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YOUR
SKILLS**

**WITH THESE TOP
WRITING TIPS**



From

writers in the

Writing For Success

Career Booster Program

Foreword

Writers are always looking for tips on improving their craft.

Some of us, it must be conceded, are how-to-junkies: we just can't get enough advice on polishing our skills, promoting our work and building our career. We surf the net, looking for more. We subscribe to industry magazines. We buy books on technique.

We're especially happy when we find a whole lot of useful advice in one place?
Especially in a free eBook!

The writers who join the *Career Booster Program* are all advanced writers. They've spent time in learning their craft, and now they're fine-tuning their writing. They're 'in the loop': meeting with other writers; sending work out, dealing with rejection; rejoicing in the acceptances. Many of them are multi-published; some are anticipating their first book launch; others are getting very close to that initial breakthrough. They are exploring possibilities both online and offline.

In this eBook, they share with you various tips, experiences and insights that might help you along the road too. You'll find everything from tips on writing short stories to advice on writing while geographically isolated. A glance at the contents list will show you what a wealth of information you'll find in this book! There are contact details for many of the contributors, including a link to their websites.

This eBook will demonstrate something else, to you, too – how easy it is to get **your** work in front of people once you have access to the Internet. You can create an eBook just like this one – whether you're writing fiction, non-fiction or short reports. (See Help for Writers at the back of the book.) Make it available from your website, or just send it out via email.

You are welcome to pass this eBook on to as many people as you wish – either as an email attachment or by referring them to the download link at Writing for Success. Good luck – we hope the articles in this will help many more writers on their journey.

Marg & Rob McAlistar

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Section 1

Technique

Plotting, Style, Editing and Polishing



To Plot Or Not To Plot

By Janette Brazel

The backbone of your story is the plot, the skeleton with which you hang the flesh on. Whether you set out with a distinct plot in mind, with the ending clearly visible, or your characters take you on a wild ride, finding the ending only when you get there, there is still a plot holding the words together.

How you decide to plot is entirely up to you, the writer, but the end result must be the same - a plot in evidence so you have a story that is logical. A story that flows and is not disjointed. All the bones of your story must be knitted together in a convincing manner. The heel bone should not be connected to the skull.

A Formula... Or Let It Just Unfold?

Some authors strongly advocate a strict plotting formula, whereas others, (Stephen King to name just one) don't believe in plots and let the story unfold as they write. Some authors graph and plan their novel as a map. They surround themselves with paper charts and notes they can move around as the story unfolds in their mind. In essence, a strategic plan of the story.

I have tried writing without a plot and following a formula, both with some success. But I believe that plotting, especially when new to the writing game, helps keep your story on track.

All our stories begin with an idea. Whether that idea be a scene - my first book came from seeing eels twist around each other in a feeding frenzy - or a character who pops in to your head demanding his/her story be told. These ideas/characters must then somehow meld into a story that is logical and compelling to the reader. This is where plotting comes in.

I Have An Idea... Now What?

So you have this great idea/character. What are you going to do with it? I like to get the first chapter down, (which may not end up being the first chapter, but it gives me a starting point). This lets me see the setting and get a 'feel' for my main character. The ideas begin to take shape of where this story is headed. Then I will think about it for a while.

Many nights I lay in bed watching my story unfold. I see it as a movie running swiftly through my mind. The script is always being re-written and often the characters like to deviate from the script. But that's okay, it's their story. Once I've got a fairly good idea of where the story is going, it's time to give it concrete structure. I like to use a plotting tool I learnt on my writing course, called Plotting Clusters. This helps me visualise the story as a whole.

Plotting Clusters

Plotting Clusters involve a schematic diagram of the story as it moves around the central theme. Here the main character and his major problem can be tied in with secondary characters and other obstacles he may face during the story. Character development, or what we want the characters to learn, can also be drawn in here as well as the ending (if you know it). You can add more components to the plot,

subplots, until the story seems complete. I often refer back to my clusters while writing. This helps me stay focused on the story.

However, as I'm writing, other ideas can and do take over. This happens often and I can add them to the cluster, making sure they 'fit' the overall feel of the story. When I look back on the cluster of my second novel, I can see a very different story to what I ended up with. Yet the characters remained the same, the ending remained the same and the overall theme was constant. What changed were the obstacles my main character had to face and extra subplots that were added along the way. This only enhanced the depth of the story.

A Beginning. Middle And An End

(or the good the bad and the very ugly)

So now you have a plot in place. You've met your characters, given them obstacles and have a fairly good idea of where your story will head. You've started with a fantastic chapter. Your beginning has your readers hooked. They will turn the pages at a great rate, until they hit the middle. Somewhere along the way, your story runs out of puff and you get bogged down in the telling of the tale. How can plotting save us from this dilemma?

Remember that you don't have to write a story that is action-packed from the word go, having the reader sitting on the edge of his seat for the entire story (although Matthew Reilly of 'Ice Station' may disagree with that). However you do have to keep the story interesting, keep the reader turning pages. To overcome this problem, I take my plot cluster to the next level. I do a chapter or scene outline once I am a little way into the story.

Chapter Outline - the Memory Pill

A chapter outline may only be a couple of sentences or paragraphs, just to lead into the scene and familiarise yourself with what is going to happen. It also brings the new chapter smoothly in from the previous one, stopping the story from being episodic - making it flow. As a writer you are going to be moving your characters around, making them interact and giving them problems to solve. Every action you give one character will have an impact on another.

Your chapter outline will have these events ready for you when you get to them. Here you will be able to graph the highs and lows of your story, ensuring it does not plod along at the same pace. Hopefully these chapter outlines will work to re-fire your imagination, help to keep your story ticking along.

The Ending

And then finally you reach the ending. The place of ultimate climax and resolution. The place where all subplots come together and tie up nicely - or not (that's up to you). Your ending should be a satisfying conclusion; it should be logical. Why not add a twist to the ending, one your readers won't see coming?

Whatever the ending, make sure it comes with a bang! not a whimper. There is nothing more frustrating for a reader than to get to the end of a story where they have fallen in love with the characters, cried with them and empathised with them only to be given a shoddy ending not befitting the rest of the tale.

