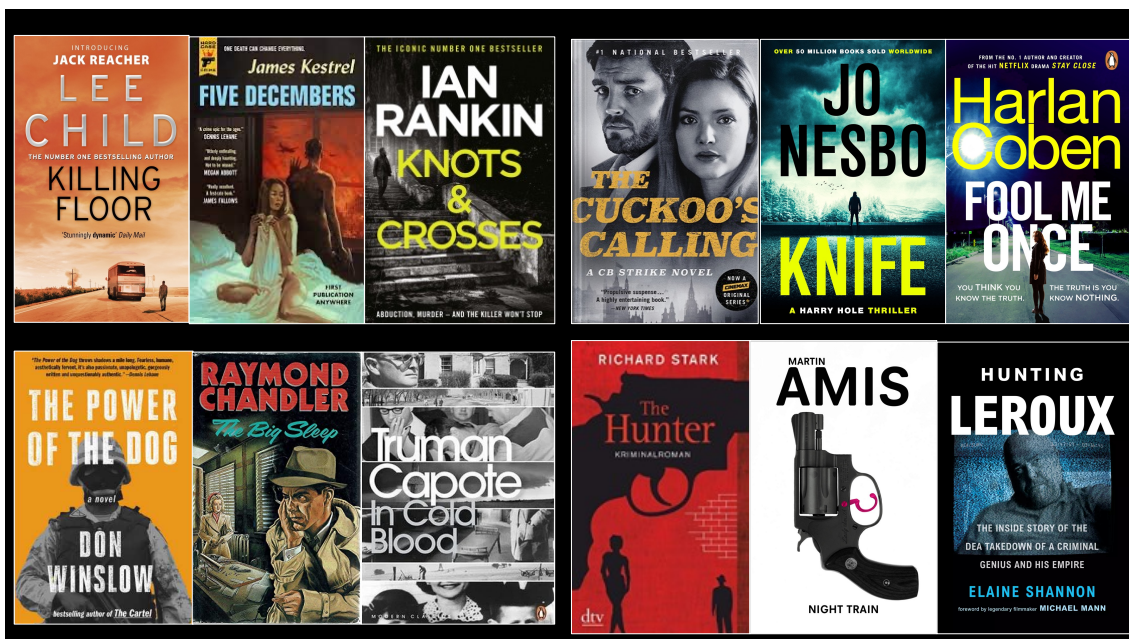


Figure 2 – Crime fiction and non-fiction book influences.



Figure 3 – Streaming, television and film drama influences

Real world crime and my own experiences working with the New Zealand Police in documentary films have also been a significant influence on my choice of writing genre. International drug cartels do operate in New Zealand, undercover police work has been going on for decades. Crime, violence, and drugs exist all around us and many of my plotlines come from real-world headlines.

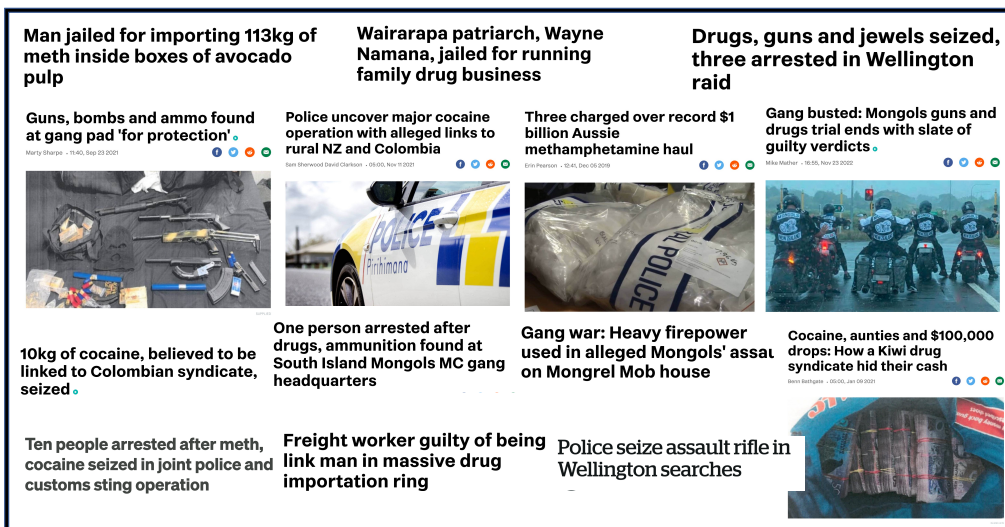


Figure 4 - New Zealand crime headlines

Place is also an important component of my novel. Much of my story takes place in my hometown of Christchurch, New Zealand and draws on my experiences there in the 90's. I currently live in Wellington which is the other significant location in the story.

My experiences as a documentary filmmaker are also integrated into my novel; chasing violent offenders through forests at night with police dogs, filming heroin addicts in Asia, visiting prisons in New Zealand. While the novel remains a work of fiction, it is a reflection of my lived experience.

DEVELOPMENTAL STRUCTURE

This exegesis defines *development structure* as the methods for moving from early story ideas, through outlining and multiple drafts, to a completed manuscript. Because this is my first novel, and due to its scale and scope, developing my own process required considerably experimentation. I undertook an iterative process to develop methods for keeping the project organised and tracking toward my goal of completing the novel. My research began with three fundamental questions:

- *What writing development processes and methods should I use?*
- *Which methods work best for me?*
- *Which methods are the most efficient for my goals?*

The methods I eventually developed are significantly influenced by my background as a cinematographer. As a filmmaker, I learned to balance creative work with structured technical and logistical processes. The writing methods I developed allowed creative freedom while following a highly structured organizational process.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

The second aspect of my research is *narrative structure*, defined as the development process of the story itself. *Lie Down with Dogs* was originally conceived as a non-linear narrative, interweaving three distinct stories set in different time periods, told out of order. It is a *who-dunnit*, or its close cousin, the *how-dunnit*. The story narratives are:

1. A present-day, police investigation into a cold case (set in Christchurch, New Zealand),
2. the events of that cold case (from six years previously, also in Christchurch),
3. and a seemingly unrelated undercover investigation which occurred between the two other timeframes (set in Wellington, two years before the present-day story).

All three stories end up intersecting. Working out how to write this multi-threaded, non-linear narrative was a significant challenge.

RESEARCH FROM INSIDE THE WORK

The methodology of practice-based research is fundamental to my thesis and my own creative experience is the subject of this research. In the work *Practice-based Research in the Creative Arts*, authors Candy and Edmonds suggest, “If a creative artifact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based. If the research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, it is practice-led” (64).

