

How to (at least try to) schedule a novel

Albert Einstein defined “insanity” as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. I guess that makes me a stark raving loony. I try to write my books on a schedule. Key word there is “try.”

Now if anyone should be able to schedule writing a novel and make it stick, it’s me. I write very thorough plot outlines, and I’m an obsessive-compulsive, overachieving control freak. I thought that would be enough. I was wrong. I don’t necessarily mind being wrong (I can hear my husband laughing now), but I’m arriving at the conclusion that novel writing—like any other creative endeavor—refuses to be confined to the schedule of a mere mortal.

Before I start a book, I’ll sit down with a calendar and map it out. I try to allow at least nine months from the time I start writing until I turn it in to my editor. Nine months. You’d think if a woman can grow an entire human being in that length of time, I should be able to write a book. Barely. After having written five books, I know that the best laid plans really don’t amount to a pile of pucky in the face of a creature (aka a book) that refuses to be scheduled.

Why is this? Well, life gets in the way. Family, friends, your day job, holidays, the colds that are waiting to jump on you, and then here come the copy edits and galley proofs for the book you’ve just finished writing.

But the biggest problem is the book itself. A chapter that I thought would write quickly, doesn’t. In other sections, characters refuse to talk to me. Which as I’ve told you before means that I’m trying to put words in their mouths, rather than me shutting up and listening to what they have to say. (I’m sure my husband’s laughing really hard reading this part.)

So what I’ve discovered about scheduling a novel is that you can try, and if you succeed consider yourself blessed — just don’t go into your next project expecting it to cooperate. And don’t freak out when it happens (however, anger is perfectly acceptable).

My second book came in a white-hot rush. My third, fourth, and fifth? Uh, not so much. There’s no rhyme or reason to scheduling a book. Each one is different and grows according to its own schedule; and if I don’t like it . . . well, tough. I’m ultra-organized control freak; so the whole process makes me nuts. I like for everything to go in a nice, orderly, and time-considerate fashion. Never happens.

So if you’re writing a novel and trying to keep it on schedule, you’re probably finding that it’s like trying to herd kittens. Can’t be done. Take comfort in the fact that you’re not alone. In fact, welcome to the club.