Recently, I heard an interview with an author about the conclusion of her book. She said there had been a lot of controversy over the ending. She felt that the ending was befitting of the period of the story and the woman involved. I read the story and agreed with her. Although it was not 'the perfect happy ending', the character was fulfilled and her actions were justified. It was not an ugly ending.

Do Professionals Plot?

Plotting is a tool used in a variety of ways. Here are what some professional writers have to say about plotting:

Leonard Bishop *Dare to be a Great Writer* - 'Characters have conflicts because they are people. Plot deals with the sequence of events that occurs in a character's life. The plot may appear first, or the character. Though separate, they are always together.'

Stephen King *On Writing* – 'In my view, stories and novels consist of three parts: narration, which moves the story from point A to point B and finally to point Z, description, which creates a sensory reality for the reader, and dialogue, which brings characters to life through their speech. You may wonder where plot is in all this. The answer – my answer anyway – is nowhere. I won't try to convince you that I've never plotted any more than I'd try to convince you that I've never told a lie, but I do both as infrequently as possible. I distrust plot for two reasons: first, because our lives are largely plotless, even when you add in all our reasonable precautions and careful planning, and second because I believe plotting and the spontaneity of real creation aren't compatible.'

Rachel McAlpine *Nine Winning Habits of Successful Authors* - 'In a popular novel there is nothing more important than the plot. Without a well constructed plot, we simply do not have a novel. A great idea and a great hero or heroine are a good beginning - but only a beginning.'

And lastly, John Marsden probably sums it up best with this bit of advice from his book *Everything I Know About Writing* - 'Every writer approaches writing differently. People who hand you a list of rules and tell you that they've just given you the secrets of writing aren't doing you a favour. You have to work out your own way.'

Sound advice. Some authors plot, some don't. Some follow strict rules, others break them and set new limits. Maybe they can get the heel bone attached to the skull successfully. Find *your* way and maybe on your journey, you'll enjoy a little plotting.

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Janette Brazel originates from Canberra, Australia. While growing up Janette played hockey, worked in restaurants and wrote heaps of short stories and poetry. She moved to Sydney to study audiology in her early twenties and there met her husband. Janette now lives with her husband, an assortment of children and too many animals. She hopes one day to be organized. Weird stories keep popping into her head so organization will have to wait. She has published stories in paperback, magazines and ebook form. There are so many stories running around her head, Janette wonders if she'll ever get them all written!

Write a Book In A Day

By Peter Taylor

When visiting schools I have found that children believe that all authors sit for weeks and weeks, often years, working on their latest masterpiece. Certainly some books do take a long time to complete, but there are many that can be written in a day. Some of these quickly written books may be suitable to be published, but not all books have to end up in bookshops. We write because we enjoy it ...well ...most of the time. If the words cease to flow on the trilogy of novels you're working on, take a break and write something short for fun, for profit or as a gift.

Here are some ideas :

- Retell an old story in modern or simple words suitable for a picture book - for example an Aesop's Fable or a Bible story, or retell it in slang or a regional dialect.
- Write a short non-fiction book for children or adults - 'Flowers and Folklore', 'Chemical Names, Formulae and Equations', 'How to Render a Brick Wall', 'How to Photograph Ferns'. If you're handy with a camera, and plan your topic, you need very few words to accompany, for example, a collection of photographs of 'Fences with Style'.
- You may find that by asking, shopkeepers would love you to write a short book for them that they could give or sell to their customers, and maybe all you would have to do would be to interview them with a portable tape recorder - 'How to Choose the Glue You Really Need', 'Looking After Your Violet Plant', 'Ten Greetings Card Designs Using Sequins' ...
- Many short books are valuable to add to the family archive - 'Our First Car', 'Holiday in Hell', 'When Sam Went to Grandma's', 'My Father's Workshop', 'The McIvors that Lived Next Door'. Little books of anecdotes and descriptions like these could easily be written in a day and be bound simply and singly. They may also become useful character or setting reminders, or stimulation or bases for other books you write. Similarly, if you need a special gift for someone, a small book of recollections of times shared could be the answer - holidays, sports-field incidents, mischief made... . Most libraries hold books on simple book binding methods, and you will find some information at my website www.writing-for-children.com .
- A story spontaneously made up for a child at bedtime could become a successful publishable story. Write down what your child has enjoyed. It can take several re-writes and edits over an extended period for even the simplest story to be considered 'finished' - picture books are not as easy as many think, but the first draft may only take a very short time to write.
- Simple bound books can also be used to win competitions. Again, you'll find more details at my website www.writing-for-children.com. An example could be, in a competition asking why you want to win a xxxx brand camera, you write your answer as a poem and bind it as a book shaped like the camera you want to win.

- There are a large number of information ebooks available on the web, from people's own websites. If you haven't done so already, consider writing one. I paid \$20 for one book which was only 4 pages long, and then most of what it contained was irrelevant self-promotion. Yours, of course, and hopefully mine, will be far better value, but what I'm trying to get across is that they do not have to be long.

I hope I have given you a few ideas and shown you that writing a book in a day is possible. There are a lot of short books published for adults and for children. Just think how long it takes to read some of them. Not long at all. Though you may feel self-conscious at first, instead of writing, you could try telling your story, or describing your technique, using a tape recorder. The secret is to imagine that you're talking to a friend - you don't re-record and edit as you go along, you just keep talking. Editing can be done after you have transcribed it. You will find that you have the making of a significant book after only an hour's recording, and if you could keep talking for a day ...well, after it's been typed up, you could have a very substantial volume.

Happy writing! Please tell me about what you write and achieve in a day ...or longer, at peter@writing-for-children.com .

© Peter Taylor 2003: Author of *The Australian Manual of Calligraphy*, *Kangaroo's Visitor Gets a Surprise*, a wide range of other books for children and adults, and 'artist's specials' - one of which was presented to HM The Queen when she opened 'World Expo 88'.

Peter's website, www.writing-for-children.com, has his stories and non-fiction for children on it – but it also offers more articles; writing tips for children and adults; advice on how to win competitions; how to make greeting cards and bind books; tips on calligraphy, illumination and illustration techniques, something about the history of books... and much much more, suitable for all ages. At the time of writing this article, September 2003, the site is still under construction. If it is incomplete when you visit, please leave a message at peter@writing-for-children.com so that Peter can inform you when it's fully functional.