The overall project and this exegesis are primarily practice-based, but there are elements of practice-led knowledge within this exegesis. It's not typical to read a novel where there is an accompanying scholarly analysis of the work's development. Elements of my development process presented in this exegesis provide new understandings about the practice of writing fiction which may be helpful to other practitioners. The results of my research can also be seen in the creative work and are a contribution to the body of knowledge in creative writing.

The literature review revealed a significant portion of literary theory and criticism does not examine the development process of creative work, but instead, often examines the completed work only. This is an important perspective for research but leaves significant aspects of how an author achieved the final work, and the creative journey it took to produce it, unexamined.

A useful analogy for these alternate viewpoints is an analysis of a high-performance car. We can observe its visible aesthetics, structure, design, and performance externally, but this offers limited objective information about the methods which led to its final form. Without seeing the components which make up the engine, the design and testing process, and how these all contribute to the vehicle's overall performance, we are limited in our ability to give an objective analysis about how it works. For a more complete understanding, analysis needs to examine both the final form of a creative text, and the development process which led to that text.

A significant quantity of research in literature takes place within an interpretive framework. Rather than being objective, it is shaped by the reader's own, unique human experience (2023, Pelz). This is an important perspective, as it mirrors the reader's inherent role in interpreting a story and judging the quality and impact of a text. What

practice-based and practice-led research can add is a critical analysis of how a work is built from its genesis to its final form. And while there is no doubt an inherent bias when a creative artist examines their own process and experience, there is much that other authors and experts in the field can learn from both a critical reflection on this creative journey, and an examination of the resulting creative work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines existing texts on development and narrative structure relevant to the challenges I encountered while writing the novel.

DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURE

The literature review revealed two primary and seemingly oppositional approaches to fiction writing development. Colloquially, these methods identify an author as either a “pantser” or a “plotter” (2022, Brewer). A pantser is an author who writes by the seat of their pants, beginning with little idea of the story and following creative ideas wherever they may lead to produce a completed manuscript. The alternate approach, the *plotter*, develops an overall story outline first then follows this plot as they write.

In *The Eleventh Draft*, Professor Fred Lebron talks about the origin of *narrative*, which means “to know”.

“The reader enters the narrative “to know”. The characters enter the narrative to know. The writer enters the narrative to know.... The shared experience among writer, reader, and character is that process of discovery. If any of these participants in the process has already discovered what there is to be discovered, then why bother... I couldn’t write knowing plot...I needed not to know” (Lebron 49–52).

This is a clear endorsement of the pantser approach and Lebron declares he cannot write any other way.

The literature review revealed a number of successful authors who share this sentiment; the journey of discovering the story is what they love about writing. Prolific contemporary American author Stephen King holds a similar view: “I believe plotting and the spontaneity of real creation aren’t compatible...Plot is, I think, the good writer’s last resort and the dullard’s first choice.” (King 164). Clearly, this approach works for some authors, but others use quite different methods.

The plotters plan their stories in advance before doing any writing. John Grisham, prolific author of legal thrillers like *The Firm* (2012, Dell) and *The Pelican Brief* (2012, Anchor) explains his development process: “I don’t write the first scene until I know the last scene” (*Author Shorts*, sec.1m 32). While Grisham has developed his own individual writing process, this knowledge of exactly where the story will go before writing places him on the plotter end of the spectrum.

Another successful plotter is John Irving, author of *The World According to Garp* (1978, E.P Dutton) and *The Cider House Rules* (1978, HarperCollins). Irving explains how he begins a new book with the last sentence, then makes “a kind of roadmap in reverse, back to where I think the story should begin” (*John Irving at Home* | *TIME*, loc.1min 53s). Interestingly, this approach to research serves as a foundation for advanced story planning, prior to writing. While this may not constitute a formal story outline, for Irving it serves a similar purpose. This example suggests a less binary distinction between plotters and pantsers.

FIRST DRAFT, SECOND DRAFT, THIRD DRAFT

While researching the differing methods used by authors, I began to see a less binary distinction between the pantsers and plotter methods and it was in the drafting

process where these two approaches seemed to differ the most, while still sharing similar development structures.

In, *Bird by Bird*, author Anne Lamott talks about the drafting process.¹ She explains that a bad first draft is a vital step in the development of a novel:

“...the first draft is the down draft - you just get it down. The second draft is the up draft - you fix it up...And the third draft is the dental draft, where you check every tooth, to see if it’s loose...” (25–26).

This three-step process is widely used in fiction writing (Beck). The first draft is sometimes described as the writer telling the story to themselves, the second draft is for the editor to critique, while the third and final draft is for the reader. While reflecting on my own evolving development process, I recognised that the differing states of sequential drafts demonstrate where the pantsers and plotters methods diverge and where they are similar.

The plotter is front loading this complex story planning before and during the first draft. This means research and planning will likely take longer. While pantsers can get more quickly into their first draft and use it as a more open, creative discovery process. The consequences of using the first draft in this way means pantsers may face a much larger task at the second draft stage to re-shape the first draft into a clear story. By contrast, plotters have less work to shape a second draft into a completed novel. This suggests to me a less binary distinction between the pantsers and plotters methods than I initially thought.

¹ Lamott is the author of nineteen fiction and non-fiction novels and was inducted into the California Hall of Fame in 2010

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

My research also examined existing texts regarding *narrative structure*, focussing on how a story is told. The book *Howdunnit: A Masterclass in Crime Writing by Members of the Detection Club* (2020, Collins), is an excellent resource on this topic. This book is a collection of advice to writers from authors who are members of an English society known as *The Detection Club*. Formed in 1930 by British mystery writers, this club has included many illustrious authors of mystery, crime and detective fiction (2023, 'The Detection Club').

In *Howdunnit*, writer Val McDermid addresses narrative structure in detective stories:

“The stories that satisfy us have a beginning, a middle and an end. But they don’t necessarily come in that order....of course there’s a place for linear narrative that begins at the start of events and continues in a straight line to the end. But not all stories lend themselves to that sort of shape. And one of the toughest struggles we often face is trying to find a structure that allows us to tell the brilliant story niggling away at us.” (99–100)

Author J. J. Connington, also writing in *Howdunnit*, indicates working backwards is his preferred method of planning complex story narratives. He uses the analogy of a chess problem:

“In both cases the constructor begins at the end and works backwards. The chess expert, having hit upon his checkmate

position, has then to devise moves leading up to it...In the same way, the writer of a detective story has to invent various characters and episodes which limit the possibilities in his imagined course of events leading up to his solution.” (151)

Connington suggests the author should have a clear end to the story in mind and their main task is to work out a plot that will lead to that ending.

