



## How I Write

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Paul Adam

I MAINLY WRITE THRILLERS and crime novels which require tighter, more complex plots than some other types of literature. And those plots don't come either quickly or easily to me. I can sit down in a morning and write a few hundred words of a novel in progress. Even if they're not very good words I then, at least, have something I can rewrite. But I can't do the same with plotting. It doesn't come like that. It can't be forced. It develops organically over a period of time.

Most of my books have required a lot of research or reading. I've written thrillers about contemporary neo-fascism in Italy, fraud and cigarette smuggling in the EU, the search for the next Dalai Lama, GM crops, the 21st-century surveillance society in which we live and many other subjects. For all of them I read widely, talked to experts in the relevant fields and also visited, if possible, the locations I was going to write about to get an authentic feel for them. In the process, the plots and the development of my characters gradually take shape.

I generally have quite a detailed plan in place before I start writing my first draft. It's not set in stone. I have the scope to be flexible and to change course if I need to, but my books need structure and a solid, well thought-out advance plan gives me the skeleton on which I can hang the flesh of my story. Writing a novel is such a long process, a slow accretion of words over a period of months, that without that plan I would lose my way and end up in difficulty.



I write all my books initially with a pen and a pad of A4 paper which I know is slightly old-fashioned. I think this may be partly because I started my career in the pre-computer age when rewriting on a typewriter was a laborious and time-consuming task. Changing a paragraph or two necessitated rewriting lots of pages. But it's also a creative choice. I feel I write better with a pen than through the mechanical process of tapping out words on a keyboard and I would rather stare all day at a blank sheet of paper than a glowing screen.

I don't write particularly fast. I like to spend time getting my first draft right. The writing, of course, does end up on a computer. After I've done my original work for the day, I type it all up. This might sound like an arduous duplication of effort, but it's actually my first edit. It makes me re-read carefully what I've written and rewrite it if it needs more work. Once the entire first draft is completed, I print it out and start the detailed process of rewriting on paper again. This could take me several more months before the manuscript is ready for the most terrifying part of the whole writing process: showing the book to my wife.