Proofreading For Perfection

By Kaaren Sutcliffe

What happens if we don't proofread our work? Well, interesting things can happen... such as the infamous advertisement for a bus company in the Yellow Pages that offered assistance with school *executions*...

As an author and professional writer, I need a 'writer's hat', an 'editor's hat' and finally, a 'proofreader's hat'. These days, to attract the attention of a publishing house the manuscripts submitted need to be near perfect. And if I'm preparing an audit report to be tabled in Parliament and posted on the audit office web site, it must be error-free since the agency's reputation depends on it.

Roles and responsibilities of a proofreader

Having clean and correct documents has been an age long tradition, since proofreading was introduced back in the 1500s. Your job is to check all aspects of the document to make sure it is 'clean' – and correct. The sentence might be 'clean', as in free from typos and spelling mistakes, but it might not be correct. Little slips can lead to large reinterpretations of meaning, such as if the word 'not' were missing from a sentence. Ideally, we would proofread a manuscript a couple of times in its 'life'.

Proofread what?

Let's imagine you've just printed off your draft book, story or article and have settled down to proofread it. Exactly *what* are you looking for? You may find the list below longer than you anticipated, but you should be checking for all of these:

- punctuation;
- spelling and typos;
- layout;
- inappropriate words;
- missed words or sentence parts;
- body of the text;
- the title page and cover;
- the table of contents;
- all footnotes, headers and end notes;
- any references;
- the chapter titles and numbering, for consistency of numbering and font;

- any major and minor headings, for consistency of numbering and font;
- any paragraph numbers;
- the sequencing and content of tables and figures, as well as the consistency of numbering and font;
- the captions for tables, figures and photos or illustrations;
- the alignment, spacing and indentation for missing spaces, additional spaces;
- FACTS - the costs, dates, location, quotations, formulae and so on;
- any names and titles;
- any agency names and capitalisation;
- consistency - of everything!
- breaches of copyright or potential for defamation;
- any cross-referencing and the index;
- the use of colloquialisms;
- the consistency and appropriateness of all tenses used;
- any orphans and widows / leading and kerning; and
- the overall presentation and visual appeal of the manuscript.

Potential consequences

What could go wrong if there are errors? In fiction it may mean your work is declined by an agent or publisher – or, if you're accepted and published, it means your readers will probably write to tell you about every single error. For non-fiction the consequences can be far more severe. Readers will always remember the one or two per cent that you got wrong rather than the ninety-eight per cent you got right. Mistakes undermine your reputation.

Have a quick look at the snippet below. Does it contain any errors?

Then the room leapt to life and soldiers in strange armour rushed to catch his father's body, exclaiming in guttural tones. A gruffer voice barked orders. Terrified, numbed, Kerod lowered the tapestry until his nose was buried deep in shag-horn aroma and the wispy threads trickled his nose and lips. Feeling, feeling, for the key, he skimmed his fingers across the floor around him. Where was it? Unintelligible shouts reverberated off the high ceiling. Distracted, he risked a peek. An object flew threw the air and was caught with a squelch by a soldier in view. His stomach tried to pour itself out of his mouth when he recognised his father's head. *No! No! I must get away.*

There are three. Did you find them? First, guttural is spelled with two u's, second the wispy threads should tickle and not trickle. The third last line should read 'an object flew **through** the air'. Embarrassingly, a friend pointed out the last error to me. I was mortified because not only had five other people read the manuscript and not noticed, but I had read this passage aloud at several workshops and still didn't detect it. So, who makes a good proofreader?

Skills and attributes of good proofreaders

Most of us can improve our skill and concentration considerably, but some people have a flair for proofreading. Who are they? People with these traits:

- an eye for detail;
- perfectionist;
- persistence;
- the ability to concentrate for extended periods;
- a good memory (to detect inconsistencies from one scene or chapter to the next);
- a firm command of grammar and punctuation (How can you find mistakes if you don't recognise them?);
- a love of the English language and words;
- familiarity with the work of the agency / the topic for non-fiction;
- perhaps familiarity with the genre for fiction;
- an inquiring mind and preparedness to check word usage or facts and figures;
- very good general knowledge;
- good judgement;
- tact and diplomacy (for feedback); and
- the ability to meet deadlines and work under pressure.

A proofreader's tools

Proofreading does indeed require some skill. But fortunately there are a number of tools available to help you. These include:

- pencils – preferably dark HB so your marks will show up if photocopied;
- an eraser;
- a ruler (For separating lines of text to help you focus, crossing out tidily, and for measuring layout and indents etc);

- definitely a dictionary and a thesaurus; and
- reference books on grammar, punctuation and language usage.

You also need a comfortable chair and desk, good lighting, and a quiet space to work. Remember to take breaks and to get up and stretch when you're feeling tired. Keep that oxygen circulating. I like to have some chocolate handy, I'm sure that one day it will be proven scientifically to be an aid to concentration!

Always use a hard copy of the document for proofreading. When you've found an error in a line and marked it up, another useful trick is to re-read the *whole* sentence so you don't pass over any other errors. Your brain will tell you you've got the one for that sentence – but there may well be more. Also be careful not to skim over repeat or frequently used words. In one document I observed, three columns in a row began with the word 'reaction'. The third one was typed 'recaction' – and six proofreaders failed to detect it. But of course it was noticed as soon as the published document was released.

It's best to work systematically and not to try to correct everything in one sweep. You'll need to select an area for intense focus. You can start with the body of the text and then go back to check the numbering, the fonts used, the alignment and indentation and so forth. The order is your choice – just make sure you cover *everything*.

Now that you know what to look for and what tools to use, how about trying a more complex document? This one is riddled with errors – see how many you can find.

Troublesome Times

Proof readers are a rare breed. They practice the art of producing perfect English in a world which is in a hurry, where contractions are the norm. Their skills are in high demand, but they're often given a tight timeline to work within. The most unique aspect proofreaders bring to the profession is a predilection for perfection. They provide invaluable advice to writers who are too close to their work to see the errors.