A third insight that informed my own approach came again from McDermid in *Howdunnit*: “Imagine you’re having a drink with your best friend. Where would you start telling them your story in a way that makes sense?” (100). McDermid explains that if you need to stop telling your story and go back to provide other information before it makes sense, this indicates the order in which the story should be written.

These insights influenced my own story development process and informed key decisions about the order my non-linear narrative needed to be told.

RELATED CREATIVE WORKS

The choice of related creative works reflected the goals of my own writing. I began with the structure and tone of the novel I wanted to write. *Lie Down with Dogs* is a crime fiction genre work, it has elements of a number of sub-genres: police procedural, noir fiction, hard-boiled thriller, detective, and action and adventure.

From the beginning, I conceived my story as a non-linear narrative which weaved three stories together. Whilst researching narrative structure, I found several examples that were relevant to my own intentions.

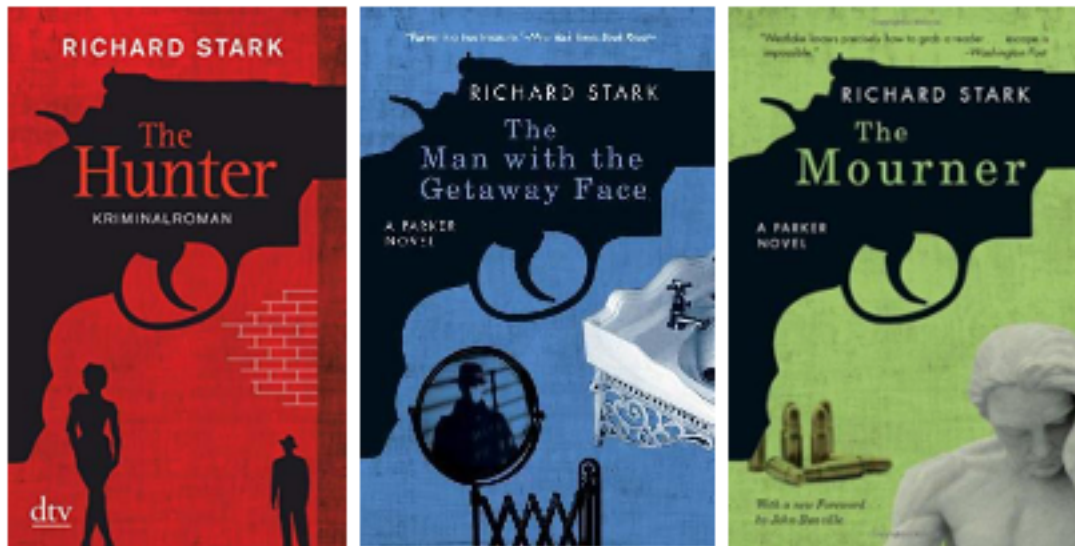


Figure 5 - The Parker Novels

Donald E. Westlake, writing as Richard Stark, produced a series of twenty books in the 1960s and 70s known as the Parker novels, named after the central character. Parker is a professional thief of dubious moral character, and the stories follow the various robberies he is involved with. Stark often applies a narrative device where the story departs from a linear progression and loops back on itself.

The first novel, *The Hunter* (1962, University of Chicago Press), begins as Parker walks into New York city after spending six months in jail after being shot and left for dead by fellow criminals during a heist. The novel is about his revenge. The book begins in the middle of this story.

“Sixty days they gave him. Twenty days, and he fought a guard, and they added six more months. Eight months out of his life, weeding on the prison farm. He lasted six and found his break, and took it - and left behind a stupid guard with his head half twisted from his shoulders... There was a score to settle: there were accounts to balance.” (Stark 23–24)

Later, the narrative goes back to the beginning of the story where Parker was double crossed and shot: “It had started ten months ago. There were four of them in it” (Stark 41). This non-linear narrative loop felt interesting and engaging. As a reader, you try to work out the various pieces of the story fit into the larger narrative. It gives a mystery and complexity to the story which I wanted in my own work. In the Parker novels, Starks narrative twists are usually between a few weeks or months, in my own book I wanted the time period to be years.

A novel which utilizes a non-linear narrative on a much larger timescale is Sebastian Faulks’ *Birdsong* (1994, Vintage).

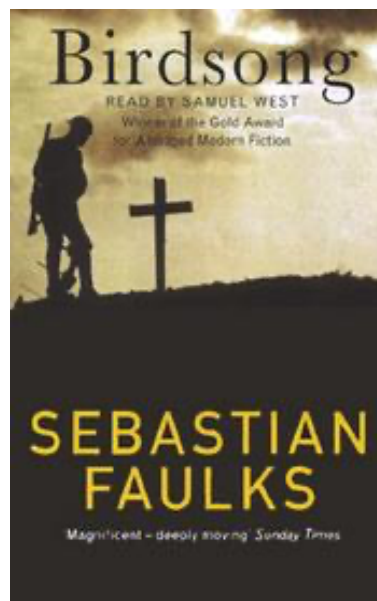


Figure 6 - *Birdsong* by Sebastian Faulks

While this novel is quite a different genre, it follows three time periods and alternates between two of them. I liked how the different stories were not presented as mere flashbacks offering a short diversion. Each time period is developed substantively, and at times, feels like a whole new book has begun. One of the story threads features entirely new characters in a different country and time. Because Faulks is such a brilliant writer, the reader quickly becomes absorbed in each new story. Initially, I was concerned that changing narrative threads in my own book would result in the reader forgetting what had happened in the previous story. Reading *Birdsong* reassured me this was not the case, and as a reader I felt overjoyed to return to a previous story when I thought it was over. Analysing this non-linear narrative in a great work of contemporary literature gave me confidence that it could work in my own story.

After completing the literature review, I felt a renewed confidence that my choice to pre-plan the story was a valid approach, and certainly wasn't a barrier to producing a good novel. However, I did learn from those authors who see pre-planning as a barrier to creative expression. Their perspective reminded me to remain open to story changes even when working to a plan. Overall, I think there's a balance that can be struck between the two approaches.

While my story idea was originally conceived as a non-linear narrative, during development I was quite unsure about whether this would work, and I considered changing to a linear narrative. Reviewing relevant creative works gave me the confidence to proceed with my split narrative structure.

