

Writers Tips:

Essays on a variety
of topics from over 20 writers



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Recapturing the Elusive Muse - by Sharon Connors

I don't know about you, but more times than not, life's demands have pulled me away from my writing for so long, I tend to lose the delicate thread connecting me with that wonderfully imaginative voice inside my head known as my 'muse'. When I come back and try to pick up where I left off, the characters seem to shun me and the muse seals itself off like the vault housing the National Treasure. So, there I sit with the prompt flashing at me mockingly and nothing but frustration growing in my empty, colorless thoughts.

I am sure this is something all writers are familiar with and dread probably a hair's width less than a total system crash when you haven't backed up your files. Anyway, let's get back to the discussion at hand, how to recapture that 'elusive muse'.

The following is how I learned to handle the problem and it has worked for me every time. Instead of getting upset and frustrated, I walk away. I keep the story or idea in the back of my mind and allow it to fester. I avoid stressing myself over not being able to continue the work in progress. Instead, I turn to something different such as other writing, editing, and critiquing projects, or any number of household chores and various other activities I love such as reading, gardening, etc.

I entice my muse to allow me to pick up the thread. Patiently, I explore new ideas and new plot lines, but until the muse returns and I actually have something to write, I wait. Patience and persistence is the key. It may take days, sometimes weeks, but it always comes back to me and because there is no pressure, the muse seems to pick me up and carry me further and further into the piece without much effort at all.

The real solution to this problem some refer to as writers' block would be to set aside a set time every single day to exercise your creativity. Craft

experts agree, if you follow a structured schedule for writing, you will constantly be in the parameters of the work in progress, never losing touch with the story line or the characters. Unfortunately for me, this is not always possible, so I have found the most effective way to deal with it for my lifestyle.

As with anything in life, if you try to force a result, it will buck and fight you at every turn. Therefore, the secret is to allow your creative voice the freedom to come and go as it chooses. Yeah, I agree, it seems even the muse has a mind of its own. Go figure.

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A writer's worst enemy: File loss - by Sharon Connors

How many of you have sat hours diligently working on a piece of writing only to have batteries go dead on a writing device, or a power outage and your system does not automatically back up your work? How about a system crash and you can't even get your computer past the start up mode?

I have experienced at least a couple of these scenarios and not by way of any negligence on my part. I use a battery-operated word processor that enables me to write anywhere. It has the capability of infrared transfer and is a wonderful tool and if I might add much cheaper than purchasing a laptop. The only problem I found, unfortunately, is contrary to what the owner's manual states, the unit does not save files when the batteries run down or have been taken out of the unit.

Consequently, after spending an entire afternoon working on a chapter of my work in progress, I closed out, saved my file and the unit went dead. No problem, I thought and went to get new batteries, installed them and brought the unit back up only to find zippo, nada, no files! You can well imagine how I felt. After I had a crying fit, and exhausted my efforts to figure out how such a thing could have happened, I bucked up, sat myself down and wrote an outline of everything I'd written that day. Fortunately, the other files on the unit had already been uploaded to my main computer.

Solution: Always transfer any work done on this type of unit to your main computer regularly to avoid memory loss at an inopportune time.

Other file loss dangers are system problems, such as viruses, spam, crashes, and a multitude of other issues that I can't even begin to name because I am not a computer programmer or computer repair literate. I have someone I pay to handle that for me.

Solution: Be sure to have virus and spyware protection, and update your software often. I will be the first to attest to this. Though I have always had virus protection active on my computer, I didn't even consider spyware until my system crashed. I had my entire computer wiped out and reloaded several times before we discovered the cause to be spyware dragging the system down until it could no longer run. Take it from me, Anti-Spyware is a must and there are several good ones out there. Many virus programs offer spyware in their packages. I use Norton Internet Security and Virus Protection and Ad-aware SE Plus specifically for spyware protection. Both can be downloaded for free trial and purchased for yearly coverage at

reasonable cost. AOL offers Spyware Protection and it's free, but I feel better with the added protection.

My last suggestion has become the most important change I've made to protect my writing files from any loss hazard. I recently purchased what is called a 'memory stick'. It is an amazing tiny device you can carry on a key ring that can retain a variety of different mega bites (mb) of information. The one I purchased holds 256mb of memory called the SanDisk Cruzer Mini USB Flash Drive, though there are a multitude of distributors. They are specifically designed to enable file transfer between a main computer system and laptop, but I find it an excellent way to backup my files in the event something happens to a floppy or CD. All you do is plug it into a USB port and follow the instructions. It's so easy and secure and they are reasonably priced. You can check them out on E-Bay, Amazon or anywhere computer accessories are sold.

Note: When using flash drives, always use the computer operating system to unplug, unload or eject the hardware before manually yanking it out of the machine. If you do not, you may experience file corruption and loss.

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Are You Prepared To Be An Author? - by Dorothy Thompson

You've written the book, sent it to a publisher, and received that wonderful acceptance letter. All your dreams and aspirations have come true and you find yourself snoopy dancing around the living room, giddy with excitement. You congratulate yourself for a job well done and sit back and wait for those glorious royalty checks to come in. You have been told or read that self-promotion is essential to make sure your book sells and you are prepared for that. Or, are you?

Many new authors have the misconception that the publisher will do all the work for you but as you will learn, publishers leave the brunt of the promoting on you. Self-publishing and print-on-demand authors have it even harder, for all the work of promoting will fall in their hands, but the same rules apply to those authors who are published with traditional houses, too.

Do You Have What It Takes To Shamelessly Promote?

As any seasoned author knows, your book will not sit there and sell itself. Your publisher can only do so much. You have to think of it as teamwork. Your publisher has your best interests in mind as well as his own.

The first place to promote your book is a website. Millions of internet-users will have access to your site and building a website is not only easy once you get the hang of it, but fun, too. Sometimes, your publisher will provide a webpage for you, but if you are not one of the lucky ones, what do you do?

There are dozens of web hosts that are free or charge a minimal price. Those that I would recommend are:

Homestead

<http://www.homestead.com>

Geocities

<http://www.geocities.com>

Tripod

<http://www.tripod.com>

Some of these come with annoying advertisements and for a small fee, you can have them removed. These web hosts are all easy to learn and provide tutorials.

Your webpage should include the following: book cover, link to where potential buyers can purchase your book, a clear crisp recent photo of you, reviews, endorsements, and contact information.

Another way to shamelessly promote yourself is to add your book details in your signature tagline with every email you send out. Round up all the addresses in your book and send them a note that your book is finally released. If you don't get bold, your book stands no chance. Get out there and brag, brag, brag!

Are You Available For Interviews?

Are you prepared to be interviewed about yourself and your book? It's no time to be shy or tongue-tied. No one will buy your book if you have nothing to say!

You can prepare yourself for this day by making a list of questions you might think an interviewer might ask you. You can be confident they will ask you the ordinary questions like "How did you get your start as a writer?" or "What are you currently working on?", but, are you prepared for questions such as "When it comes to promotion, what lengths have you gone to in order to increase reader awareness of your work?" or "What are the key selling points of your book?". Believe me, they will ask.

This is where your press kit comes in. Before the interview, send them your press kit. Not only will they appreciate this, but it's common procedure and will make you look more professional. I buy a folder and place a copy of the cover of my book on the front for appeal. Inside I have another copy of my book cover, a single-page write-up of what my book is about, an author bio sheet, a recent photo of myself, any reviews that I may have secured as well as past interviews, and articles I placed in the paper myself about my book, as well as press releases. You might also want to add in a sample question and answer sheet so that the potential interviewer will have an ! idea of what to ask.

I also make sure this folder has side pockets for pertinent information such as my business card with my contact information listed on it.

Are You Prepared For Book Signings?

I am a member of several online writing and critique groups. One question I asked them to prepare for this article was, "Which promotional method helps the most for selling your book?" The answer unequivocally was book signings. While one of the most feared, this was the most profitable in terms

of book sales. As long as you have done your homework and come prepared, book signings can boost your exposure and sell more books than any other promotional outlet. The key here is “doing your homework”.

It might help to attend a book signing in your area before you have to hold your own. Note what makes this particular author interesting. Is he/she sitting at a desk waiting for people to come to her or is she mingling with the crowd? One prominent author friend of mine never sits. She doesn't even allow the bookstore manager to put a chair down for her. She feels she won't get the urge to be unsociable this way. Moving around makes her seem more people friendly and, thus, more approachable.

Another good approach many authors possess at book signings is “their signature”. One author of a children's picture book about turtles brings her pet turtle in for a “show and tell”. Youngsters love this. This approach is good for the author who might like some of the spotlight taken off them and onto something else.

Another author who wrote a Caribbean romance story showed up at her book signing dressed in a flowery dress with dangly seashell earrings.

To sell your book, you have to sell yourself. Shameless promoting not only puts money in your pocket, but the recognition is priceless. Now isn't the time to be shy. Get out there and promote, promote, promote!

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Dorothy Thompson is the compiling editor/writer of ROMANCING THE SOUL - TRUE STORIES OF SOUL MATES FROM AROUND THE WORLD AND BEYOND and is the editor of The Writer's Life (www.thewriterslife.net), one of Writer's Digest Magazines Top 101 Websites. She is also a syndicated relationship columnist and a chick/hen lit writer. You can visit her website at www.dorothythompson.net or email her at thewriterslife@yahoo.com.

Do The Unfamiliar To Keep Your Writing Going - by Catherine Franz

One of the best ways to blow someone's winning streak during a tennis game is to comment on how great they are doing. Your comment will kick in their left brain's inner critic which will zap their flow and change their focus. In tennis this is an underhanded type of gamesmanship.

In life, it happens to each of us all the time. Even writers.

In writing, the same thing occurs as soon as the right side of the brain, the right hemisphere, gets a break, the left side begins editorializing. Even if the left side compliments you on your progress or the time you committed, it still zaps the flow. Flow stops, hiccups, and the writing or idea doesn't get to the next step.

This event affects us all in more than just writing.

There is not any particular time frame when this occurs either. It may occur when writing something short, like an article, memo, or email. Or it might not occur until chapter six of your book. This is why the free-writing exercise works so well. It allows your right brain to tell the left side to shut up for particular amount of time.

There is actually only one way to get the writing flowing again. It is doing some thing unfamiliar. When you are doing something unfamiliar the left side doesn't know how to logically respond. The left side then can't be its helpful self. Flow, intuition, and ideas naturally return with a renewed rhythm.

Whenever I am trying to describe something, my logic side kicks in and brings the next action to a halt. The self talk begins to say, "How can any words describe this beautiful sunrise?" Since drawing isn't a familiar item for me, I pull out a few drawing pencils or a watercolor brush and play. The drawing isn't something I do often. If I did, it would then become familiar and that self would stop me. It doesn't take but a few minutes of doing something unfamiliar before the flow flourishes again and I am able to return to the description or writing.

Always remember, all the words we use in our first draft look like ordinary words. It isn't until later that their appearance changes to extraordinary.