All government or private sector programmes should use proof readers to affect perfection in their documents and publications. Ideally, documents would be proofed at several stages in their production to try and eradicate all errors. All elements must be checked and, the writers appraised of all mistakes. This includes the title; header and footer; the body of the text; line and word spacing; the contents; the index; the consistency of headings; font and pitch; widows and orphans: leading and kerning; and column sizes and widths as well as alignment.

In summary, proofreaders are essential in the life cycle of any document, whether it be fiction or non-fiction, a thousand words or a hundred thousand words.

The errors, in order, are:

1. The title – it says TiNes instead of Times.
2. The first para is indented – first paras are never indented.
3. Proof readers – this should be one word 'proofreaders'.
4. Practice: this is the way the noun is spelt – it should be the verb practiSe. Similarly with advice and advise; device and devise. Learn the conventions.

5. 'world **which**' – should be world **that**. Which is usually preceded by a comma.
6. Contractions – a typo, it should be contractions.
7. Still line 2 - they're – should be the possessive 'their'.
8. Timeline – this is not one word. You need to take care with words and check whether they are joined, hyphenated or unjoined.
9. Most unique – incorrect use of a qualifier. Either something is unique... or it isn't.
10. Line 4 – proofreaders – this is now correct, but it's inconsistent with other usage within the text. Make them all match (as one word.)
11. **Pre**deliction – misspelt, should be **predilection**.
12. **Advise** – now the opposite issue, this should be the noun, **advice**.
13. Line 5 – there is an extra space between writers who.
14. The second paragraph *should* be indented.
15. Line 6 – **secter** is misspelt and should be **sector**.
16. Programmes – this is the us spelling. Check your agency usage. Most use programs, but there are exceptions. For example, the Department of Transport has Road Programmes.
17. **Affect** – incorrect word, this should be **effect**.
18. **Pubilications** – transposed letter, this should read **publications**.
19. Ideally – there should be a space before this word to separate the two sentences.
20. Line 8 – 'there production' should of course read 'their' production.
21. Line 8 still – **try and** is grammatically incorrect and should read **try to**.
22. Line 9 – there is no comma required after the word 'and.' You should study the usage of commas as this is indeed a common error. Become a master of the Comma Sutra as Mark Tredinnick would say.
23. **Appraised** is the wrong word here, it means to praise. The writer should have used **apprised**, which means to inform or keep abreast of.
24. Line 10 'the body of the text' is in Arial Narrow instead of Times Roman.
25. **Cointents** is a typo – remove the extraneous i.
26. Line 11 'font and pitch' is times 11 pitch whereas the remainder is 12 pitch.
27. There is a colon after widows and orphans instead of a semi colon.
28. In kerning the letters n and g are transposed.
29. Last paragraph – same issue with indention at the beginning.
30. **Essencial** is incorrect and should be spelt **essential**.
31. Last line – 'be' is incorrect and should read 'is'.

Are you feeling a little shaken? What an exercise! Many of these issues relate to spelling, punctuation and the finer details of grammar. My advice (with a c) is to invest in some good style guides and references for effective writing. Many good texts on editing and proofreading can be found at www.writersbookcase.com.au.

Role of a proofreader versus an editor

I'm not proud to be the author of that exercise – never mind the mistakes, it deserves a rigorous edit! But you were asked only to proofread it. If you're working on your own manuscripts you can edit and proofread to your heart's content, but if you are asked to work with someone else's material you would be wise to clarify your role.

If you're asked to proofread a *final* manuscript for a publisher or someone, this is the time to lay aside your style preferences and knowledge about effective writing. At this stage, your views on the plot and pacing, whether the lead character is engaging and plausible are *not* welcome. If you slip up and stray into making such comments, use your eraser quick smart! Of course, you *did* use pencil in the first place, didn't you...

If editorial comments are welcome, the best approach is to make *suggestions* to the author. These should be supported with the basis for your suggestion, for example: 'Consider presenting this information in dialogue rather than narrative. This will help to keep the pace of the chapter as well as retaining the use of character point of view.'

Remember at all times that it is the author's story, not yours. However, if you adopt an approach that is professional, respectful, tactful, practical and backed up by sound reasoning, your honesty and expertise will be accepted and put to excellent use to better the story.

Proofreading is an age old profession that remains current – with good cause. As writers, we all desire to see our work as close to perfection as possible.

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Kaaren Sutcliffe is a Canberra based author and professional writer. Kaaren has several books published, including a non-fiction book, a two part fantasy series for adults and young adults as well as stories for younger readers. She writes professionally in her work as a senior performance analyst for the Australian National Audit Office. She has Diplomas in Professional Children's Writing and Professional Editing and Proofreading from the Australian College of Journalism. During 2003 she added the role of freelance proofreader and editor/manuscript reviewer to her repertoire. Kaaren enjoys the challenge of writing, and she enthusiastically delivers workshops to young adults and adults in the ACT region on the essentials of engaging writing. View her works at www.kaarensbooks.com .

Character And The Powers of Observation

By Tracey L. R. Hawkins

“I see,” said the blind man.

A writer understands the need for every good novel to be alive with characters. These characters develop and grow, adding to the story line. They fulfill a variety of roles – from the Protagonist right down to the Supporting Players.

The character/s in the story can make your story come alive or die. It is up to you, the writer, to create believable characters the reader can relate to. The Oxford Dictionary defines **Character** as: *“All the qualities and features that makes a person, groups of people and places different from others”*.

“How do I begin to make my character/s real and believable?” you ask.

First, there is the need to understand the fundamentals of human behaviour.

As a writer you must consider the interaction of your character/s from a variety of perspectives and appreciate the individual and societal factors that influence behaviour. You don't need to be a psychologist to see what makes a person. All you need are the powers of observation.

To understand the principals of human behaviour: look at what makes us individuals.

We all share behavioural characteristics to a certain degree. What separates us from others is the complexity of our behaviour, our thoughts and emotions.

Each behavioural pattern is unique. We each move, think and feel differently from others. These small differences in behaviour give us an individual being.

Our sensory organs such as sight, smell, hearing and touch are far more receptive than we realise. Our powers of observation allow us to sense more about a person than we first think we have noted.

We can **see**, **hear**, **smell** and if need be **touch** what is before us.

