

# A Novel Idea

✘ If you had to choose one month of the year full of deranged activities that have spread like wildfire through the power of the internet, November would be a top candidate. Not content with changing its name to '[Movember](#)' in a bid to have men raise cancer awareness by growing outrageous moustaches, it's also home to National Novel Writing Month, or NaNoWriMo for short.

The goal of NaNoWriMo is simple. In the month of November, you sit down and write a book. Or at least 50, 000 words of one. You do **not** go back and re-read or edit these words until either the month is over, or you have reached your word count. Going back will invite your inner critic to tell you the whole thing is nonsense and you must delete it at once, and then you'll never finish.

Look at the video here.

This was the brainchild of a small group of American friends in San Francisco 1999. They initially wanted to write novels "for the same dumb reasons twentysomethings start bands. Because we wanted to make noise. Because we didn't have anything better to do. And because we thought that, as novelists, we would have an easier time getting dates than we did as non-novelists."

Ten years later in 2009, 165,000 people across the world signed up to complete the challenge.

But why is this of interest to us? Well, given that Edinburgh is the self styled [city of literature](#), it would be a bit surprising if we didn't join in. And sure enough there are just over 200 Edinburgh people primed and ready to take part in NaNo 2010. According to local organiser Terry Rodgers, this is roughly the same number as Glasgow or Newcastle, or as

the whole of Norway or Spain.

So why would anyone put themselves through the drama of writing 50,000 words in 30 days? This averages out at 1,666.66667 words per day. Do these people not have jobs?!

“For fun!” Rodgers tells us. “The only reason for doing it is because you think it might be satisfying.”

“50, 000 words seems daunting at first, but you can break it down into chapters and smaller scenes. It’s more important to enjoy the process of writing than to see it as a daily chore to get to a particular word count. Certainly, nobody should feel bad just because they haven’t written as much as the person next to them!”

That’s all very well, but I don’t have the time, might be the response of the average person with a job, kids or other commitments. Not so, Rodgers argues.

“If you can get up early in the morning, or find time between teatime and going to bed, that could give you a few good hours. If you commute by public transport you could take a laptop and squeeze in time then, or during your lunch break. On top of that, you’ve got a whole weekend to play with.”

“It’s easy to think of excuses or reasons why you can’t do it – but what about all the reasons why you can? If you don’t write anything, then this time next year you’ll be twelve months older, but with one thing less to show for it. I’ve encouraged people to [list](#) what other things are going on in their life that might stop them from writing – and then decide why they won’t!”

There is also a lot of support available. Rodgers’ co-organiser, Karen Harding, has made sure the Edinburgh group is present on [twitter](#), [facebook](#) and in the [blogsphere](#) as well as on the main [NaNo](#) site. With this enveloping online presence it will always be possible to find someone nearby to give you

a bit of encouragement.

So who are the 200 Edinburghers ignoring all the reasons why this is a silly idea and doing it anyway? “You can get teenagers who’ve been writing fiction since they learnt how or retirees writing their first story,” Rodgers says, “but none of that really matters. Knowing that everyone has the same challenge and faces the tyranny of a blank page is a great equaliser.”

It’s also a good way of bringing Edinburgh’s writers together. Members meet to write together in coffee shops well in advance of the November 1<sup>st</sup> start date. Last year younger participants organised their own write-ins for under-16s, whilst second year Geophysics student ‘jammycarrot’ set up a university ‘word war’ to give students an extra incentive to finish. Edinburgh University beat Napier by only 1,080 words, and there is plenty of good-natured rivalry on the subject on the online forums.

‘Word wars’ exist between different regions in the UK and Ireland too. These incorporate dares to make things interesting or weird, such as random phrases, objects, places or characters you have to add at some point in your story, and aim to see who can get the highest average word count, or the highest proportion of people reaching 50,000 words.

With this in mind, anyone who has ever thought that they have a novel in them might want to reach in and extract it in the coming month. Details of meetings can be found [here](#), or you can go it alone as long as you register [here](#). Perhaps the time could also be used to grow a particularly jaunty moustache.