The left self is always telling us that every day scenes or objects are just

ordinary. A mere beer bottle on the side of the road can receive a message, "So what." When we push the situation we usually ask, "How can I make this come alive?" By doing something unfamiliar in the mind or in some type of action can we release the right side to the freedom to find the words. Do so by seeing the ordinary, describing the ordinary. At this moment, you begin using both sides of the brain. I guarantee that whatever you write will never be ordinary. Extraordinary writing is ordinary writing practiced.

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Critique: Take it Easy, Give it Nice - by Marius Benta

To your writing career, critique is both unavoidable and indispensable. Unavoidable because this is a free world, but why indispensable?

- The act of writing is probably very intimate and precious to you. And it's very good that this is so. But you may find it difficult to take a distance from your own creations and see their imperfections. Perhaps the first gain from having your work criticized is that it helps you to improve, but it's definitely not the only one.
- Very often the others will discover in your texts things you haven't planned or expected. You may see them describing for hours the intricate symbolism of your story and the subtle meanings of your themes, while you say to yourself, "What are these people talking about? I've never thought of such symbols and themes! How is that possible?" When you create your stories, your mind works at all the levels of consciousness. No matter the extent of rational planning and structure you give your story, you will still add an important amount of unconscious substance to the composition, generally through spontaneous and emotionally driven choices. You can't be aware of these non-rational elements because, by definition, unconsciousness escapes rational scrutiny. When you receive a critique, you may earn something even more valuable: knowledge about the inner depths of your personality.
- For the mercantilist side of you, feedback can also be an easy way to identify and test your audience. You can't write for everybody, and don't even have to. If people tell you, "I hate your story," you must not panic right away. Instead, consider that maybe they simply don't share your preference for certain styles and themes. You just need to know what sort of people you're writing for.
- There are two angels out there: one is beautiful, the other is ugly. You'll have to face them both. Knowing how to deal with rejection is an important skill to any writer, and listening to criticism is, again, the first step to acquiring that skill. For a whole good year after I received my first rejection letter, I wrote almost nothing because the tone of that letter was, at least in my perception, arrogant and mean. Learning how to cope with the beautiful angel can be a painful experience, too. But right now we don't want to talk about that, do we?

How to take it?

- Be always grateful, and never lose your courtesy. It's true that some people take great pleasure at demeaning others. If you feel that someone is attacking you personally instead of offering you a fair critique of your work, say a polite thank you, and this will calm him/her down. Let them feel that you can assume, at least for five minutes, your condition as disciple and their status as expert. Most likely, you will have the chance to switch seats soon.
- Take it easy. While positive feedback can boost your self-esteem, you may feel deeply offended by negative comments. Take your time and reflect on what your reviewers have said about your piece. Decide what are the points you agree with and the points you don't. You only need to take those suggestions that are useful to you and help you grow. Try to find ways of improving your writing accordingly and never let a negative comment affect your motivation. If you want to write action-driven stories, don't let yourself be turned down by the comments of someone who enjoys character-driven plots, or vice-versa. Ultimately, you are the author and you must have the final word on your writing.
- Ask for more if you need to. If you feel you haven't grasped some of your reviewers' points, ask them to elaborate. Tell them to give you some examples, or to be more specific. Many tensions and useless arguments could be avoided if people learned how to make themselves clear.

Why give feedback?

- First, because we all need a fair trade. Thinking they will appear modest and well behaved, beginners often say, "I'm not qualified to offer a critique." They would just like to have their texts read by others and find out "if there's any good in it." This is a mistake. With such an attitude, they only look selfish and discourteous, since they aren't prepared to spend their time and patience reading someone else's story, thinking about it, and giving comments on it. Unless you can afford to pay your reviewers, you need to give feedback if you want to receive it.
- Second, because you need to develop your critical and self-critical skills. You are not just helping others; you help improve your self-editing skills, too.

- Third, it helps you see where you stand and build your scale of values. There will always be people who write better than you do, and there will always be people who write worse. This is not a race against other writers, of course. But to write well, you need a healthy self-esteem. Criticizing other people's work can give you the confidence to reach the level of someone whom you consider a better artist.
- Finally, critiquing can be a great opportunity to make new friends. In the publishing industry, social networking is very important, if not crucial. You never know who is going to open that door for you when you need it.

How to give it?

- Avoid such easy answers as, "Oh, I love that" or, "Oh, I hate that." You may read a story so well written that you think nothing needs to be changed. But maybe you could still elaborate a bit: Why did you like the piece? Why do you think it was so well written? What were your favorite parts? Any writer is impressed when you quote a fragment of their story. If you just say, "I like it, really!" they may think you are graciously avoiding giving negative critique.
- Be tactful. Writers are very sensitive about their work. Honesty is indeed essential to constructive criticism, but there are a thousand ways of being honest. According to Umberto Eco --one of the giants of modern semiotics-- it is not so important what you say as the way you say it.
- Never omit the good points. You have just read a story, and your first feeling is of total disgust. That story may indeed be a complete failure. Still, breathe deeply before you say anything, and try to search for the little positive side. Every great writer was once a beginner. And beginners can learn unbelievably quickly. So try to balance your discourse by mentioning such things as, "You have an ability to express genuine feelings" or, "You have a very interesting choice of subject." I am talking now from the abundant well of my own sins. This was one of the mistakes I perpetrated for a long time in a critique group I used to frequent. For some reason, I seemed to take it for granted that "the writer is already aware of his/her qualities, and I am here to help them identify their weak side." Imagine those young writers and guess how they felt when all I had to say about their texts was negative criticism. No, they didn't take it

for granted. They may have been aware of their good side, yet were still expecting me to see it and point it out.

- Don't make it a personal business. If you have to make negative comments, avoid addressing the writer directly ("you say," "you think," "you fail to"); rather, try to show that you are criticizing the text, not the author ("this text is," "grammar needs," etc.).
- Do make it a personal business! If you have a positive comment to make, then it is a very good idea to address it to the writer in a personal way.
- Organize your discourse. You can bring structure to your thoughts if you have a list of items to look out for when reading a text for critique (such as: style, subject, characterization, or plot) and keep these elements distinct from each other. If a text has addressed a boring and overused subject, but was written in a pleasant and witty style, try not to let one perception overshadow the other.
- Mention the weak points not as failures, but as possible improvements. Instead of saying, "Your style brings up every homicidal tendency in me," you can put it simply, "This text needs some polishing here and there." If you are already familiar with that writer's work, it is a good idea to make comparisons with other texts of theirs, especially if you have noticed any improvement.
- Be specific. If you need to say the style needs polishing, point out one or two sentences that you think are wrong. If you need to say the characters were stereotypical, support your argument with an example. Failing to grasp a general comment that has been made on their work can be a very frustrating experience to a writer.
- Avoid overdoing it. If you pick up examples of bad writing, limit yourself to a reasonable number; there is no need to spend an hour and dissect the whole thing, except if you have previously agreed to edit someone's work thoroughly.
- Assume your subjective standpoint. Sometimes you can say, "I would do this in a different way," instead of bluntly claiming, "This is wrong." You may try to rephrase their sentences to illustrate your comments. But be aware that most writers feel uncomfortable when anyone attempts to rewrite their story.

- Take everyone from where they are. Give them what they need and as much as they can take. Don't venture into sophisticated criticism just to show a fourteen-year-old novice how competent a critic you are. Try to think up the level of that author. They don't need to jump to the top by a single leap; they just need to step to the next level.

Where to do it?

- Look for critique groups in your area or online communities that share your interests of genre and style. Sometimes it's difficult to find the right group in your neighborhood. It is better to join one even though they are specialized in a genre that is not your cup of tea than not at all. Chances are good you will find people who share your preferences and have joined the club for a similar reason.

And finally...

- Critique is important to your career. But if you feel you just need to work on your own and stay away from criticism, then do so.
- Trust your instinct.

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Marius Benta has enjoyed offering and receiving critiques on stories, essays, and drama in several writers' groups for the past 15 years. His recent work has appeared in [Local Minds](#) and is forthcoming in [Versal](#). Marius is a PhD student in Sociology with University College Cork (Ireland), and a journalist in Eastern Europe. You can find more from his website: <http://www.geocities.com/imbenta/fiction.html>.

Twelve Tips For Writing Dialogue - by Pamela Ridley

At some point in your novel, your characters will have to talk to each other. Strong dialogue will instantly elevate your writing beyond the beginning stage.

To get dialogue right, it helps to take a favorite book and study how established writers do it. If it's done correctly, you will observe the following twelve points:

1. Each new speaker gets a new paragraph.

The ending punctuation in the direct quote comes before the closing quotation mark. When the tag, or the words that designate the speaker, comes after the quote, it starts with a lowercase letter unless it is a proper noun:

"Mary has other obligations," he said.

"Jim, go with Lou," Kate said.

"Did you eat the last cookie?" she asked.

2. If the tag comes after the quote, the ending punctuation inside the quote may be a question mark, and exclamation mark or a comma. There's never a period at the end of the quotation if a tag follows.

"Hey girl! You're looking good these days!" Paul said.

"Can we watch the movie now?" his sister asked.

"Let's have chili for dinner," she said.

3. If the tag comes before the quote, and begins a sentence, it starts with a capital letter and a comma comes after it:

Mark said, "It's getting dark now."

The detective asked, "Is this the right address?"

4. When the direct quotation is in parts, capitalize the first word in the first part, but leave the first word in the second part

lowercase unless it's a proper noun.

"Marge, one more thing," George said, "don't let me see you with him again."

5. In the dialogue example from a favorite book, chances are the writer used "said" or "asked" in the tag most of the time and not words such as retorted, responded, embellished, delineated, or cried. Stick with said and asked for the most part. They become invisible allowing the reader to stay in the flow of the story.
6. Note the author does not use a tag every chance she gets, rather she uses it only frequently enough to make sure the reader knows who is speaking.
7. One way to avoid the tag altogether is to have the character performing an action before he speaks:

The man in the green jersey blew on his cup of coffee, staring at her the entire time. "I know you. You're Dana Shelton. I'm curious if you remember me?"

8. Avoid tags that include an adverb:

"I hate you!" she said aggressively.

"Hating you requires too much energy," he said smugly, "but I thought about it."

Some authors use adverbs like this, but they are published authors and can get away with it. Stamp out adverbs in the tag by showing and not telling:

She slammed the door, crossed the room to stand toe-to-toe with him, both hands on her hips. "I hate you!"

9. It is important the characters speaking are not talking heads disconnected from everything around them. To avoid this, establish setting and have your characters engaged in an appropriate activity. Incorporate accompanying character body movements:

Conner stepped on the treadmill and pressed a few buttons. The machine kicked into life with a low roar. He looked over at Chelly.

"You're new here, aren't you?"

The activities the characters do while speaking depend on who they are and what their interests are. Some might be job related. Others will be events that happen in their everyday lives, but help illustrate personality or a plot element.

However, do not attempt to record every single step in an activity. Also, do not rely too heavily on food eating or food preparation, unless food is a major plot element in your book. Show other aspects of the character's life.

10. Tap into all the senses to create the setting. Paint a picture with your words to give the reader enough details to explore a house layout, inhale smells, hear sounds, recognize faces and taste everything your characters experience from fear to a new recipe.
11. Setting and description are critical, but, at the same time, don't drown the story in them. Control the palette to give the reader just the right amount of color.
12. Watch redundancy. Beginning writers often use favorite words or phrases. The redundancy is noticeable. Use the find feature on Word to search and replace.