- We note a person's dress, appearance, physical behaviour and movement.
- We hear a voice and from from the tone, inflection and pitch of that voice absorb the message imparted to us.
- Smell can immediately provide a profound source of information about that person or the environment.
- Our touch receptors feed us stimuli we interpret into physical feeling and emotion.

These are the external facts that feed us information about a person, place and environmental situation.

We are all familiar with the following sayings: “Actions speak louder than words” and “Never judge a book by its cover”.

By simply looking, we can judge a person/s demeanour very quickly. Behaviour, stance, appearance and dress are indicators that jump out at us. We know if we are in trouble, or if the person is happy, sad, distressed, angry, hurt. By looking at a person’s behaviour we can read much into the person’s manner.

We use the various senses – all the things that contribute to the powers of observation – to draw a ‘picture’ of the character for the reader and to create a believable person. When characters are convincing, readers becomes emotionally involved.

- They love them or hate them.
- They feel for them.
- They trust, or *distrust* them.

Characters grow through the passage of the novel. It is like creating a patchwork quilt. You build each person slowly, here and there adding a new part that belongs to that character. It is not enough to develop a character from someone you know. You are bound to leave out the small factors that make that person unique.

- Do they pick at their nails?
- Chew a thumb?
- Play with their hair?
- Raise an eyebrow questioningly when doubting something?

These small idiosyncrasies all play an important role in relaying behavioural information that helps us gauge the ‘player’. Seemingly insignificant behaviours may be indicators of far more significant characteristics of the person. Picking at nails may be a nervous behaviour or an annoying habit. The thumb chewing may hide shyness or be a trait displayed by a person who is openly lying. By showing these behaviours, the author paints a truer image of the person.

Of course you can’t bore your reader with a thousand physical descriptions of each character. What you *can* do is to use some of these behaviours to reveal the qualities of a character and help create the image the reader needs to be able to visualise the character too.

The powers of observation involve more than using the five senses already discussed.

The Inner Person

“What of the ‘inner’ person?” I hear you cry. “I can’t write a character based purely on external physical factors.”

No, of course you can't. We need to address the inner characteristics that make that person 'tick'.

This is where instinct and intuition kick in and help us to understand some of the complexities of personality. We can never fully know what makes others what they are. Unless we have the magic ability to step into another's brain and think their thoughts we can only be guided by our own logic, and understanding of ourselves, in understanding something of others.

We do however, all have emotions. Okay, some people show less than others – and we all know people who wear their emotions on their sleeves.

It is the compilation of many individual traits that add to the 'me' factor. Selfishness, generosity, love, discord, harmony etc may be revealed through behaviour but are nurtured within. The soul of the character shows through in many ways. Reasoning, logic, and recognition all help us to understand human behaviour. We can use our feelings and imagination to transfer ourselves into different situations. Empathy allows us to trade places and imagine what it must be like for someone else to be in a particular situation.

Gathering Information On Human Behaviour

Alright, I've told you to use your senses and understand human behaviour, but how do I gather this information? What do I look for when thinking of human behaviour?

Your resources are in front of you. Look around you. Unless you live in a remote part of the country chances are you have people near you. Be more observant.

How do police know which suspect is guilty? What was it that drew them back to someone, or made them question a matter over and over? It comes from human behaviour, logic, reasoning and recognition. Police use their powers of observation to really watch people. They stop to think about things that were said; look at little human traits, personal idiosyncrasies that may be clues. You too have these abilities.

Often, we can't help but 'overhear' a mobile phone conversation – or the cry of a distressed child and the angry words from the mother. People's conversations float to us at coffee shops, in the shopping aisle, in line at the bank and as we pass each other in the street. Small snatches of conversation often contain a wealth of information. Even though you might not know the people you overhear, a fragment of conversation may tell you much more than you first realise. The tone, pitch and volume of the voice may relay emotion and feeling that you unintentionally store away.

Think about a conversation you have heard indirectly in the past day or so. What was it about? What was the reaction of the listener or teller? Did you also see the people talking? What conclusions can you draw from their body language and interaction? Did they look friendly? On the other hand, did you think they were merely acquaintances?

Look at people in the street as they pass you by. Are they in a hurry? Relaxed? Stressed? Happy? Hungry? Study their body language. It will reveal so much about a person. Observation can be enjoyable. Sit and watch the world go by. Make up stories about the people you see. Think about what it was that drew your eye to a particular person. Was it their dress, their stance, movement or appearance?

Watch other people watching people! This in itself can be a load of fun. Be a wallflower at a party for a short time and see what is unfolding before you. Study the crowd at the football (I personally find this quite entertaining!). Seeing people interact at large gatherings can be fascinating. Group behaviour is markedly different to that of individuals. People act differently when they feel 'safe'.

Take a pen and paper, make notes on human behaviour. All this will help you, the writer, to create more believable characters.

So... what are you waiting for? Get out there and sharpen your senses! Stop, look and listen to the world around you. You'll be amazed at what you've been missing.

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<http://www.writers-exchange.com/epublishing/tracey.htm>

Say What...??

5 Ways to Make Your Dialogue Zing

By Jill McDougall

“How are you today?”

I’m very well, thank you.”

This simple exchange tells you plenty about the speakers. They are polite, they are well spoken and they probably don’t know each other too well.

Imagine if the interaction had gone more like this:

“Hey bro. How’s it all hanging?”

“Oh. It’s er, ... hanging nicely. Thanks for asking.”

Again a vivid impression is conveyed in just a few words. How did you ‘see’ the first speaker in your mind? Most readers would imagine someone young, street smart, and brash. Probably male.

And the responder? He or she could well be one of those polite acquaintances we met earlier. Only now they are seriously out of their comfort zone.

That’s a lot of information conveyed by a few spoken words.

Dialogue is one of the most powerful tools writers possess. Used carefully, it can:

- breathe life into your characters
- convey mood and personality
- play on readers’ emotions
- supply background information
- add interest and liveliness
- quicken the pace
- provide lots of reader-friendly white space on the printed page.

These tips will help you use dialogue to full advantage:

TIP 1: Give your dialogue personality

No one sounds exactly the same. Age, background and gender all affect how we speak.

Can you match the following dialogue to a teenager, an elderly person and a young child?