METHODS

This section explores the systematic approach I developed for writing the novel and the methods used to develop the pre-planned story outline. It draws on one of the primary tools I used to track the research, a narrative reflection journal. This became the record and basis for my research and allowed me to track the most significant and persistent questions arising during this practice-based project.

I love large-scale storytelling and was determined to create an epic, New Zealand crime story. The final word-count of my novel is just under 190,000 words. Novels vary widely in word-count, although marketing expectations tend to coalesce around typical ranges. However, there are many exceptions to these word counts.² One of the reasons I choose to self-publish this novel is to avoid the constraints of market-driven norms. I didn't set out to write a novel driven by marketing choices, I wanted a work that reflected my taste and experiences and create something uniquely my own.

Completing a work of this scale presents many organizational, creative and psychological challenges which were a focus of the research. First amongst these challenges was my aspiration to have three separate narratives, set in different locations and time periods, and told out of order. I had an initial idea set in Wellington which focussed on a detective investigating a cold case. The idea was that he would discover a link to a previous undercover investigation he had worked on and through the present-day investigation he would solve both cases.

² Thriller and mystery genres are typically around 75,000 to 100,000 words, yet many successful novels have far higher word counts (Bransford). The third book in Don Winslow's crime-fiction trilogy, *The Border*, clocks in at 261,000 words. (*Prosecraft: The Border by Don Winslow*).

As I developed this idea, it quickly became apparent that characters, locations, and events, linked across multiple storylines, were very challenging to keep logical and coherent. Drawing on my filmmaking experience and the formal structures of film production, I developed a system to keep track of the story narrative and a roadmap that I hoped would lead to the completion of my novel. This structured system was key to the completion of this project.

SYSTEMS IN FILM PRODUCTION

My previous experience working on some of the largest feature film productions in the world (M. Knight), has taught me that the key to completing projects with high levels of complexity is ensuring that formal systems are in place that function smoothly and provide a roadmap that guarantees the completion of the project. Whilst most people are familiar with the final result of a film, few understand the rigid organizational systems that underpin production (2016, Pogaru). A film project combines creativity, technical complexity, logistics and people management. These systems have been used for decades and have many similarities with military structures due to the large-scale logistics required. This may sound like the antithesis of free creative expression, yet in my experience this disciplined, systems-based approach is one of the best things about filmmaking and it supports and enables creativity in complex projects. These systems ensure the organizational wheels of a project turn smoothly, even when people are tired and overwhelmed with the scale of the task (a state common to both film production and novel writing). When organizational aspects of a project do not function smoothly, the ensuing chaos forces creative artists to spend

their time and energy fixing these problems at the expense of time focussed on the creative work.

During the development of my novel, I felt a similar tension between complex organizational tasks and creative work. In order to feel comfortable with these large and long-term organizational challenges, I developed an overarching system that would keep the project well organised while giving me the freedom to focus on writing. I used an iterative process to develop these methods with the ultimate goal of a completed novel. While many writers use variants of these methods, my process is underpinned by the formalized, systems-based approach I learned in film production. The following sections address the key components of this approach.

STORY CARDS - PHYSICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF DIGITAL WORK

In screenwriting for film, the use of physical cards to display brief outlines of each scene is common. Screenwriter Robert McKee refers to this as a step-outline (McKee 412). For me, physical interaction with a subject has always been a key factor in my learning, and the use of physical media has been vital to the development of this novel.

In writing these days, the majority of work happens on a laptop in a purely digital environment. For me, this is not the ideal media form to engage in complex, intellectual problem-solving. I do some of my best thinking when I'm on my feet and able to move the pieces of the puzzle around in a physical space. This is exactly what I have done for many years as a cinematographer on film sets. While writing, having a physical manifestation of the story was hugely beneficial to me.

I began the first steps of planning my story with cards on a wall and maintained this throughout the writing process. Each card includes a brief chapter synopsis or plot point. This allowed me to see the entire story at once. Cards are also an easy way to identify gaps in the story and move things around to fix narrative flow.

Below left is an example of my entire story cards outline, and right, a single chapter card example:

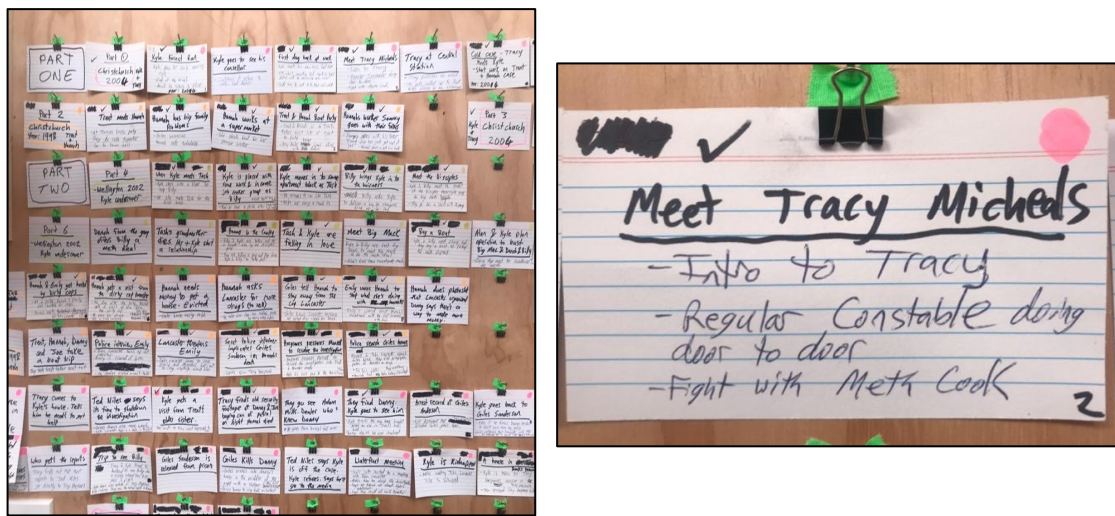


Figure 7 – Entire book story cards and single chapter example.

The example above right describes the idea for a single chapter which introduces one of the main characters (S. Knight, chap.4). The card summarises the general story idea and the significant events in the chapter. It's enough information to remind me of the idea I plan to write. This information is all the story planning I began with.

The carding process evolved throughout the project. It began with broad story points, but as the novel developed the cards became more detailed. Many times, I returned to the cards when significant story changes were required: adding missing elements, combining story points into chapters, reworking transitions between

timelines. This development occurred using the story cards first, before the actual writing began. A key point here is that the story outline was not immutably fixed in advanced. It provided a roadmap to follow, but I still had complete creative freedom to change the story as it evolved. This system supports creativity, rather than constraining it.