Following these twelve steps will get you off to a good start writing dialogue.

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*Pamela Ridley writes novels that combine faith, romance and murder. She's also the author of several short stories, poems and children's plays where the topics range from lost treasure to alien encounters. A teacher by profession, and a native of St. Louis, Missouri, she currently resides in Maryland. Look for her first published novel to be released April 2006 called *Between Tears*.*

One Way to Work a Synopsis - by Dorice Nelson

As most of you already know, a synopsis is usually required when you submit to either an editor of a publishing house or to an agent. That synopsis is merely a narrative summary of the main action in your novel—from the beginning to the end. The summary briefly introduces your main characters, generally the protagonist (one or two), the villain and perhaps an important recurring character that influences the story. I give a brief description whenever a character is introduced. A synopsis of two to ten pages is acceptable, but five to six pages are more appropriate.

One important thing to remember is to write your synopsis in third person and in present tense. You need a first line that is absolutely stunning and will catch the attention of whoever is reading. Set your hook or the editor/agent won't read further. Use the strongest verbs possible.

My method of doing a synopsis goes along with much of Alice Orr's teachings. I use a tape recorder, a comfortable spot to sit, something to supply fluids while I talk and a thesaurus within reach. The tape recorder becomes my audience and my friend. I tell it my story in any way it occurs to me at the time and tend to jump from one important action to another but not in any definite sequence. I go from beginning to end.

Later, I play back the tape(s) and use 5" x 8" index cards to write down one-sentence descriptions of each scene I've mentioned on a separate card. I stop the tape, replay it often and but keep going until I have a stack of 50 to 70 cards—my books are long. Sometimes, it takes me as long as a week to complete the cards. As I listen, I tend to get even more ideas for scenes. Once my cards are complete, I put the cards in some kind of sequential chronological order.

At this point, I sit at the dining room table and spread the cards out in front of me. I look for holes in my story, and places where I need to fill in. If I don't know what goes there, I put a blank card as a placeholder and wait until something hits me. Next, I write 2 or 3 sentences that show the scene at its most exciting and brainstorm some of the gaps I see.

Every time I introduce a character, I use another card and place a short description of that character. I gather the cards together and begin to work on the opening—the sentence that hooks the reader, be he/she an editor or agent. Once that is done, I type up the synopsis directly from my cards, using transitional sentences where needed. What I finally wind up with is a

short story without dialogue or much description. I use the synopsis for the construction of the book as well.

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Dorice Nelson is the author of three award-winning historical and romantic adventure novels, published in both print and digital formats with Write Words, Incorporated's Cambridge Book Division. CLAN GUNN: GEREK, set in 1650 Scotland and the first in the Scottish Heritage Series, came out this year, at the end of May. LOST SON OF IRELAND, set in 9th century Ireland during the time of the Norse raids, will be out in September or October. SARATOGA SUMMER: 1863, the first in a Saratoga Series about the five O'Malley brothers, will be out at the end of this month. They can be purchased at a number of stores and at www.cambridgebooks.us for print or www.ebooksonthe.net for e-books.

Finding a Book Publisher - by Jenna Glatzer

Recently, a few writer-friends on the Absolute Write message boards and I were lamenting the fact that many inexperienced writers get tricked into believing that vanity presses and borderline-vanity presses are traditional publishers. We were talking about the numbers mostly—how did so many new writers even find these publishers?

It all became shockingly clear: search engines.

We found that new writers often type phrases like “book publisher,” “find a publisher,” “book publishing,” or “novel publishers” into search engines like Google. And what comes up when you do that? Vanity presses all over the first page, with enticing messages like “Publish fast! We want your book!” Many writers don't dig much deeper than that. They find those first few publishers, submit their manuscripts, and take the first “acceptance letter” that comes their way.

See, vanity and fringe presses caught on a lot faster than I did. They figured out what new writers were searching for and they optimized their web pages to make sure that when a writer typed in keywords like “book publisher” or “novel publisher,” their pages would come up first.

Now, I love the Internet. It's a fabulous tool. But search engines are not the best spot to start your research when you're a new writer in search of a book publishing contract. They'll take you to the last-resort places first.

If you're truly serious about building a career as an author, whether you plan to write novels or nonfiction books, you won't skimp on the research. Aside from the time you spend actually writing the book, researching your publishing options may be your most valuable effort in the publication process. If you put your heart, your labor, your discipline into this manuscript, doesn't it deserve the best home you can find for it?

Choosing a publisher is no simple task, and it's not a decision that should be based on impatience. Yes, the easy way out is to find one of these “we'll accept anything” publishers, turn in your manuscript, and have your book in your hands in a matter of just a couple of months (maybe even weeks). Unfortunately, it's the easy way out only until you actually try to sell the darn thing—then it's about the hardest road you could possibly have taken.

The next simplest way to find a publisher is in the Writer's Market. I look forward to its publication every year; it helps to keep me up-to-date about thousands of markets for my work. You can search through it in hardcopy or online, and it has a genre index at the back so you can flip to book publishers that match your genre quickly. However, it shouldn't be your only tool.

You may choose to look for an agent first, or you may choose to go it alone. Agents typically take a 15 percent commission from sale money; legitimate agents do not charge anything up-front. A good agent can help you get read faster, can help you get read in places that are typically closed to unsolicited submissions, and can help you negotiate the best possible deal.

That said I've made more than half of my book deals on my own. I tend to be more proactive about my career than an agent ever could be, and I'm not afraid to negotiate. It's all a matter of figuring out what works best for you.

If you choose to fly solo, there really are better ways of finding a publisher than doing random searches or reading books of guidelines. Here are my best tips:

1. Read Publishers Lunch (<http://www.publisherslunch.com>), which gives a run-down of book deals. It tells you which publishers are buying which types of books, and usually includes the name of the editor who acquired the book and the agent who made the deal.
2. Read Publishers Weekly (<http://www.publishersweekly.com>). It's expensive, but you can probably find it at your local library. This will keep you up-to-date on industry happenings, trends, who are buying what, and staff changes.
3. Read books! This may be the most obvious, yet most overlooked suggestion. The best way to target your submissions is to find books in your genre or on similar topics at a bookstore or library, then copy down the name of the publisher. Check the acknowledgments section, too, to see if the author mentioned the editor or agent. Then you can hop onto Google and type in the publishers' name. More often than not, on any publishers' site, you'll find a link to submission guidelines. Barring that, there should be a mailing address or e-mail address at the very least. You can cross-reference information with Writer's Market once you've found publishers that interest you, too.
4. Ask around. Let's say you found a book in your genre that you enjoyed, but you've never heard of the publisher. There's no harm in

looking up the author, then sending off a polite e-mail to ask if he or she is having a positive experience with that publisher.

5. Search Amazon. Look up books you've read or heard of in your genre or category. Amazon lists the book publisher in each book's entry. Then look up the publisher in a search engine or guidebook.

Assuming you want to earn a living from your writing, it's important that your book reaches a large audience. That means it needs adequate distribution. Unfortunately, most print-on-demand publishers can't achieve decent bookstore distribution because of a number of bookstore-unfriendly policies (no returns allowed, lower-than-average discounts to bookstores, lack of a bar code or price on the back of the book, etc.), not to mention the overall poor quality of vanity-published books due to a lack of editing and lack of editorial standards. This is not the crowd you want to be in if you plan to be a professional writer.

Above all else, you must be patient. There's much more to book publishing than I could ever share in a short article; luckily, there are plenty of professional authors who are more than willing to share their expertise with you. Don't rush your manuscript out until you feel secure that you understand the way the industry works. A few good clues: Do you know what a distributor does versus a wholesaler? Do you know which trade magazines' reviews are important? Do you know why it's preferable to get royalties on list price instead of net? Do you know why it's important to have an "out of print" clause and what it should look like?

There's nothing wrong with not knowing the answers. Everyone starts someplace. The only wrong thing is rushing into the publishing industry before you get those answers. The more naïve you are about the process, the easier it is for unscrupulous people to get hold of you.

A traditional publisher will never pressure you to buy your own books, to pay for editing or cover art or even your own copyright. They'll cover the expenses. You'll be expected to pitch in with publicity efforts, but it won't all fall on your shoulders. With vanity and fringe presses, these standards aren't there. Those companies make money from authors instead of from readers.

I know the road can seem long and difficult. Most authors receive many rejection letters before that first acceptance letter. But it's a worthwhile wait. In a case like this, your first "instinct" may not be the best one. The kinds of publishers you probably want to deal with are not the ones who are screaming, "Click here! We'll publish your book!" They're the ones who are

busy actually selling books instead of concentrating their efforts on luring in new writers.

Keep working at it until you find the right solution. Take as much care in finding a book publisher as you would a marriage partner; get to know the publisher before you commit, and understand what you're getting into. When you begin walking into bookstores and seeing readers picking up your book, you'll thank yourself that you took the time to get it right.

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*Jenna Glatzer is the editor-in-chief of <http://www.AbsoluteWrite.com> and the author of many books, including *Make a Real Living as a Freelance Writer*, which comes with a free editors' cheat sheet at <http://www.jennaglatzer.com>. Her latest book, *Fear is No Longer My Reality*, which she co-wrote with Jamie Blyth of *The Bachelorette*, is hot off the press.*

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Is Your Writing a Business or a Hobby? The Importance of the Difference - by Kelly James-Enger

Chances are you began writing because you loved to capture your words on the page. Then, as you continued to write, you may have decided to pursue publication. What could be better than seeing your work in print? Why, discovering that you could get *paid*-- sometimes well-- for your writing.

Whether you write for love, or for money, or for both isn't simply a rhetorical question. The answer may have a significant impact on whether you can deduct your writing-related expenses under U.S. law. Read on to learn what you need to know to determine whether your writing is a business or a hobby-- and why that distinction is a critical one.

Let's start with the basics. As a U.S. citizen, the money you make from your writing counts as "reportable income." Legally, you're required to report the amount as income on your taxes, regardless of whether your writing is considered a business or a hobby.

But if you're operating your writing as a business, instead of a hobby, you can deduct legitimate business deductions from that income. That reduces the amount you pay taxes on at the end of the year. On the other hand, if you're pursuing writing as a hobby, you still have to report the income you make but you can't take advantage of any business deductions (because you have a hobby, not a business.) Get it?

Let's say your first year of freelancing, you sell several articles for \$800 and win a writing contest which awards you \$500. Your writing-related expenses including postage, office supplies, telephone charges, books, and other materials total \$200. If you're operating as a business, you're allowed to deduct \$200 from \$1,300 and pay taxes only on the \$1,100. If, however, you're operating as a hobby, you'll pay taxes on the entire \$1,300.

So what's the difference between a business and a hobby? After all, even if you're writing to make money, you probably enjoy your craft, right? The key for the Internal Revenue Service comes down to something called "profit motive." Profit motive essentially means that you're writing with the intention of making money from your writing-- not simply pursuing a pleasurable activity.