1. *“Out of my way, love. I’ve got bigger fish to fry.”*
2. *“Bug off, pizza face.”*
3. *“Worms are yukky.”*

If you want to give your characters’ dialogue some authenticity, try a little eavesdropping on the world around you. No one speaks in exactly the same way.

Some dialogue tricks:

- Drop a few letters when young children are speaking.

‘Come on’ becomes ‘Cm’on.’

‘Probably’ becomes ‘Prob’ly.’

- Insert a favourite word into a character’s speeches.

“It was full of ghosts, yes, and evil ones, yes, and dragons.”

- Use colourful expressions.

“Well paint me purple!”

- Confuse common expressions or words

“I’m telling my mum off you.”

“Don’t be so darn dogbastic!”

TIP 2: Avoid fancy attributions

Attributions are a term used for ‘he said,’ ‘she asked’ (and so on).

‘Said’ is the dialogue writer’s best friend. Since the reader’s eye tends to concentrate on the dialogue and scan the attribution, a bunch of ‘saids’ on the page need not make you nervous.

So don’t fall into the trap of using a dozen different words to replace good old ‘said’ when your character is speaking in a NORMAL TONE. This practice will take the reader’s attention away from the action. It’s fine to throw in the occasional common attribution – ‘asked’ is as invisible as ‘said’ - but don’t slow down your story with irritating attributions such as ‘enquired’ or ‘responded’ or ‘exclaimed.’

TIP 3: Choose attributions with punch

Make no mistake – while it is clumsy to substitute fancy words for ‘said,’ you can make your writing more vivid by using strong verbs when your character is doing MORE than simply speaking in a normal tone. Some examples might include:

blithered, choked, demanded, exploded, grumbled, faltered, hissed, mumbled, ordered, purred, roared, spluttered, urged, wailed, yelled.

REMEMBER: less is more

TIP 4: Be aware of tone

New writers tend to concentrate on *what* is said more than *how* it is said. Much can be conveyed through the speaker's tone of voice.

Consider the difference between these two examples:

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

OR

"What are you doing here?" she asked as if she had just discovered something clinging to her shoe.

In the second example, the reader is left in no doubt as to the speaker's mood.

Mood can also be revealed through the careful use of adverbs (those -ly words that attach themselves to verbs). Many writers avoid adverbs like *he plague*; however, used SPARINGLY, they can add atmosphere.

Watch the temperature drop with:

"I see you've arrived," she said frostily.

And feel the emotion in:

"I thought you'd never come," she said thickly.

Warning: DON'T use overworked adverbs such as 'angrily,' 'quickly', 'sadly.'

TIP 5: Use action tags in place of attributions

Action tags refer to the character's behaviour while they are speaking e.g. She drew in her breath, " You saw me at the murder scene?"

If you use an action tag alongside the dialogue then the reader automatically knows who is talking. By simply writing the dialogue and the action tag, you will find your scene flows more smoothly. I'm not suggesting that you should do without attributions altogether but you WILL find that your writing develops a tighter, more *professional* feel if you cut them down to a minimum.

N.B: This advice does not apply to stories for very young readers who have more trouble 'reading between the lines' and need the extra clues.

Cleverly used, attributions and tags can bring a scene to life and provide some emotional punch at the same time. Consider this extract from Betsy Byar's *The Eighteenth Emergency*: The main character is at the chalkboard, fudging his ability to solve a maths problem.

"Wait a minute." He hesitated. "Are we looking at the same problem?"

“Problem one.”

“Yeah,” he said, shaking his head from side to side. “Problem one.” He paused and then said in an enlightened voice. “What page, Mrs Romanoski?”

“Page forty.”

“Yeah.” His voice sagged. “Problem one, page forty.” He took another sip of chalk. “Wait a minute, let me read this thing again.”

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Tips For Short-Story Writing

By Sue Tognela

Do you love that sense of achievement and well-being you get when you finish something? Write short stories and you'll have that feeling often.

By its very nature, short story writing is fast. Your story can be written, polished, and sent off within a week. And you'll have money coming in from those one or two thousand words while you work on your bigger project, your book.

Short story writing is a great teacher, too. You will learn how to "write tight." It's like writing in a paddock. You can't go past the fence called Word Count, so you learn how to cut out the flowery description, the waffling dialogue and the prattling narrative.

And best of all, short story writing is fun.

Where Do Ideas Come from?

Observing your fellow man while they go about their daily business is a good place to start. Ever sat opposite someone on a train, and made up life story for that person? Try it. By the time you get to Central, chances are you'll have a story simmering in your brain.

Listening in on other people's conversations is called eavesdropping in some circles, but we writers call it research. Sit in a café with a cappuccino and a notebook, and listen. Many a good story has been born that way.

Watching television, reading the newspaper, or even reading a story someone else has written can generate an idea. No, I'm not advocating plagiarism here; that is definitely frowned upon, but an *idea* for your own story that hatches out from whatever you're watching or reading.

Sometimes just thinking of a protagonist's name, or a gripping title, will invoke a story.

Let your mind wander. Begin a conversation between two people, and let them say and do whatever what they want. It's amazing how often a plot for a story will come to you.

Also, ask yourself "what if this happened?" or "What if he/she said that/did that/went there?" Many writing tutors advise this method of coming up with ideas, and it works.

Keep a notebook and a pen in your bag and beside your bed. Sometimes the best ideas arrive when you're out, or at 3a.m, and trusting them to memory nearly always comes off second best.

Let the "Word Count" Button Be Your Boss

Most short stories are regulated by word count.

Word count can be anything from a 300-word essay, right up to a 15,000-word short story or novella. Most are within the 1000 to 5000 word guidelines.

It's important to keep within these guidelines. You may have a brilliant story, which could have won you dollars, or been published in the best magazine, but it wasn't read because there were too many words. It's often stated in the guidelines that the judges or editors won't read the story if the word count is over the required amount.

I know, you're thinking: I can't possibly write this story in two thousand words, it just *has* to be 3,336 words, or the story won't be complete. Once the judges/editors read it, they will realize that. **WRONG.** The judges/editors are only one step below God when it comes to this, and they will bin your story the moment they see the word count is too high.

How to Cut A Story From 8000 to 5000 Words.