Story carding also provided an important psychological benefit throughout the project. The cards were always on the wall above my desk. They were a constant reminder that the characters were waiting for me to finish their story. I would feel guilty if I left them alone too long. Perseverance is a vital part of writing a novel. The carding process kept me focused in a way that a document buried in my laptop never could.

THE LINEAR STORY OUTLINE

After creating the basic story outline of the entire book, it quickly became evident that writing three interrelated, non-linear narratives, required careful management. For example, I realized one of the cities I had envisaged in one story was incompatible with where the characters needed to be in another. I also recognised the order of information the reader received in one story significantly constrained how the other stories could be told. When confronted by these problems, I questioned whether a non-linear narrative was the right approach and considered switching to a more conventional linear narrative. Either way, I needed to find a way to manage these complexities.

At this point, I decided to story card each of the three stories as independent, linear narratives. This was a key step for both my project development process and my story narrative. Laying out the three narratives in a linear order allowed me to see which

<p>"Present" day Christchurch Story Year: 2006</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.1 FOREST RUN</p> <p>Present day Kyle in Christchurch. They find Kyle goes to see his counsellor.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.2 Kyle goes to see his counsellor</p> <p>Kyle goes to the top of the mountain overlooking Christchurch. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.3 Kyle's first day back at work</p> <p>Kyle goes back to Christchurch office and meets with his boss. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.4 Meet Tracy McKeath</p> <p>Tracy goes to the office to meet with Kyle. She is told that he can't go back to work. She is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.5 Tracy at Court of Public Station</p> <p>Tracy goes to court to see Kyle. She is told that he can't go back to work. She is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.6 Cold Case - Tracy meets Kyle</p> <p>Tracy meets Kyle and they talk about the case. She is told that he can't go back to work. She is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.7 Meet the Detectives</p> <p>Tracy meets the detectives and they talk about the case. She is told that he can't go back to work. She is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.8 Group therapy session</p> <p>Tracy goes to a group therapy session. She is told that he can't go back to work. She is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.9 Meet Mike Mansell - Part 1</p> <p>Tracy meets Mike Mansell and they talk about the case. She is told that he can't go back to work. She is told that he can't go back to work.</p>
	<p>CHAPTER 2.10 Meet Mike Mansell - Part 2</p> <p>Tracy meets Mike Mansell and they talk about the case. She is told that he can't go back to work. She is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.11 Kyle & Tracy visit Emily's house</p> <p>Kyle and Tracy visit Emily's house. They are told that he can't go back to work. They are told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.12 Kyle looks for a neighbour</p> <p>Kyle looks for a neighbour. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.13 Kyle asks his doctor for more treatment</p> <p>Kyle asks his doctor for more treatment. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.14 Hopper Street</p> <p>Kyle goes to Hopper Street. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.15 Kyle visits Emily's house at Sanctuary</p> <p>Kyle visits Emily's house at Sanctuary. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.16 Update the boss 1</p> <p>Kyle updates his boss. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.17 Mansell Remembers Kyle - part 1</p> <p>Mansell remembers Kyle. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.18 Mansell Remembers Kyle - part 2</p> <p>Mansell remembers Kyle. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>
	<p>CHAPTER 2.19 Cap tells Kyle doctor who will provide the update</p> <p>Cap tells Kyle doctor who will provide the update. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.20 Kyle & Tracy becomes closer</p> <p>Kyle and Tracy become closer. They are told that he can't go back to work. They are told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.21 Kyle goes to a new doctor and gets diagnosed</p> <p>Kyle goes to a new doctor and gets diagnosed. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.22 Lunch at Tracy's Place</p> <p>Kyle has lunch at Tracy's place. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.23 Tracy tells Kyle he needs help with unemployment</p> <p>Tracy tells Kyle he needs help with unemployment. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.24 Kyle remembers what he did when he was unemployed</p> <p>Kyle remembers what he did when he was unemployed. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.25 Kyle gets into a fight at a bar</p> <p>Kyle gets into a fight at a bar. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.26 Kyle gets a visit from Tracy's older sister</p> <p>Kyle gets a visit from Tracy's older sister. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.27 Emily House pays Kyle a visit</p> <p>Emily House pays Kyle a visit. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>
	<p>CHAPTER 2.28 Kyle remembers 3 years in hospital</p> <p>Kyle remembers 3 years in hospital. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.29 Kyle finds out about his undercurrent experience</p> <p>Kyle finds out about his undercurrent experience. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.30 Kyle goes to see Emily</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Emily. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.31 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.32 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.33 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.34 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.35 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.36 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>
	<p>CHAPTER 2.37 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.38 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.39 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.40 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.41 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.42 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.43 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.44 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>	<p>CHAPTER 2.45 Kyle goes to see Tracy</p> <p>Kyle goes to see Tracy. He is told that he can't go back to work. He is told that he can't go back to work.</p>

Figure 10 - Linear step outline3 - Christchurch 2004

Creating this linear outline reaffirmed my initial plan to write the book using a non-linear narrative. The carding process showed that if I wrote it as a linear story, the reader would have all the answers to the investigation before it even began, negating the who-dunnit element. I still felt that my original story idea was good, but it had to be told in a non-linear order to enable readers to put together the information to solve the mystery.

THE NON-LINEAR STORY OUTLINE

Next, using story cards, I rearranged my three linear outlines into a single, non-linear narrative. This process was more complex than I had anticipated. Interweaving the three stories raised issues around when the reader found out certain facts. For instance, I couldn't reveal all the details of an exciting scene as it unfolds, then later present the reader with a police investigation into what happened. If the reader already knew what happened, the investigation becomes irrelevant. Instead, I decided to introduce an unsolved crime through a police investigation, then go back to those

events, and reveal what really happened in a separate narrative. Mystery and evidence were presented first, then detail and emotion delivered second.

Informed by my review of related creative works, I also tried to avoid jumping back and forth between different narratives too quickly. I wanted the reader to spend considerable time within each separate story thread, so they became engaged with the different characters and plots.

Once complete, this non-linear story-card outline gave me a firm roadmap of the entire book which I would follow when I finally began writing.