So how can you convince the IRS you're writing with a profit motive-- to make money, in other words-- if you ever are audited? The IRS considers a number of factors, but some of the things you can do to prove this include:

- Submitting your work only to markets that pay. You're writing for money, not for exposure.
- Dedicating significant time and effort to your freelancing career-- not approaching it in a sporadic or haphazard fashion.
- Setting annual financial goals for your writing business, and aiming to maintain or exceed them over time. (Making a profit doesn't absolutely prove that your writing is a business, not a hobby, but it certainly helps.)
- Keeping records of your submissions, assignments, income, and expenses like you would with any other business.

The Bonus of a Writing Business

Once you pass the "writing as a business" test, you're entitled to deduct all ordinary, necessary, and reasonable expenses related to trying to make a profit in your business. According to IRS regulations, those expenses are the ones that are common, accepted, helpful, and appropriate for your writing business. For most freelancers, those expenses would include:

- Computer and software purchased and used for your business;
- Paper, letterhead, pens, printing cartridges, and other offices supplies;
- Postage and mailing expenses (and these can add up fast!);
- Telephone expenses including long-distance charges (while you can't deduct your primary phone line, a second one used solely for business is deductible);
- Travel and entertainment related to your business, such as lunch with an editor or trip to attend a writing conference (note that you can only deduct half of your meals); and
- Writing-related classes and events.

You may also be entitled to a home office deduction if you use a section of your house or apartment solely and exclusively as your place of business, and to deduct the cost of traveling from your home office to other locations for business reasons-- such as mailing manuscripts, conducting face-to-face interviews, meeting with clients at their offices, and attending a networking event. With automotive expenses, you can choose between the actual expense methods or the more commonly used standard mileage deduction to write off allowable operating costs.

The bottom line is that if you're writing with the intention to make money, keeping good business records and maintaining expense receipts can support your "profit motive" position and reduce your tax liability. As a smart, savvy writer, you want to make as much money as possible-- but pay as little tax on it as you legally can.

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*Freelance journalist and speaker Kelly James-Enger is the author of books including *Six-Figure Freelancing: The Writer's Guide to Making More Money* (Random House, April, 2005) and *Ready, Aim, Specialize! Create Your Own Writing Specialty and Make More Money* (The Writer Books, 2003). She can be reached through <http://www.becomebodywise.com>.*

The Arrogant Writer: Five Ways to Nurture and Defend your Muse - by Jill Nagle

Arrogance has a bad rap. We think of arrogant people as unpleasant to be around, full of themselves, and incapable of taking an interest in anyone else. However, when applied to one's own writing, a certain measure of well-placed arrogance can be a useful tool.

Writing can be a scary enterprise. The writer puts herself out for public scrutiny in a way most other artists and professionals do not. When the writer publishes, she commits herself to the words she's written for the rest of her life. Even if she changes her mind about what she's said, others may still react to the piece decades after it first appears in print. This can make even the act of putting pen to paper (or more likely, fingers to keyboard) an anxiety-producing ordeal.

Then there is the schooling most of us received, which treated writing as a chore rewarded when well done or punished when poorly done, as opposed to a pleasurable activity for ourselves and our readers. Very few of us had any audience for any the writing we did in classrooms, other than the teachers who instructed, criticized and graded us. It's no wonder most writers suffer from self-doubt rather than overconfidence. We tend to underestimate ourselves and our words, even when they come from the most powerful places inside us, even when we get accolades from the outside world and even long after we finally get published.

Practicing selective arrogance can help disarm these nasty doubts. And, not to worry: If you are not arrogant to begin with, practicing the type of arrogance I suggest will not transform you into an insufferable braggart. Rather, it will help uplift you from the gutters of self-doubt onto the clean, dry road to getting published. Even if you do not feel in the least arrogant about your writing, you can still follow my simple instructions to act as if you do, with the same results: to get published, or to get published again.

Selective arrogance does not mean thinking of yourself as any better than anyone else, or as having reached the pinnacle of your skills. Rather, it means treating every word you write as a precious baby worthy of the greatest care and nurturance. Here's how to do that:

Never, ever throw anything away, period.

Carry with you at all times a means to record your creative thoughts.

Record your creative bursts, even if other voices inside you are dismissing them with negative judgments.

Trust your impulses and passions: if you feel drawn to write about something, write about it!

Eschew impatience-give your babies the time they need to gestate. If you've read between the lines, you see that these instructions have you do nothing more than treat yourself and your writing with respect. However, because many people have a hard time doing even that, I counsel my clients to behave arrogantly. It gets them giggling and releasing the feelings they have about their writing, and makes it easier to find that respect.

Although you may have read elsewhere to be prepared to throw away your first writing attempts, to release attachment to your early work and the like, nuggets of wisdom and creativity appear throughout a writer's life from childhood through seniority. I advocate collecting these and treating them with care, perhaps polishing them now and again. There is no magical moment when one suddenly becomes "a good writer." Thus, your most novice scribblings become diamond mines.

The one time I disobeyed my own advice and discarded what was I believed was possibly the most poorly written sentence in history (or at least my own history), I rejoiced. Five minutes later, I needed the gem in a new sentence, and struggled to reconstruct the one I'd discarded. May you never make that mistake-do as I say, not as I've done.

These gems also shine through at unexpected times. This is why I advise my clients to carry at least some scrap paper and a pencil nub if not an electronic recording device. The times at night and in the mornings between wake and sleep often yield good raw material, so keep your recording device of choice bedside.

The idea behind saving every little scrap, writing everything down and cultivating the arrogance to believe these activities matter is that finished pieces often assert themselves over time, forming a coherent whole from little scraps, like a Rorschach, or getting that crucial letter right in the Wheel of Fortune. The key is to keep feeding the collage and trusting that something or things will emerge over time.

Not every sentence will necessarily lead to an essay, book or screenplay of its own. But some might add that missing piece to make a good piece great. Even tidbits that go nowhere for now still give your brain a chance to exercise itself and keep your creative pathways well-hacked.

When it comes to choosing which pathway you'll write your way down, trust your wild and woolly impulses. If you're drawn to something, chances are you will make the subject come alive. You'll seduce your readers by the very fact of your relationship to the material.

Finally, give your pieces the time they need to develop. Being an arrogant writer means honoring the gestation period your writings must pass through to be born into the world healthy and ready to engage readers. Honoring this gestation period may mean asking for help. Just as the dedicated gardener finds the right soil, fertilizer, seeds, watering schedule and equipment, so the arrogant writer finds her coach, buddy, copyeditor, ghostwriter, or colleague's expert eye. I have seen writers move from stagnation to publication with the right combination of assistance. I love being part of that process.

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*Author Jill Nagle is founder and principal of GetPublished, <http://www.GetPublished.com>, which provides coaching, consulting, ghostwriting, classes and do-it-yourself products to emerging and published authors. Her most recent book is *How to Find An Agent Who Can Sell Your Book for Top Dollar* <http://www.FindTheRightAgent.com>.*

For Beginners: Ten Ways to Prepare to Get Published - by Jill Nagle

Like any field, excellent writing requires study, practice and mentorship. Very few successful authors ever published their first draft of their first work. Nearly all had to expend considerable effort to improve their craft. Here are some ways to prepare for that moment of publication. These tips also help keep you on your toes after publication for better and better writing results as your career develops.

- 1) Read, read, read in your field. You can never read too much when you're trying to excel as a writer. Reading in your field helps you develop a discerning eye. You need this discerning eye for when you step back and look at your own work.
- 2) Cultivate role models. Know who the top-selling authors are in your field. Find out more about them. How did they get to where they are? Do searches in the Internet (available in most libraries-ask your librarian how to use a search engine) for information about particular authors whose careers you admire. Let your role models inspire rather than daunt you. There is no competition, only inspiration, potential teachers and opportunities for cooperation. That author you envy this year may be writing a blurb for your first novel next year.
- 3) Research your markets. If you want to publish in periodicals, whether literary fiction, journalistic writing, or anything else, realize publication standards serve a purpose other than to frustrate new authors.
- 4) Take classes. Many cities offer writing classes through community colleges or local writing groups. Online writing classes are popping up everywhere. If possible, choose a writing teacher who has published in a field you'd like to enter. Even better, find someone you already consider a mentor. Not every published author has what it takes to offer beginning writers what they need, but many do.
- 5) Join or start a writer's group in your area. We teach best what we most need to learn. There is no better way to improve your own writing than to help others with theirs.
- 6) Find a writing buddy with whom to check in on a regular basis. The two of you can be each others' inspiration, accountability market, guidepost and reality check. Having structure and someone to check

in with may help you look forward to your otherwise lonely writing sessions.

- 7) Play with changing voices. Copy other writers you admire. How does that feel? Pretend you suddenly got an injection of creativity serum or I.Q. booster, and then write like mad for ten minutes. What happens to the quality of your words? Is this a possible new direction for you? As creative and intelligent beings, we have so much more within us than we could ever dream.
- 8) Accept the reality of rewriting. Unlike other professions who get to rest on their milestones, for writers, a completed manuscript often represents a beginning. The best writing comes after lots of rewriting, even for seasoned authors. You needn't throw any of it away, but not every sentence belongs in every work. Save the scraps, but don't get attached to where they go, or the integrity of your project will suffer.
- 9) Get clear on what you want out of getting published. Many writers move forward without knowing their destination. As a teacher once told me, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." The answer to what you want out of getting published will help you determine the best route to take. And in publishing, those routes are many and varied. You can use our Twenty Questions as a self-help guide.
- 10) If what you want is to get published in the least amount of time, considering hiring a ghostwriter. An extremely common but rarely discussed practice, many successful authors talk to ghostwriters, who put their skills to work on an author's behalf. Although some such ghostwriters get a cover credit, many do not, hence the "ghost" terminology. If you have more money than time or inclination to toil, ghostwriting may be the option for you.

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Author Jill Nagle is founder and principal of GetPublished, <http://www.GetPublished.com>, which provides coaching, consulting, ghostwriting, classes and do-it-yourself products to emerging and published authors. Her most recent book is How to Find An Agent Who Can Sell Your Book for Top Dollar <http://www.FindTheRightAgent.com>.

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There's No Such Thing As Writer's Block - by Marilyn Henderson

If you think you have writer's block, it's all in your head. Like any idea, you can accept or reject it.

The best way to handle any problem is to prevent it.

Here is a proven prescription for avoiding the blank page blues:

- 1) Develop an idea you are enthusiastic about. Enthusiasm keeps you going when the going gets tough, and it's contagious -- your reader will get it from the book.
- 2) Schedule regular writing time, even if it's only half an hour a day. Sticking to a schedule fosters creativity and gets the book finished.
- 3) Use writing time for writing. Think or plan while you walk the dog, ride the subway or bus, drive to work or do the dishes.
- 4) Don't try to edit as you go. It's counterproductive. Instead, keep notes on changes that occur to you and mark the spot with something distinctive, such as ***, so you can find it easily later.
- 5) Set a specific time to do any editing you can't live without: the end of your working period, Monday mornings before you start work, or any other time outside your daily writing schedule that works for you. If you can hold all editing until your first draft is finished, you'll be able to see everything in perspective and do a better job.
- 6) Be cautious about reading your work to others or asking them to read it and comment. There are two kinds of comment: valid criticism and reader reaction. Both are valuable, but be sure you take into account the person's background and degree of expertise in writing fiction. Don't let your work get nit-picked to death.