Impossible, you think. No it's not. And once you have cut the story down, you'll be surprised how much better it is. But how is it done?

Be ruthless. Cut out everything that doesn't move the story forward. Cut out unnecessary words and phrases, such as actually, as a matter of fact, he replied, she asked etc. And cut out the obvious words, such as "her dress was the colour of pink." "Her dress was pink" is enough.

Interweave a brief description of your characters as they are doing something else. Eg: "He picked her up and carried her into the house. "Gawd," he said, "are you sure you're only fifty-seven kilos?" This tells the reader she is a slim woman, while still moving the story forward.

Your characters dialogue has to be kept tight as well. Don't let them waffle. Again, their speech has to move the story forward. If the story has no place for them to be telling each other what they did on Saturday night, leave it out.

I like to write the story as it comes into my head first, and then leave it for a few days or a week before I begin the first polish. Then I polish it again, and again, until it's shining like a bald man's head. When I think it's finished, I leave it for a few more days, then read it again, and give it a final tweak. By that time, it will be within the required word count, have no unnecessary words, and will be the best that I can write.

Reading Reading and More Reading.

That's right. A good writer of any genre needs to read everything they can get their hands on. If you intend to submit a short story to a particular magazine, it's a good idea to read a few stories already published by that magazine first. I have heard many editors lament the fact that people send them stories that are totally unsuitable. If it's a family magazine that has light, often humorous, stories with a twist at the end don't send them a horror story.

Some competitions publish their winning stories in anthologies. It's a good idea to purchase a few of these short story anthologies, and see what type of stories are winners. It's all in the name of research.

Competitions

Some competitions have themes. To win a competition with a theme, you need to be as original as you can be. I once read the comments of a judge who had to read hundreds of short stories based on the theme of “Spring” He said that the majority of entries were a variation of each other. What do we think of when we think of Spring? Warm weather? Blue skies? Bees? Yes, everyone had thought of that, and wrote their stories accordingly. Everyone except the winner. His story was within the guidelines of the theme, but completely different from the others. The judge was beside himself with joy to find something different.

So the lesson to be learned is---don’t go with your first idea. Everyone else will have thought of it too. Discard the first, and probably the second idea you have. Recently I read where the theme of a competition was “Disaster.” Most of the entries were about floods, earthquakes, hurricanes etc. The winning story was about an avalanche. Still a disaster story, but the writer incorporated his protagonist’s emotional slide into his personal disaster as well. So, think of a different twist with the theme competitions, and increase your chances of winning.

Other competitions have different genres to choose from rather than themes. I find these easier to write, because as long as you stay within the genre and the word count, you are free to write about any subject.

Horror and erotic stories have their place as well, if this is what you like to write. There are competitions out there for those genres too.

Finding Competitions

There are thousands of writing competitions to be entered. Most offer prize money, some offer prize money and publication. Some magazines, such as The Australian Women’s Weekly, and HQ Magazine have annual or bi-annual competitions with prizes of up to ten thousand dollars.

Many competitions can be found on the Internet. Go to Yahoo or Google, and type in “writing contests” and hundreds will come up. Or you can e-mail: writingcontests@yahogroups.com and be put on an e-mail list that sends you details of different competitions nearly every day.

Magazines

Read the magazine you want to submit to first, and become familiar with the type of story they want. Then get a copy of their guidelines, and start writing. Some magazines pay well, but, like everything with writing, they are hard to crack. However, keep at it until you’ve got a foot in the door.

Some magazines accept submissions by e-mail, others want only hard copy. If it’s hard copy, always send an SSAE, a front sheet, and a short cover note. A front sheet has the Title, number of words, the authors name and contact details, and that a SSAE is enclosed. A cover note tells the editor the title name, the word count, and if it has been published before. You can also include a brief outline of any other stories you have had published.

- Your story must be double-spaced, and paragraphs indented. Use double-double spacing to indicate a passage of time.

- Always use white A4 paper, with generous margins, and never use both sides.
- Always keep a copy of your story, and where you sent it.
- Pages must be numbered, preferably on the top right hand corner, along with your name and title.

On-line Magazines

These are becoming more popular. Again, go to their web site, read the writer's guidelines, and then follow them to the letter. www.expressofiction.com publishes one story per week, and is seeking new writers, or again go to Google or Yahoo search engines, type in "online magazines" and choose from the many that come up.

Submitting by e-mail.

Submitting a story by e-mail is different to hard-copy submissions. The story must have single-spacing, no indents, and double-double spacing between paragraphs. Put your story title, your name and the page number on the top right-hand side. At the end of the story, put the word count, @/your name/address/ the year and your contact details.

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Susan Tognela lives in rural Western Australia, and is a mother of triplets. She has had two short stories published, one in an anthology called "Debriefed" published by Writers Spot publishers, and another published by ReadersWorld.

Another story received an honourable mention when entered in a competition.

Apart from writing short stories for adults, she likes to write for children. A story she has almost finished writing, and hopes will soon be published won her a twelve-month mentorship with the Australian Society of Authors, of which she is a member.

She has a Diploma of Professional Children's Writing from the Australian College of Journalism, and has recently finished a course in short story writing with author Jo Hamlet, of Western Australia.

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Evoking Emotion In Your Readers

By Zab Elizabeth

So you want to write a brilliant novel filled with captivating characters who your readers remember for years to come? Well there is a magical ingredient you need to add to your story – emotion.

If you want to write a compelling story you need to evoke emotion in your readers. How do you do this? By portraying your characters as real people with authentic emotions. To do this you need to know your characters well and know how they would feel and act in every situation.

How do you go about doing this? **Draw from your own experiences.** Find a time in your life when you felt the same emotion your character is experiencing. How did you feel? What did you do? What did you say? What physical sensations did you experience in your body? As a writer you must be willing to honestly revisit your past and access your emotional memories if you want to create authentic emotional lives for your characters.

Emotion can be used in every element of fiction, not just for character development. It can be used in dialogue, action, plot and theme. A character's emotions can drive the story and influence plot twists and turns, as well as enhance dramatic tension.

POINT OF VIEW

Looking at the world through a character's eyes is a great way of showing the character's emotional state. For example, a character who's feeling sad will see the world in a bleak way, focussing in on all the sad events around him. He may also stay in bed all day with the curtains drawn, shutting out the world.