The figure below illustrates how the three stories are interwoven in the finished novel:

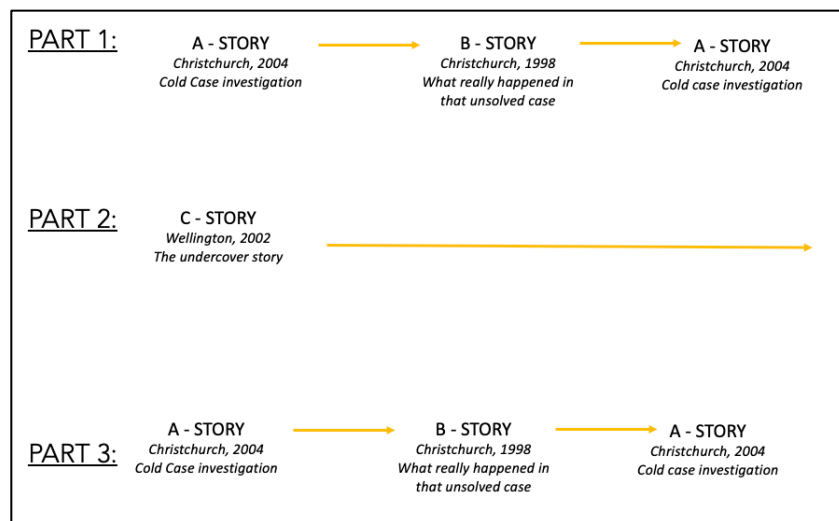


Figure 11 – How the three narratives are told in a non-linear order.

THE WRITING BEGINS

At this point in the process, I had done significant work on story outlining yet almost no writing for the actual novel (I had previously written three stand-alone chapters during early prototyping). This was an unsettling feeling. There are significant psychological challenges to writing a full-length novel and its worth addressing these.

One analogy for writing a novel, likens it to filling an empty swimming pool by adding a spoonful of water each day. If you keep going, every day, every week, every year, there is a mathematical certainty that eventually, the pool will be full. Yet each tiny spoonful seems like it will never fill such a large space. There is a level of faith in the process of writing that is required. You need to believe, that if you keep putting those spoonfuls in everyday, eventually you will have a completed novel. That psychological challenge is significant, and for me this is where a formal development system pays dividends. On days when your faith in the novel ever being completed is in short supply (which is often), you don't need to carry that burden. You have faith in the system and segment your goals into small, achievable steps. You may no longer believe you can write an entire novel, but you know you can write a single chapter (or a single page). When I began, there were over one hundred chapter cards on the wall. I set myself a goal of one chapter per week. Then, for the next two years, I sat in the chair, put my head down, and wrote.

FIRST DRAFT

By the time I began writing in earnest I was aware many writers use a fairly similar drafting process irrespective of whether they pre-plan their story or not. This process is well established in creative writing (Burroway and Stuckey-French 15). All the advice I read emphasised the importance of pushing through an entire first draft as the initial goal. There is widespread acceptance that this first draft may be bad (likely will be bad), yet it is a necessary foundation for creating a good novel.

I set out to complete a first draft of my entire book while following my story card outline and committed to always moving forward. As I progressed, I ended up

making a few small tweaks to previously written chapters, but mostly stuck to the goal of a minimum of one chapter per week. Once I committed to this process, my chapters and word count began to grow.

While I began with over one hundred chapter outline cards, as the story came to life there were times when adjustments needed to be made. Chapter cards were added, removed, combined, or re-organized when necessary. This is a key aspect of my development process. While following a story outline may sound like a rigid process, I still maintained complete creative freedom to make changes. But I would make these changes at the story card level, not while writing.

BOOK EDITOR AND THE ITERATIVE PROCESS

As a new writer, I felt I needed ongoing external feedback to develop and improve my writing. I found this by working closely with a development editor.³ This role can include “coaching the author chapter by chapter” (Norton 1). Hiring a development editor over such a long time period was not an expense I could afford. Instead, I was lucky that my wife, Anna Broadhurst, was willing to take on this role. Anna is a highly accomplished formal writer in her career and an avid reader who is familiar with the genre I am working in. As I wrote, I developed an iterative process that incorporated ongoing feedback on a chapter-by-chapter basis. This process differs

³ The role of a developmental editor is distinct from the normal editor role. Editors are usually involved towards the latter part of the writing process, while a development editor is a less common role that engages with the work as it is written. (Norton)

from the way many writers work with an editor and became a key aspect of my development process. This is how it worked:

Step 1: I wrote the first draft of a chapter (in a separate Microsoft Word document).

Step 2: The developmental editor would review the chapter and send me notes and suggested changes. This work would cover typical aspects of editing such as; structural editing, line editing and copy editing (MacKenzie).

Step 3: I would review the feedback, then re-write a new version of my first draft.

Here is an example of the editor's review notes on a first draft chapter:

- Plot wise this is great.
- The balance of physical description and characters' internal reflection isn't right yet. Lost opportunities to reinforce Kyle's state of mind and what Ross means to him.
- The physical descriptions feel a bit lazy – emphasis on height, size, rather than more unique references (I changed Billy's descriptor from short to chubby in a few places, just think it makes it richer).
- The dialogue is a bit flat. The characters aren't differentiated enough. The Police Radio language seems overdone to me, doesn't add much after a while.
- The language is very plain, and too passive in places. There are times where some crisper descriptions will reveal more to the reader. Particularly describing locations and movement. Some detail (layout/left/right) doesn't matter to the plot, just makes the narrative heavy going.
- The Tash character seems a bit discordant with the Wainui pub chapter.

Figure 11 - Example of development editor notes on chapter first draft

This process generated a first draft version (1.0), then an updated version based on the editor's notes (1.1). This meant my 1.1 draft was a fairly tidy version, rather than a very rough draft. Some authors may identify this a *second* draft. But for me both these versions are still quite fast passes, rather than slow and detailed deliberations. As such they remain a first draft for me. There are of course many steps and shades to these processes, but how I conceptualize the stage of the process I am at is important to my sense of progress.

The second and third drafts of the entire book were still to come, but using this first draft, iterative method meant that subsequent drafts weren't quite as difficult as they could have been. And crucially, it helped me develop and improve my writing skills and voice as I progressed.

In terms of research, I focussed primarily on these early drafts as this was by far the most challenging part of the writing process for me. While subsequent drafts still required a huge volume of work, I did find them far easier than the initial writing. Making bad writing better is an easier task than starting with nothing.