These few things will help you get your book to first draft. Once you are able to read your story through, you can rewrite, make changes, edit and fine tune until it's as good as you can make it.

There's nothing like practice. the more you write, the easier handling the little stuff becomes. Practicing good habits helps build confidence, and good self-confidence banishes the idea of writer's block and makes you a better

writer.

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Marilyn Henderson, 42-year novelist, coach and manuscript critic. There's no substitute for experience. Let mine help you reach your dream goal. EBk: Writing A Novel That Sells...Beyond the Basics <http://www.MysteryMentor.com> Email: <mailto:marilyn@mysterymentor.com>

Writing Tips for Your Website - by Jennifer Ryan

Now that your website is up and running, it's time to add content. Fresh content will make your site interesting and keep people (and search engine crawlers) coming back. In order to achieve optimal web success, your site must be informative, relevant and written the way that people read the web. Here's a few tips to get you started.

Get to the point--FAST. Just ask internet usability consultant Jakob Nielsen. People don't read the web, they scan. It's not like print, where you can meander your way to the point. Online, you have but a nanosecond to prove you're legit. Nielsen says to use the "inverted pyramid method." for web content. Tell the point first, get to the supporting info afterwards.

Find your inner voice. We want to hear you on your website, not a text book or someone else. Get in touch with your real-live human "voice." Hello? Is anybody there? Show us your humanity so we can relate to you. Don't publish anything that you haven't completely written researched or re-worked. Posting text to your website that's meant for the printed page is a no-no. People won't read it, and worse, they'll make bad faces at you.

Use the least amount of words for what you have to say. Listen, you're not going to impress us by using big technical words. In fact, when you use words we don't understand--I must say--you look stupid. Why? It's easier to write a story with 3000 words than it is to write the same story in 300. It takes more thought, more planning, more time to extract away the excess. Therefore, the writer who uses less words to convey to same message is clearly the winner.

Write to a person, not a group. When you are writing web content especially, write to a person. Pretend like that person is sitting right in front of you and write conversationally. When you write to a person, it draws the reader in and makes you look more human. It's good for connecting and bonding with your reader.

Don't talk down to your readers. Though it's true that most of your readers will be reading at the 9th grade level, and your content should be written accordingly, resist the urge to talk down to your audience. Humble yourself. And certainly don't try to appear more knowledgeable with shop talk. If you don't know what your writing about, research it more. Otherwise, your lack of knowledge will be transparent even to a 9th grader.

Use small words with the least amount of syllables. This is a basic web

content premise. The fewer syllables that you use, the less your web reader has to think to digest your information. Try not to make your user think. Spoon feed the information in the cleanest manner possible so they get your meaning with the least amount of distractions. Don't say "successfully" when "well" will do. As with every rule, there are exceptions.

Do not underline to make a point. It is a convention on the web that underlined words are links. It is irritating to click an underlined word when you think it is a link. Do everything possible to keep your visitors from being irritated, and to keep yourself from looking--well let's just say, from looking like you don't know. Don't underline anything unless it is a link, use bold to accentuate your main points instead.

The tips above are by no means exhaustive. There are gazillions of techniques and writing tricks that foster online success. Wise is the web marketer who understands that marketing your business online is a process that can always improve, just like direct sales. Get these guidelines under your belt and you'll be a step closer to winning clients, customers and respect online.

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Jennifer Ryan of The Marketing Shop is a web promotions and sales expert. Having earned numerous awards, recognition and financial success in sales, Jennifer now sells online for businesses worldwide. Using a variety of tools--web design, copywriting, SEO, pay-per-click and web site conversion enhancement--she creates Websites that Produce™. Visit <http://www.the-marketing-shop.com> today to sign up for her monthly newsletter (generous with free tips and advice!).

Are Your Dreams Trapped Inside Your Head? - by

Oscar Bruce

Sometimes a dream needs a little help. Even in our social and business relations, the race is not to the swift, but to the verbal - the spellbinding orator - the silver-tongued seducer.

As you are reading these words, you are taking part in one of the wonders of the natural world, for you and I belong to a species with a remarkable ability. That ability is language - Man's most important cultural invention. With nothing but words, we can reliably cause new ideas to arise in each other's minds. Hypnosis has proven that mere words can deeply influence behavior and perception.

Language is a bit like an artist's palette. If he has only two or three splotches of color from which to choose, his painting may be colorless and/or confusing. And so it is with a vocabulary that has limited words for painting the stories of one's past or future. They are colorless and uninteresting; they lack excitement or persuasion.

Take, for example, the less fortunate hapless worker. He probably has lofty dreams. But those dreams are trapped inside his head because no dream or ambition can be told without being couched in words. Limited words mean limited expression. Limited language skills mean limited opportunity. These limitations block efforts to raise him above the worker class. His struggle to upgrade his circumstances collapse at the point his language skills fail to support his aspirations.

But Let's Talk About You...

Does your cocktail party repartee come across as sophisticated conversation, or a confused meandering string of meaningless babble? Whether you like it or not, your conversation as well as your language skills tells the world about your background, and even your intelligence.

In a study which polled top executives in fifty-eight of America's largest companies, every single executive named personal communications skills as the major factor in their advancement.

You may feel you are stuck with your current education or intrinsic intelligence. While that may be partially true, you are not stuck with your current verbal and conversation skills.

Remember...The race is not to the swift, but to the verbal - the spellbinding

orator - the silver-tongued seducer. You learn the skills in a matter of weeks, sometimes days. It's largely a matter of making that decision and commitment.

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Oscar Bruce is considered the ultimate personal communications guru. His dynamic books are considered field manuals for mastering conversation and confrontations. His website offers several verbal strategies that can add power to your conversations at no cost. His free newsletter is available at <http://www.oscarbruce.com>. To order: <http://future-world.com/cgi-bin/product/30302/6017>

What You Must Know Before You Write Your Book - by Marvin D. Cloud

Chaos and confusion come when established rules and procedures are not followed. Even mixing and matching systems to favor one's own position can cause a great deal of consternation. In writing a book, the first rule is to know and understand why you want to write in the first place.

In other words, you need to develop a theme that will answer the question of why you want to write. I usually get a blank stare when I ask a budding author, "What is your book's theme?" Eventually the answer I get may be the title of a manuscript.

When I explain that a title isn't a theme, I then may hear, "It's the story of my life." That is unquestionably the number-one answer I get. There is a big difference between the title of your book and your theme.

While your title may be the sizzle, the theme is the flavor and is formally defined as a "recurring, unifying subject or idea." This is the aim or the main message of your book. Generally speaking, in writing there are two themes: the author's theme and the book's theme.

The author's theme is the usual subject matter the writer handles, or the one the writer is most comfortable with. For example, a writer may find his forte in the subject matter of healing or forgiveness. Another may write most of the time in the area of spirituality or motivation.

Don't confuse the author's theme with genre, which is the category of writing. In addition to establishing if you are writing fiction or non-fiction, your book may fall into several categories. Some of the most popular ones today are biography, science fiction, fantasy, mystery, romance, thriller/espionage, horror, inspirational, historical, and courtroom drama.

Your book's theme is what the reader should learn most after reading your story. There are two answers that you as a writer shouldn't give when questioned about your theme: 1) This book is about me and the things that have happened to me; and 2) A rambling, almost incoherent dissertation that leaves one asking, "Huh?" Every author should ask and answer the following questions: "Why am I writing? What am I trying to articulate? What kind of outcome will the story have on the reader and what is the outcome I'm aiming for?"

In other words, what is the rationale behind your book? For example in his

bestseller, *The Purpose-Driven® Life* (Zondervan), author Rick Warren, founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, takes readers on a "personal 40-day spiritual journey" to find the answer to the question, "What on earth am I here for?" To me, the most important element of your book is its theme.

Writing professors will probably disagree with me, and that is their right. In fact, some say the title is the most important. I understand, because all of this is subjective and mostly based upon personal preference. After all, there are many elements to creating a successful manuscript. But after years of trying to get would-be writers to complete their novels, short stories or even church talks, I've discovered that nothing has helped to move them "off the pot" quicker than having a well-developed theme.

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Marvin D. Cloud is founder of [mybestseller.com](http://www.mybestseller.com) and author of "Get Off The Pot: How to Stop Procrastinating and Write Your Personal Bestseller in 90 Days." Visit <http://www.mybestseller.com> and grab a free copy of the "Get Off The Pot" newsletter, dedicated to motivating ordinary people to write, publish and sell their books faster, efficient, and more cost-effective.

Which Comes First -- Short Story Or Novel? - by David B. Silva

A writer writes.

Bet you've heard that one before.

Or maybe this one: if you want to be a writer, first you write one word, and then you write the next.

Both of these old clichés are true, of course. That's how they turned into clichés. But there's another dilemma a beginning creative writer often finds himself facing: do I write short stories or novels?

Writing novels is almost always the end goal. You'll find exceptions---such as Ray Bradbury and Harlan Ellison, who primary built their careers writing short stories---but the vast majority of successful storytellers are novelists.

The real question then is this: do I jump into novel writing with both feet or do I test the waters first by writing short stories?

Generally, beginning writers don't understand that these are two very different forms. They see writing a short story as easier, less intimidating. At a cursory glance, it's hard to argue with that. But if you ask a writer successful in both forms, he'll almost always tell you that short stories pose a much more difficult task.

Why?

Because you're working on a small canvas.

The novel is a wall mural. It's expansive. You have time to fully develop your characters. There's room for movement, for growth and change, for surprises and insights, for looking back as well as looking forward.

The short story is an 8x10 landscape. It's a moment in time when your character faces a critical point in his or her existence, a moment that changes everything. In a glimpse, readers must believe in your characters, in the crisis they face, in the choices they make. It's a tiny, one-dimensional surface that must appear three-dimensional.

With that understanding, starting out writing short stories can still be a good proving ground for a writer. You learn quickly what works and what doesn't.

You learn to write tight, to pack as much meat into as few words as possible. You learn to capture the core make up of your characters.

All very valuable lessons for both the short story writer and the novelist.

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David B. Silva, The Successful Writer (<http://thesuccessfulwriter.com>)

Twelve Tips for Writing Short Stories - by Arline Chase

1. A short story should be short. The longer your story is the more difficult it will be to sell.
2. A short story should be fast paced and never boring. A short story needs to move quickly and take place in a short length of time.
3. A short story should be written in scenes and all scenes should be from a single character's viewpoint.
4. A story plot should contain an Objective (the main character's goal), Obstacles that stand in the main character's way, and a clearly defined Outcome, that results from the characters actions (not from coincidence).
5. A short story is about a main character who wants something and whether they get it or not. If there's no problem, there's no story. Some central problem should face the central character and how the main character solves that problem is what the story is about.
6. A short story should have a theme, some universal truth that becomes the central theme of the short story.
7. The Protagonist (main character) should be someone whose motives the reader will understand, whose mistakes the reader will forgive, and whom the reader will identify with and root for.
8. Action and dialogue should rise as the story progresses. Scenes should build upon one another to increase the reader's involvement. Action should be believable. Dialogue should stay on the point.
9. A short story should have a bleak moment, just before the crisis, when it looks as if the main character will never get what he or she wants.
10. The crisis should be realistic and the reader should be experiencing both tension and suspense as to the outcome.
11. The resolution should explain everything, and tie up all the loose ends. It should be satisfying to the reader, even if it is not a "happy ending."

12. Dialogue in a short story should always move forward and be about the point of the scene. Small talk has no place in dialogue.

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Sherry Morris writing as Olivia Andrews and Pamela Downs
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Avoiding Submission Traffic Jams - by Olivia Andrews

Breaking into publishing is a complicated compound prescription mixed by that invisible mystical pharmacist watching over us. Everyone will have different ingredients, i.e.: eyebrow of buffalo + toenail polish of agent + reading glasses of contest judge + ancient Egyptian blessing... I'd like to share my experiences. I hope you'll be able to avoid some bottlenecks along your journey.

Portable Word Processors

Alphasmart, Dana, etc. New, used, borrowed. Obtain one. Carry it with you when you're writing a first draft. Five minutes here, thirty there. Knock that infernal internal editor off your shoulder and write an uninhibited first draft. Forget the "rules". Give yourself permission to write crap. Just type the darned story. Crap can be fixed during revisions. A blank page can't. Don't go back and reread what you just wrote. Don't edit it until you upload the week's work into your document. You'll be surprised to learn some of what you thought was pure crap is actually genius. I wrote the first draft of a 100K MS in three weeks.

Start at the Top

Submit to your dream editors/agents first. Only move on down the line if they all reject you. I have never submitted to anyone I would not immediately accept a reasonable contract from. It's wasting their time to boost your ego. This is a tiny industry. Editors and agents talk and move to new positions. They'll remember if you play games with them. An offer you declined six months ago will probably not be waiting when you finally do get rejected by your dream editor.

Rejection

Every writer gets rejected. Some are more proficient in collecting rejections than others. Get mad, cry, wallow, vent to your friends. Then get over it and move along. Some rejections are devastating. Others are barely worth the notation. I think it has a lot to do with our biorhythms and where we are in our cycle of Writer's PMS.

Consider all criticism you receive. If it makes sense, change your MS. If a little voice says, no, that would wreck my story; this person doesn't understand where I'm going, then ignore it.

Weigh heavily on editor criticism. Do try to see what she means. But if she just doesn't get your story, don't change what you don't agree with. Move on.

Never badmouth an editor in a public forum. Never send her a retort. Again, this is a small industry. My first personal R [rejection] was very blunt and I was devastated. It took nearly 6 months for my ego to let me understand what she meant, and that she was right. I made the changes, and sold it elsewhere. This rough R came from the editor that just bought my two PAN sales.

Voice

Everyone has a distinct "voice" for storytelling. The way you form sentences and their length. Your word choices be they proper, alternative or completely made up. New writers often struggle to "find my voice". Shh...it's right there in your first draft. Don't polish your MS's with line edits from other writers/readers, thus changing your words into theirs. Do consider advice about everything else, but don't allow others to speak for you. You'll end up with a grammatically correct, generic read and probably a slew of contest finals, but no publishing contract.

One more hard-learned tip: If a sentence reads roughly to you, and after a few days, you still can't make it work; delete it. The paragraph will flow better without it. The meaning is conveyed even though it's invisible. Trust me.

Simultaneous Submission

'No simultaneous submission' only applies to requested full manuscripts. Send out queries and partials to everyone on your wish list.

If you send an exclusive query, wait for the partial request, send that, wait for the full request, send that, wait for the revision request, send that....wait for the offer.... then heaven forbid you ultimately receive a rejection. You would need to start the query process with another house/line, and you may well be dead before you ever see your work in print.

If on the other hand, you've been sending queries and partials out, then you'll all ready have another request for a full and can then mail it right off.

Agents

Harder to hook than editors. Signing with a top agent does not guarantee

your book will ever sell. The wrong agent is worse than no agent at all. But do try to land one. She could procure you an excellent first sale contract! Make sure they are members (or their firm is) of AAR and ask around on the loops before signing. Literary agents are not like real estate agents. They will only take on projects they feel are easy sales. I have 205 agent R's across three MSs. I don't write what they want to represent.

Contests & Conferences

Check the score sheet before choosing a contest to enter. Make sure your MS has a fair chance and isn't doomed because your hero/heroine isn't introduced in the first chapter or any other gradable area doesn't exist.

If you are entering for anonymous feedback, don't enter more than two contests with the same MS. Find critique partners, they are free.

If you are entering in the hopes of getting your work in front of a particular editor, don't. Even if you do final, there is no guarantee she'll request your MS. Save your money and attend a conference instead. So long as you grossly write what she acquires, an editor or agent WILL request a partial or a full manuscript from you.

I've spent over \$1,000 on contests. I finaled once, and did not receive an editor request. I didn't agree with her feedback either. I didn't change my MS. It sold elsewhere. For the money I've spent in entry fees, printing and postage, I could have attended two chapter conferences, enjoyed the company of other writers, learned new skills and come away with at least two editor requests.

Do enter the Golden Heart. Somebody has to final, and this is the prestigious contest where it means so much.

Remember

You are a capable writer with amazing stories only you can spin. Write for the joy you get taking dictation from the characters in your head. If NY soundly rejects your MS, consider e-Publishing it. No, you won't get rich or make the bestseller list. But your story will be told, readers will enjoy it and you'll have the satisfaction of validation, the experience of working with a professional editor and cover artist. Write another MS and send it to NY.

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The Art of Objective Evaluation - by Diane J. Newton

We'll assume that your submission package and enclosed query letter has sparked interest and your manuscript is in the proper format and on the right desk. In other words, at first blush, it met your target's expectations and he or she is willing to read more.

Pretend you are one who evaluates the work of writers; an editor, a literary agent or, perhaps, a judge in a writing competition. What specifics would you look for? Here are a few suggestions. Before you submit, see if your work measures up.

Writing: Has the author displayed:

- Command of language?
- Solid word, grammar and punctuation choices?
- Discernible and pleasing authorial voice?
- Discernible character voices?

Setting Mood: Did the author adequately convey:

- Surroundings?
- Environment factors, including sensory input?
- A place in time?
- An overall feeling or tone in each scene?

Character Development: Did the author adequately convey:

- Personality differentiation between characters?
- Character response, both physical and emotional?
- Desires, motives, plans, etc.?
- Consistency in characters?
- Were you moved to care about, love or hate them?

Plot Development: Did the author adequately develop:

- Action of immediate or future consequence?
- Impact and reaction leading to or affecting the next scene?
- Conflict arising from an action and its aftermath?
- Chapter or story questions kindling reader curiosity; who, what, where, why and when?

Final Questions:

- Overall, were these various elements compelling?
- Were many of these elements fresh and unique?
- Were all story questions posed by the author adequately answered?
- IS THERE A MARKET FOR THIS WORK?

Hint: One can learn a great deal by using this list to evaluate the work of established authors. Our work is ready for the mailbox when we can satisfy all these questions with 'yes' answers. Best of luck!

© Diane J. Newton

A literacy and writer advocate, Diane J. Newton is an award-winning author of suspense. Her novels include Unusual Destiny, Children of the Sun, Paradigm and the anthology, Secrets, Fact or Fiction?, which she compiled and edited.

<http://dianejnewton.bravehost.com/index.html>

Diane J. Newton, Award Winning Suspense. Two New Books and a New Web Page: Secrets, Fact or Fiction? an exciting anthology:

<http://www.hometown.aol.com/newsplace/> or <http://www.secretsfactorfiction.com>

Group, Newsletter, Web Page Moderator,

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/publishingandpromoting/>

Authors Guild of WNY:

<http://www.authorsguildwny.com/>

Change Your Position - by AJ Dryna

There are times when I would rather clean the house, do the laundry, even wash the dog rather than face my computer. I've tried everything the writing books have told me to do. I've gone outside and written about the first thing I saw. I've temporarily changed my writing from third person to first person. There is nothing that I haven't tried. Still the words would not come. They were there, I could feel them there, like the expression 'on the tip of my tongue' I just couldn't spit them out.

Then I figured out why.

I was bored. At first I thought the story had gone stale on me, so I started a new one, but then I tired of that, too. So what do you think I did? I started another one that also went bad, now what? I had three stories at different levels of completion and I still forced myself to sit down and write.

I finally figured out my problem. It wasn't the story that was boring it was me-or better yet, my writing habits and workplace. I wrote in the afternoon and the evening. I'm not a morning person, and I tend to watch movies at night or read books from my library. Then, NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) came along and pumped me full of enthusiasm. I got up early and wrote morning, noon, and night. After the thirty day time period was up (I made the deadline by the way) I was burned out, but I discovered something. I wrote the best, with fresh ideas, and more alertness-in the morning. It came as a shock to me. I'm not a morning person. So I changed my writing schedule to mornings and evenings and my story flew out of my head...for a few months. Then I got tired of it again. This time I was prepared. I bought a QuickPad and took my writing to the play park. My son got to play and I got to write, again, I hit the jackpot, we went to the park every day.

Now I am armed with the knowledge that sometimes you just need to change your lifestyle to fit around your writing and no matter who you are, it can be done. Maybe all you need is to re-arrange your computer room, or buy a new computer desk. Change the pictures you've got on your desk or the flowers or other decorations you've got there. Clean the dust away and write to the fresh scent of lemon pledge. There's another idea, buy some scented candles, fresheners, or essential oils and change the atmosphere of your work area. You can make your enthusiasm and your story fresh by changing your surrounding, sometimes its not the story or your muse that has gone dull, its just the scenery.

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AJ Dryna is a facilitator of an Independent Writer's Challenge Group at Writer's Village University, a second reader and editor at e-press publishing.

She is currently working on her third novel, 'The Crystal Faery' having completed 'Nola and the 'Goblin Mountain', a young adult fantasy and 'The Purple Tree' a drama/folk book.

She has won several minor writing competitions and one poetry publication. She is also the founder and creator of 'The Valencia Hills News' and co-founder of Spirit Critiquing Service.
www.spiritcritiquingservice.com

Writer's Tips - by Donna Sundblad

1) How Do You Know?

How many times has someone critiqued your work and told you to "show" instead of tell? It happens to all of us along the way. I found one way to help show is to ask, "How do you know?"

My husband and I went to breakfast the other morning. It didn't take long for me to say, "I think the waitress is having a bad day." I thought about it. When writing I could say, "The waitress was having a bad day." I would be telling. But how did I know? The woman looked to be in her early sixties, mouth turned down at the corners of her painted lips, and she stared out the window rather than make eye contact.

"Coffee?" she asked.

We nodded and she returned with one cup of bottom-of-the-pot coffee spilling over the side filling the saucer. We pointed out our need for a second cup.

"I'll get more." Her shoulders slumped and her raspy voice sounded inconvenienced like a child sent to do a chore. I could go on to show you what transpired down to her dropping the change brought to our table.