Here is an overview of the entire drafting process I used:

<u>Lie Down with Dogs – Drafting process</u>	
FIRST DRAFT	<p>Version 1.0 - Blank page to first version of chapter Version 1.1 - Re-write based on editor feedback This was a long process (approx. 2 years) and continued until an entire first version of the book was finished.</p>
SECOND DRAFT	<p>After having completed the entire 1st draft of the book, I did another pass of the entire book. This was faster than the first draft, but still took a considerable amount of time and reflected the improvements in my writing abilities.</p> <p>Once I had completed the second draft, the editor did a complete editorial pass concentrating on grammar, style, and mistakes in names, places, dates etc</p>
THIRD DRAFT:	<p>This followed a similar process to the 2nd draft, but was a little easier and quicker.</p> <p><i>NOTES: Throughout all of this, each chapter was an individual Microsoft Word document. These always remained the master version. At every stage, the most recent chapter version was cut and pasted into the Vellum file of the entire manuscript. Final formatted versions were exported from there.</i></p>
PROOFREADER:	<p>The final stage is hiring a professional proofreader to check for typos and formatting mistakes. This is just prior to publication and has not been completed for the version submitted for the MCE.</p>

Figure 12 - Overview of drafting process

VELLUM PUBLISHING SOFTWARE

For my novel, self-publishing is the most accessible path to market and the only guaranteed pathway to commercialization.⁴ It also offers the creative freedom to write the book I wanted to write. Self-publishing requires extra steps beyond producing a finished manuscript. For this purpose, I used a software called *Vellum*.

Once a manuscript is completed, publishers need to produce a variety of e-book and print versions to highly specific formatting requirements for distributors.⁵ Vellum is designed for automatically generating these publishing formats. This step became an integral part of my overall development structure and the process helped keep the project well organised and safely backed up.

Using a single Microsoft Word file to write a novel, results in a document that's quite challenging to manage and navigate. Instead, I kept each chapter as a separate Word document. These always remained the master versions. As each chapter draft was completed and updated, I copied and pasted the contents into the Vellum document. This made it very easy to keep the many drafts and versions clearly organised.

⁴ While traditional publishing might offer a possible path to market, it is giving the decision to publish or not to other people. This does not constitute a viable business plan (more a hope or dream). See the separate business pitch deck document for further information on self-publishing.

⁵ Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, Google Play, Kobo, Nook and generic eBooks, plus print versions for paperback and hardback in a variety of sizes.

Below is an example of the entire book in Vellum (displayed as e-book):

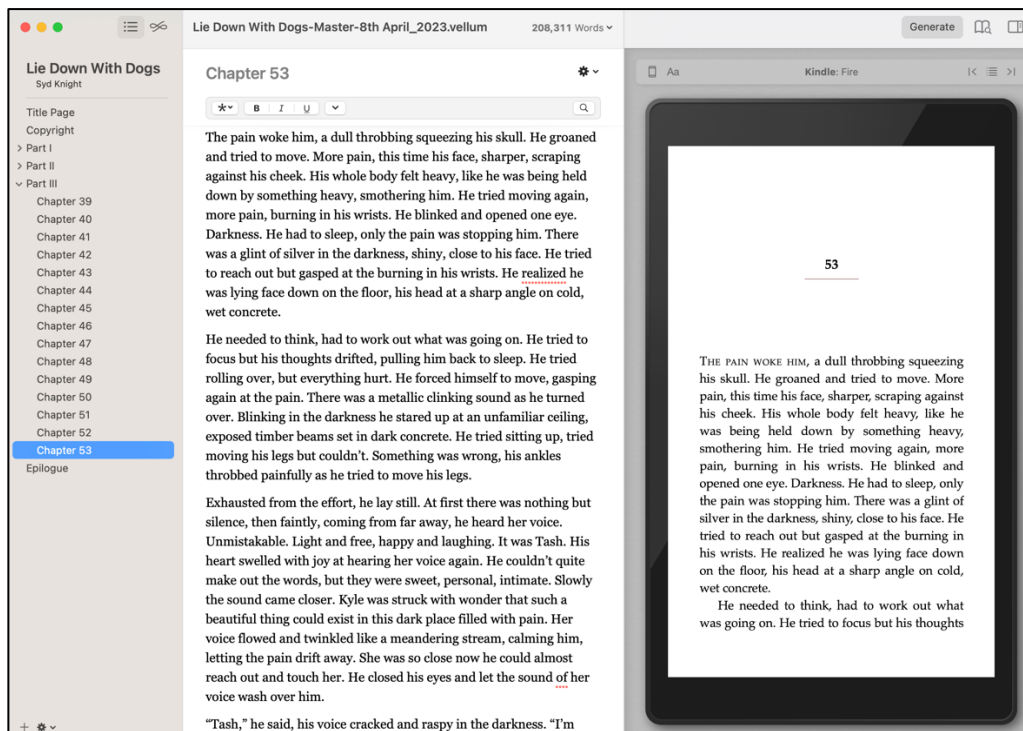


Figure 13 - Vellum project manuscript

FORMALISE THE SYSTEM, FOLLOW THE SYSTEM, THEN JUST WRITE

After developing these methods, writing the book became a (long) process of perseverance. Once I had the system in place, I stuck to it exactly. Having a story roadmap to follow, and a well-organized plan was vital for making me feel secure in the knowledge that if I stuck to this plan, I would have a completed novel by the end. I do have a particular personality type that needs this clear structure, but once in place this gave me the freedom to focus on the fun part, writing.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

As a new author, writing this novel was intended to be a learning experience. In critically reflecting on my methods, the distinction between the quality of my writing and the methods used to create the novel is important. My research focussed on macro-level methods for developing a full-length novel, not the micro-details of creative writing prose. Measured against the goal of completing a novel, my methods were successful. However, deeper critical reflection on the project reveals the key learnings from this research.

MULTIPLE DRAFTS AT CHAPTER LEVEL

My development method differs from some authors by completing multiple edit passes at a chapter-by-chapter level within the first draft. Much of the advice I read suggested writers should complete a first draft of the entire book before doing any revision. I can understand the rationale of this. You avoid perfecting sentences and paragraphs that may end up being discarded later. And for pantsers who are writing without a story outline, the first draft will likely contain significant content which will be discarded later. Working to a pre-planned story outline however, there was significantly less of my first draft which was discarded, making these early editorial revisions worthwhile.

Also, as a new writer I needed to learn as I wrote. Completing a draft of a full-length novel before getting substantial feedback seemed too high risk for me. In particular, fundamental learning and decisions around style and voice were developed as I wrote. Feedback on each chapter allowed me to address, improve and apply

relevant learnings to each subsequent chapter. This chapter-by-chapter, iterative approach, resulted in clear improvements in my writing as the book progressed. For an experienced author this may not be important and slow down the process unnecessarily, but for me it was critical.