How do you know? You experience it. You see, hear and smell what happens and that's what you want your readers to do when they read your story.

2) Mirror, Mirror

Writers face the challenge of pulling readers into stories by making them feel present in the scene. How? We all know how--"show don't tell." As I wrote a scene recently, describing the look on someone's face stumped me. Instead of saying, "She looked incredulous," I got up from the computer and went to the mirror and attempted to look incredulous.

I came back to the computer and wrote, "Her sister propped her hands on her hips. She didn't blink. Her top lip curled into a sneer."

Next time you're stuck trying to describe the expression on a character's face, get up and look in the mirror to help your readers "see" what you see.

Purpose Driven Editing (One Sentence Rule)

When faced with the daunting task of editing and rewriting, it's important to keep focused on your purpose. It's easy to become sidetracked by our clever choice of words. To help short circuit the tendency to hold on to unnecessary words or passages, make a list of your chapter titles or numbers. Ask yourself, "What's the purpose of this chapter?" (When editing a short story, instead of chapters ask yourself the purpose of each paragraph.)

Summarize each chapter in one sentence. Keep this list handy and consider the direction of each chapter when you go through your manuscript with the red pen. It helps you see superfluous and unnecessary passages. An additional bonus to this technique is that with minimal editing you can combine your summations to create a short synopsis.

Handpicked Impressions

As a child, I picked raspberries in the back yard. I'd steer clear of green clusters or small berries because of their sour flavor. I searched for plump, dark fruit. Today, I'm learning to pick verbs. When choosing a verb, avoid humdrum generalities such as "look" because nonspecific verbs add a generic, watered down flavor to the action. In contrast, words like stare, gaze and scrutinize to ripen the action.

Word Counter (<http://www.wordcounter.com/>) provides a list of the top twenty-five words used within submitted text. This cataloged information offers a glimpse of word choices apart from context. It can be an eye opener. You may find your character "looked" at his watch, down the street, at a woman or through the window. Learn to be more specific. Be sure your word choice leaves the impression you want to make.

Finding a Fitting Name

A name is a label given to a person or thing to distinguish it from another. As a writer, I once struggled to name characters. Today, I match the meaning of the name to my character. This helps solidify a developing character's reputation in my mind. Sometimes fictional personalities live up to their name, but other times they grow beyond my original concept.

A handy tool to find the right name is <http://www.babynames.com>. This site provides access to a plethora of names as well as their meanings. If I have a physically strong character, I look up names that mean "strong." "Brogan" means sturdy and strong, "Rico" means strong ruler, while "Virgil" just

means strong. All of these names would make good candidates for my strong character. Use personality or physical attributes to help you find names that fit characters.

Tracking Your Submissions

To track submissions, I made a table in Word. It's composed of five columns. 1) Date, 2) publication's title, 3) site/phone, 4) title (of submission), and 5) details. Under details, I include such information as the contact person's name and how long I can expect it to take to receive a reply.

If the first response from the publication tells me that my piece is under consideration, I highlight the title with yellow. If I receive a "no thank you," I highlight it with red, and when it is accepted, I highlight it with green. Anything not highlighted means I have heard nothing and follow up is in order. This tracking table offers status at a glance.

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Author of Pumping our Muse and co-owner of Team Spirit Critique and Editing, LLC.
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The 'DNA' of Fiction - by Hill Kemp

When I first started writing, I took my main impression from books I'd read and made the story line the key driver for my writing. My first draft, 300 manuscript pages, was narrative driven. That was a mistake for me. I wouldn't have read it myself! Two versions of the manuscript later I finally found out what works for me and that's what I have used in writing three novels since.

It turns out that all those intricate and interesting stories I've enjoyed are derivatives of something very much deeper. I felt that, in reading, the narrative provided a setting for the characters to act out their interests and therefore reveal themselves for who they really are. It is just the opposite for me.

When I start out on a new novel I might have in mind around a dozen or so major milestones that will occur in the narrative. I really only want to have a bare skeleton of the story. What I do next is to write four to six PAGES about each of the point-of-view characters. I start with them early – e.g. what they did/liked/hated in third grade – and proceed through stages to their current age. I give them a family life or its substitute. I give them a favorite color, food, place to go, pet, etc. This character document mainly contains information that will never make it into the novel. But what it does is to make those characters fully multi-dimensional FOR ME. If there are other characters that will play significant roles, they get a page or two of the same treatment. All this before ever writing Chapter 1 or any part of the novel.

The novel writing process then becomes my putting those rich characters onto the opening stage and letting them do their thing. If the characters are truly 'alive' for me, they take over and go with the novel. As an example, in the book I am currently writing, the characters have added five chapters out of the first forty. Chapters I never envisioned but the situation and the characters demanded we go there. As I go I'll have the major milestones in view and maybe a few chapters ahead. In my first novel, *Capitol Offense*, the events of the ending were worked out by the characters in the moment – as I wrote it.

Another thing that characters this alive do for me as a writer. Once they get going, they demand that I stay with the writing until they resolve the challenges in which I have placed them. In other words, the characters provide the push to keep me writing.

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Hill Kemp is a former member of the Texas House of Representatives. He also had a career in management and consulting. His writing credits include Capitol Offense (ISBN 1878096702), Secrets, Fact or Fiction? (ISBN 0973728256) and soon to be released Lucky Penny, a children's chapter book co-written with Kemp's nine-year-old granddaughter. His websites are www.capitoloffense.com and www.secretsfactorfiction.com.

Internet Marketing Tips for Book Promotion - by

Parker Owens

Website Tips

Before creating a website, do a little planning. This seems obvious, but it is amazing how few people know what they want before creating a website. Go look at other author websites and make notes about the names of their pages and what information they provide. Take all the appropriate topics and try to organize them in logical groups. Your results will turn into your website navigation and structure. If you talk to a web developer, they will call this process "developing your site architecture."

Pages appropriate for authors include a home page, bio, and contact information. Fans will appreciate a guestbook, blog, tour dates, and extra information on characters and stories. They might also like to read sample chapters. You might include an online resume, and links to published non-fiction work. Include a 'press kit' if you can to make it easy for reviewers and journalists to write about you. Some sites include downloads of free ebooks, or a storefront for ordering books and promotional items. If you are on a limited budget, start with the basics and add more later.

Consider your audience. Will this be a website for future fans or an online resume for a professional freelance writing site? Or, would you prefer to offer personal pages for family and friends only? A personal site might include pictures of family and pets, and pages for hobbies or travel. Don't try to combine all your audiences into one website - it weakens the focus and looks haphazard.

Simple is always better. You can increase the website interactivity as your fan base expands. A resume site will not need much interactivity.

What do you need for a website?

- Domain name
- Web host
- Written content
- Content in the form of images
- Back end coding
- Web designer or software

Carefully consider your domain name. Rather than use your own name, or the name of one of your books, try another key phrase that will make you place higher on a search engine list. For instance, if you write detective stories, use a domain with the word crime or detective in the title, like CrimeStories or DetectiveTales. Use a resource like <http://www.nameboy.com> to automatically generate available domain names for you.

Don't use a book title for your website name unless it has been published with that name and you don't plan to write any additional novels. Keep in mind it is common practice for the publisher to rename your books.

While you want to avoid having a website for each book, you can purchase domain names for each of your books and point it to your main website. For instance, buy domain names for each book title, and your full pen name, and have the additional domain names point to your main website under a company name, for instance DetectiveTales.com mentioned above. Domain names should not cost over \$15 per year per domain name. You can buy them for as little as \$8 each.

Web hosting costs can be as low as \$25 per year, but typically run around \$8 per month. Carefully read the fine print. At some hosts, you only get the lower price if you pay for a year up front. Some hosts offer free domain name registration and setup for new clients. If the domain name registration is under \$25, it may be worth it to you to have them do the work for you.

If your site is simple and only uses html, IIS Windows servers will work as well as Apache. If you decide to make your website interactive, your host will tell you what coding can be used on the site (ASP, PHP). If in doubt, ask your web developer. If you plan to use Microsoft FrontPage, make sure the host offers FrontPage extensions as part of their web hosting package.

It does pay to shop around for the lowest price, since you will be paying the host for years. You can change your host and your domain name registrar at any time, but it is an inconvenience, much like changing your phone service or ISP. You will need to re-upload your website to a new location, and modify your domain name pointer to hit another server.

Free web hosts are not recommended because they display pop-up and banner ads. Find inexpensive professional quality hosting at www.m6.net and www.stargate.com.

If you decide to develop your own website, I recommend www.geocities.com. You can download easy-to-use free software for

developing your website, and geocities offers many easy-to-add widgets like guestbooks and games. Most professional web developers use Dreamweaver or VB studio for site development. Neither are easy programs for beginners. It would be easier to learn html and use it to develop a simple site using a text application like notepad than to learn these programs

For a simple five-page website without any interactive widgets, you can expect to pay a web designer at least \$500-\$1200 for an html-based design. Expect to provide all content and images for the site, but allow the web designer to help you with the site structure and navigation.

Search Engine Positioning

Domain names are an important key in search engine positioning, however, search engines also consider the page name, the title code, meta tags, and keywords within your content. Site popularity is also important in search engine rankings.

Key words are the words people type into a search engine box to find your site. It could be a novel name, a publisher, genre, your name, or a topic. Be sure to include all these items in your key word list, and also include them in your website content.

Pick your keywords carefully. Focus on twenty or fewer keywords that you think are most important to your website, then ensure those words are both in your title and mentioned at the beginning of your web page. Rewrite your web content with these guidelines in mind. It also helps to include keywords in headings, links and image alt properties. Ask your web designer to provide the keywords in your links and images, this is not something you can do yourself unless you know html.

Keywords you consider crucial may not be what users think to enter in a search engine input box. Not only should you list the name of each book, but include your pen name, publisher, awards you may have received, the genre, and possibly your city and state. Also add the keywords "author" and "writer."

You can purchase keywords at Google and other search sites, guaranteeing your placement on the first page of search results. However, you will have to pay every time someone visits your website, and your site will appear with the paid ads. It may be worth it to drive visitors to your site if you have a unique book.

Meta Tags

Your <meta> data should appear in the <head> part of your document. It is not visible to casual viewers of your site, but they can see it if they look at the code. The search engines read the hidden code and use the information for different purposes. Some search engines use the description tag to display under the links on a search item list. Other search engines do not use the meta data and exclude it. Repeating keywords in meta tags or in your content will not improve your location on a search engine list.

Keywords and Description tag examples:

```
<meta name="description" content="The Gnome Stories is a series of
fantasy novels about the dark consequences of liberation.">
<meta name="keywords" content="gnomes, gnome liberation front,
lexington, ky, fantasy, gnome harvest, rosetta gnome, ashley parker owens,
gnome press, author, writer">
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Search Engine Submittal

It is easy to submit your site to a search engine, but you will need to go to the site and hunt for the form. On <http://www.google.com>, go to "About us," then click on the link called "Submitting your site." Many search engines have a link at the bottom of the page called "Submit your site," or "Tell us about your site."

Submittal should be free. Do not pay any fees!

If you pay to have your website designed, make sure search engine submittal is included in the general fee. Most web developers have site submittal software, which is much more efficient than manual submissions.

E-Mail

Add an email signature to every piece of email you send. Make sure your name, book name, and website are in the signature. Many sig lines also include a short quote or blurb. Most mail programs automate the inclusion of an email sig line. In Outlook, choose Tools from your menu bar, then Options - Mail Format - Signatures.

Many suggest posting responses using your sig line in Usenet, or other newsgroups. Choose a group with your interests and post regularly to develop interest in your website. This technique is not suggested, and be

aware it can backfire if it is perceived you are posting messages only to advertise your site. Go to Google Groups for easy access to Usenet.

Whenever you publish short how-to's or professional articles, always include your book names, email, and website links in your bio line.

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Parker Owens is writing a series of novels called the Gnome Stories. Find more information at <http://www.gnomestories.com>. Her blogs are located at <http://parentinggirls.blogspot.com> and <http://www.bloglines.com/blog/ciwstudy>. She also writes regularly at <http://www.blogcritics.com> and does blog reviews for <http://www.theweblogreview.org>. She is on staff at <http://www.epress-online.com>. To find out more about web promotion, go to <http://www.webpromotion4writers.com>.

Ten Ways to Tickle Your Creativity - by P. June Diehl

Introduction

Creativity is free. Yes! You heard me: FREE. You have it, even when you don't feel creative. It's there, trying to break out.

A child has a natural, uninhibited ability to tap into his or her inherent creativity. As a child matures, this natural function can diminish. One of the biggest killers of creativity is your own "inner critic," that voice that whispers that you're never good enough. This can lead to a fear of failure.

Conventionality is the adversary of creativity. Look beyond the mundane world to find the magical.

Let's explore some ways that you can free your creativity.

Trust your intuition

Beyond your inner critic and any other voices that tell you what to think and feel, is a voice striving to reach out to you. This is your intuition, your instinct, your inner voice.

Find this voice and latch on, believe and act upon your intuition. The more you trust what it tells you, the stronger it becomes.

Use your intuition when you write. Do you have a "vague feeling" that something is wrong with the story you're trying to write? Don't ignore your feeling. Explore it, let it out. Your inner voice is trying to tell you something important.

Be open and flexible

Don't be quick to judge. Let your mind be a river, flowing along, taking in all that comes its way and going with the tide as it journeys into larger bodies of water.

When we are open to new ideas, they start with a trickle and grow to a flood. Be ready for ideas to rush forth. Have something to write on no matter where you are or what you are doing. Jot down brief thoughts and ideas. Remember that great idea you had and you told yourself: Oh, I'll

remember this one? And later, you couldn't recall that great moment? Write them down!

Learn to bend and twist, to stretch yourself into new positions, take in new ideas, listen to new ways, and explore new possibilities.

Standing out of your way

When you "stand out of your way," you allow your strengths to blossom and your thinking to clear. You see other possibilities; multiple possibilities that you can explore.

Some call this "thinking outside the box." One way to accomplish this is by metaphorical thinking.

Writers love words. A turn of a phrase or a single word can set our racing minds into motion. Take some familiar phrases and create new metaphors. Combine words normally not used together. Stretch your thinking.

Take risks

Consider this: risk is about passion.

What are you passionate about? What excites you? Hopefully, one of your answers is your writing. Passion can drive us to take risks, where otherwise, we might not. Risk-taking doesn't seem so impossible when we see it through eyes of passion.

Use your passion to push your writing to the next level. To try something different. To submit your work. To reach out to others. To dare to go (emotionally, physically, socially, spiritually) where you didn't dare to go before.

There are words, emotions, stories, and poetry in you fighting to get out. Listen to your passion and taking a risk won't seem so scary or impossible. Risk-taking is one way to realize our dreams.

Embrace disorder

Embracing disorder is living outside your typical, mundane self. Seek out that which pushes your limits.

If you always write in your office, choose another location. If you normally write at night, try writing in the morning, or other time of day. If you write from an outline, try freewriting. If you record your stories using a keyboard, pick up pen or pencil instead. If you read or write only mysteries, try read and writing romances, fantasies, science fiction, or from some other genre.

When you try something new, you will feel “out of place” and disordered. Create new and different orders for yourself and out of this disorder, creativity grows.

Be spontaneous

Many people find they function differently depending on the environment. At the day job, we might be practical, logical, and analytical. When relaxing with friends we might be playful, associative, and intuitive. One mind, two ways of thinking. Both are important and both should be nurtured.

Much in our world is about being practical, logical, and analytical. As a writer, you need to embrace, encourage, and allow the other side of your thinking to grow. Welcome the child-you-used-to-be into your adulthood. Mingle the magical you with your mundane world.

When you act on your spontaneity, you allow the magic of creativity a place in your world. Use this as a place in which you can write without questioning what you’ve written. Treat yourself to that child-like, carefree feeling.

Feel your emotions

When you write you pour your heart out and you hope your readers FEEL what your writing is about. You need to dig deep into your emotions in order to find that which will embrace your readers.

Emotions are the waves as they come ashore. Feel your emotions in the soul of your inner being. Feel your emotions as they wash through your body.

One way to explore different emotions is to listen to different types of music. Music is emotion in motion. Try writing to different types of music (classical, jazz, rock, blues, country, gospel, etc.) and explore what emotions and words you are compelled to write, what stories evolve.

Dreaming

You dream at night, you dream during the day (daydreaming), and you have dreams (goals) you work to accomplish.

Do you remember your nighttime dreams? Most creative people have a vivid dream life and remember many of these dreams. Not only is dreaming healthy, but a great resource of ideas for any writer. If you wish to further this skill, try keeping a dream journal.

Daydreaming can also enhance your writing. When you find yourself standing in line at the grocery store or waiting at the doctor's office, use your daydreaming skills to create new scenes, shift through multiple plot possibilities, or develop new characters. Imagine the possibilities.

Dreams are also massaged into goals. What are your writing dreams? How might you develop your dreams into achievable goals?

Use the magic of your dreams to the benefit of your writing.

Be observant

Watch everything and everyone. Become AWARE.

Listen and watch. Go to places where you can observe people. Listen to how they talk. Watch their body language. Learn to read the emotions in their facial expressions.

Watch nature: how the wind moves through a tree, how squirrels behave, how a bird walks and flies, how the grass grows in the crack of the pavement, etc.

Be aware of sounds and smells around you and how others react to them.

A writer is the ultimate observer. One who can sit in a corner watching the world, plotting the story behind the observations.

Ask "what if. . ."

A writer should become the master of "what if. . ." A young child naturally asks "Why" and "What if."

To expand your writing, to be at your creative best: Never stop asking questions.

This is especially helpful in developing characters and plots. You're developing a new character, Marcy. She's a middle-aged college professor who's tackling divorce and caring for elderly parents. How might you learn more about Marcy? Ask questions!

Who are her friends? Is she having an affair? What problems is she having with her husband? Do they have children? What problems is she having with her parents? Does she feel torn between her many relationships? How does she deal with this? How does she feel about life? What are her personal issues? What dreams and goals does she have?

Now, take some of these questions and look at "What if..." to see the possible plot directions.

What if she left her husband? What if she left her job? What if she disappeared from her current life and started over somewhere else? What if she killed her husband? Her parents? What if she tried to commit suicide? What if she had an accident and her perspective on life changed? What if she became religious? What if she was diagnosed with an incurable disease?

Learn to question. Use it often.

In conclusion

Creativity is a gift of magic in a mundane world. Embrace all that encourages and expands your creativity. Let the magic of creativity become the life-blood of your writing.

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To Blog Or Not To Blog - by Michele Schermerhorn

A weblog, or "blog" started out as a personal journal on the Web. They have evolved far beyond that initial concept. Now, weblogs cover as many different topics as there are people writing them. Some blogs are highly influential and have readership which exceeds most traditional newspapers, while others are mainly intended as personal journals to be shared with only family and friends. So, should you consider blogging?

The power of weblogs is that they allow millions of people to easily publish their ideas, and millions more to comment on them. Increasingly people write, read and comment on blogs. Many people mistakenly believe that blogs are only personal diaries. More and more, blogs are being used by businesses to attract customers. Since blogs now come in all flavors, let's look at the basics of blogging.

A blogger is someone who writes a blog. The "Blogosphere" is a word used to describe the online community of bloggers and their writings. A blog differs from a website only because it is a website that is updated frequently, most often displaying its material in journal-like entries. An entry, a post, or a posting, are the terms often used to refer to a specific article or commentary written by the blogger on his or her blog. Many weblogs allow readers to write a reaction to what was written in the blog entry. These comments can often be found directly following the blog entry.

For millions of people, blogging is a hobby. For some, like journalists, writers, business leaders and political leaders, writing blogs enhances their professional careers. A blog gives the voice a broader audience and allows more direct and interactive contact with the readers. Some bloggers have readership numbers approaching that of big media and are able to earn income from their blogs. But potential profit should not be the primary motivation for blogging.

Why should a blog be part of your business' marketing strategy? The blogging movement is picking up speed, particularly for businesses. Blogging is one arena where the size of your company won't matter. A blog is NOT the place to promote your product or company. It is a place to promote your ideas, provide tips, and express yourself in the hopes of building an audience. That audience may, in turn, become customers.

There are two key concepts to keep in mind when deciding whether you will launch a blog or not; providing quality content and blogging regularly. These

are critical to creating an audience for your blog.

A successful blog is written with a distinct audience in mind. In this way, you can provide content that is unique to your audience's issues, needs, or desires. If you create content they like and wish to return to read, you will produce quality content. Successful bloggers have a focused topic and a unique personality.

Both your topic and unique style will cause your audience to return to your blog. When they return, it is critical to stay true to your audience and tone of your blog. If people are reading your blog, it's because they like your topic and tone. Try not to stray from your typical topics and style too much. This will give your readers a reason to link back to your blog on an ongoing basis. But your content and tone are just one element to consider.

Also critical to your ongoing blogging success is how frequently you update your blog. If you don't update your blog often enough, blog readers will move on to other blogs. There are too many blogs out there competing for your reader's attention. Blog readers will go where the content is.

Successful blogging takes a commitment of your time. When you begin blogging and wish to capture an audience, you should be prepared to blog every day. In this way, you can develop an audience who counts on you to help them begin or end their day. This means you should also try to post at the same time each day. Your readers will get accustomed to your schedule and check your blog at the appropriate time. The time of day is not as crucial as the consistency in your posting.

So, is a blog right for you? You tell me. Do you have a distinct topic in mind? Do you have a strong opinion or passion for the topic? Do you know what audience you are writing for? Do you have the time to commit to regular postings on your blog? If so, see you in the blogosphere!

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Michele Schermerhorn calls herself a "Corporate Freedom Fighter" dedicated to freeing cubicle prisoners to experience their own successful online business. She has over 30 years experience in the business world and over 12 years running her own successful online businesses. She is President of Online Business Institute Inc. (<http://www.obinstitute.com>), authors a sassy marketing blog (<http://www.imarketblog.com>), and regularly conducts free online seminars. Online Business Institute Inc. exists to "Create Successful Online Business Owners One Person At A Time".

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