LEAVING A TIDY TRAIL

An additional benefit of this chapter-by-chapter editing approach, was the idea of *leaving a tidy trail*. To me this meant that when I came back for subsequent drafts, I had a better first draft to work with. Essentially, I was front-loading more of the work, thereby making later drafts easier. A writer who does a faster and rougher first draft, may face more substantial challenges at the second draft stage. My second draft was more about refining prose and style rather than fundamental changes to the story. This was also a direct benefit of my early, and ongoing story planning work.

STORY CARDS

Inevitably, the final quality of this novel primarily reflects my current skill as a writer, rather than the development methods I used. But I have no doubt I will use card-based story outlining in the future. For me, pre-planning story using physical cards is a highly effective process and supports a faster progression towards a quality story and a completed book. I discarded far fewer written chapters than I would have predicted and made no major changes to plot lines or characters after the first draft. While the entire story was planned in advance, I often amended my story cards to adjust what I would write next. That meant a lot of the creative work focussed on how to transition from story outline point A to point B, rather than an open ended, *what happens next?*

If I was using a pantsers approach, I could see myself getting lost in the story development process. The initial free flow writing stage might result in a huge jumble of different plots and characters that need to be cut, combined and rearranged in significant ways. That's a very challenging process when working with a large manuscript. There are of course plenty of successful examples of the pantsers approach, but what we don't see is data on how many people using this method give up and don't complete a novel. I am a goal-orientated person, so psychologically, having a clear path to follow gave me the confidence I needed to complete this daunting project.

ART IS EMOTION - FEAR, FLOW, ELATION

Academic research in creative arts benefits from recognising and engaging with human emotions as a fundamental part of the art form. Artist's work with their own emotions as they create, and they embed these emotions in their work. Audiences feel these emotions when engaging with the completed work. When researching the development process, a critical reflection on the emotional aspects of the project is important as it is one of the fundamental challenges that all creative artists face. These emotions are the barriers, challenges and rewards that a writer (or any artist) must engage with in their practice.

My undergraduate creative writing studies focussed on short form projects, but the emotional journey of writing a full-length novel was a profoundly different experience. Three years of working on this book has enabled me to recognise the emotional patterns which occur, and this recognition has made the process easier. Each new chapter I wrote triggered a similar cycle of emotions that many artists would

recognize. Acknowledging and accepting these emotions was a vital part of my growth as an author and supported the completion of this book.

FEAR

Before writing every new chapter, I feel fear: fear that I won't be able to convert my idea into a good story. Initially this prevents me from writing. In my mind the idea is perfect: exciting emotions, quality prose, an engaging reader experience. But when confronted with a blank page, all that exists is the hope that I can do it. And once I actually write that hope gives way to whatever it is I am actually capable of delivering. I'm scared that by writing it, I will ruin my perfect idea. I think this feeling is common to many artists and is a significant barrier to the early stages of any creative work.

Now that I have more experience of this cycle of fear, I have developed a degree of faith in the process. Knowing I have written decent chapters before gives me faith that I can do it again. Recognising this emotion as just one stage in a process (the worst stage in fact), allows me to face that fear and start writing.

THE FLOW STATE

In the book *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (1996, Harper), author Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi analysed the concept of flow in creative work. This is characterized by a merging of action and awareness, the disappearance of self-consciousness, and a distorted sense of time (111–13). In my own work this sense of flow is a powerful part of my love for creative writing. When

there are no more chores to do or social media to surf, when the fear of not writing anything finally overtakes the fear of writing badly, then the real work can begin.

Once I start, it always surprises me how quickly I became totally immersed in that flow of creative thought. Humans experience this flow state in many activities: intense sports, music, meditation, reading. It's the experience of being lost in the moment: no past, or future, no outside world. Experiencing this flow state has taught me that if I sit down and write, it will happen. I won't just stare into space with nothing to say. And where once there was nothing but a blank page, miraculously, there will be something new. Knowing that flow state will come helps me to begin.

This experience for the writer also has an important connection to the reader. When I am immersed in that flow state while writing, pouring my energy and emotion into the words, that feeling is captured on the page. It becomes part of what the reader experiences. Human emotion is embedded in the work and it's one of the powerful things creative artworks give to their audience.

ELATION

When the first draft of a new chapter is finally done, I walk away knowing that it will no longer dissolve into smoke or dust if I turn my back. Where before there was nothing, now I have created something real and enduring. The quality may be good or bad, but that doesn't matter. I know I can make it better later on. I have triumphed over the fear, got lost in the flow, and that feeling of elation will stay with me for days. That feeling is what I love about creative writing.

Through writing this novel, I've learned I will face this same emotional cycle every time I write a new chapter. Every blank page is daunting. But experience has taught me to accept these challenges and have faith that I will overcome the fear and get the emotional rewards. All I need to do is turn up and follow the words. That is comforting knowledge and allows me to write with a free spirit. I think acknowledging and sharing these emotional experiences is an important contribution to the body of knowledge in creative arts.

CONCLUSION

When drawing conclusions about this project, it's important to contextualize them within the aims of the research. Examining a creative writing project is not a scientific experiment that can be deemed a success or failure. Yet, undertaking an academic analysis of one's own methods is worthwhile information to share with others working in the similar fields.

Research into story development methods via the pantsers or plotter approaches, suggested these were less binary than first appeared. The differing methods can be understood as a choice to front load story development work prior to a first draft, or to use the first draft as an exploratory tool, leaving more story development work to the second draft. My experience suggests the two approaches have more in common than initially presumed, and both are valid methods.

My background in film production significantly impacted my approach to this project. Using a systems-based development structure provided a clear process for managing the project, giving me freedom to focus on the creative work. Using story cards to pre-plan and update the evolving narrative offered a simple and accessible physical format for working with complex story construction, offering a visual representation of the entire story throughout the process. It also provided a clear roadmap to follow throughout the writing.

Progressive chapter-by-chapter feedback from a developmental editor, and the resulting early revisions, supported my ongoing learning and improved the quality of the work at the first draft stage. This reduced the re-writing work in subsequent drafts.

This research sought to analyse aspects of my own creative writing experience and share these methods with other authors and academics. By documenting and critically reflecting on these methods I hope we can help one another develop our own unique approaches and share this learning with everyone working in creative writing practice.

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