To add to the emotional impact of your story, choose to write as many scenes as possible from the point of view of a character who will have the most emotional impact.

In the following example, from Anna Fienberg's *Borrowed Light*, she shows us, through her teenage character Callisto's eyes, her reaction to finding out she's pregnant.

That evening I went into my room and lay on my bed. I was panicking. Often I do my worrying here, but that's pale pink compared with the scarlet of panic. It makes you feel like you are dying and need an ambulance. That your heart's going to explode out of your chest. Red everywhere. It's like listening to a siren that won't stop. I just wanted it to stop.

USE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Search beyond the obvious cliché. Aim to use strong, original language to paint images that force the reader to see the emotion in a new light.

In this passage from Anna Fienberg's *Power To Burn*, she shows her character Lucrezia's feelings after finding out that her boyfriend has been killed in a house fire which she felt she could have prevented if her parents hadn't locked her in her room.

I walked the two kilometres to the station. My body was heavy. I dragged it along like an old suitcase. Where there used to be light and wind and sun there was now only the cold. I shivered, and the frozen hatred sat in my heart like a lump of dirty ice.

With the use of strong, original language Anna has painted a picture of grief, sadness and hate.

To strengthen your writing, keep in mind these basic rules:- show, don't tell; be specific; chose strong nouns and verbs; and, limit the use of adjectives and adverbs.

Also remember that our emotions affect our senses. For example, fear increases our hearing but decreases our taste and smell. Conversely, when we are in love, we feel everything more intensely. So aim to use as many of the six senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing and intuition) as possible to describe your characters' emotions.

REMEMBER EMOTIONS ARE COMPLEX

To bring your characters to life, you need to see them as complex beings who experience a range of emotions.

Also remember that emotions are not one-dimensional. They are complex and often a mix of many different emotions.

Here is an example from Anna Fienberg's *The Witch in the Lake* describing the many facets of fear that her character Leo is experiencing after his first encounter with the witch.

With a cry Leo flung out his arms and kicked against the dark. His feet felt the solid ground, and gratefully he clung to it, digging into the gritty sand until his fingers stung. Then he turned and ran, clawing at his eyes as he stumbled over the shore, racing into the blue afternoon. The breath was aching in his chest, his throat was raw and still he ran like the wind, away from the darkness, away from the terror.

In this short passage the author has conveyed fear, terror, gratitude, desperation, panic and relief.

BE UNPREDICTABLE

Characters, like people, don't always behave in a predictable way. For example, crying may be an obvious response to grief for some people but in some situations a person may burst into a mad laughter or respond by cleaning the house maniacally. People aren't always predictable in the way they express their emotions and neither should your characters be.

In this passage from Anna Fienberg's *Power To Burn*, she again effectively shows us the hatred her character Lucrezia feels for her father. The author does this by using an unpredictable response coupled with original language shown through Lucrezia's point of view.

I stared at him, and suddenly I laughed, flinging my loud brash laugh like a coloured scarf right into his face. Look at that mouth of his, ringed by the moustache, twisting into that righteous grimace of disgust. I'd like to rub and rub at it until it disappeared.

As a writer, you too need to be unpredictable. Avoid falling into the trap of labelling an emotion and then using a predictable action to illustrate it. Instead, use the power of suggestion to show the character's emotion in an indirect way. How do you do this? Read on.

METHODS OF SHOWING EMOTION

There are various ways that you can convey emotions in your characters. To add interest to your writing, try to vary the method you use.

Dialogue:

Well-written dialogue can be one of the most authentic ways to show a character's feelings. Your character can express her feelings using her own words. Here's an example from "The Writer in the Family" by E. L. Doctorow showing an effective use of dialogue to convey anger.

My mother slammed down the phone. "He can't even die when he wants to!" she cried. "Even death comes second to Mama! What are they afraid of, the shock will kill her? Nothing can kill her. She's indestructible! A stake through the heart couldn't kill her!"

Conversely, a character can show us how she is feeling by what she doesn't say. For example, she may be angry with someone and give him the silent treatment.

Internal dialogue:

Internal dialogue is also an excellent way for a character to convey her true emotions. Remember to keep monologues short as they take the reader away from the action.

Here's another example from Anna Fienberg's *The Witch in the Lake* showing Leo's fear when his father becomes ill.

God, please don't let him be sick. Make him better now, please. He's all there is in the world. Please, oh please.

Action:

The way a character acts or reacts to a situation or person can also show her emotional state as well as shape your character's personality. Different people show their emotions in different ways. For example, someone who is angry may throw or punch things while someone else may burst into tears.

Indirect action:

Be careful not to force cliqued actions onto your characters to demonstrate emotion. Sometimes a character's emotional state can be shown through indirect action. For example, an angry person may furiously chop wood or massacre the vegies.

By using indirect action you can avoid stating the obvious and allow the reader to put the emotional puzzle together.

Props:

Another effective way of showing your character's emotional state in a more subtle way is through the use of props. For example, you can show your character's sadness by describing an open photo album on her lap and mascara smears under the eyes.

By using the power of suggestion, you allow the reader to work out the emotional state of your character without stating the obvious.

By now you may have realised that Anna Fienberg is one of my favourite authors. Why? Because, not only is she imaginative and a great storyteller, she is skilled at eloquently capturing her characters' authentic emotions.

Aim to take your readers on an emotional rollercoaster ride and they'll be queuing up for more.

If you would like some further information on this topic, get your hands on *Creating Character Emotions* by Ann Hood (ISBN 1-884910-33-5)

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Zab's picture book 'Zapped' is soon to be published by Writer's Exchange E-publishing International (www.writers-exchange.com/epublishing/). Zab has also been published in *Countdown*, a NSW School Magazine, and in SIRS Publishing's educational database, Discoverer®. She is currently working on a fantasy novel for 8-12 year olds.

If you want to find out more about Zab have a look at her author page at www.writers-exchange.com/epublishing/authors.htm where you can also catch a glimpse of her beautiful cat. Zab can be contacted at zab@iprimus.com.au

Blending Your Tale

By Kaaren Sutcliffe

What makes a story great? We all know the answer, don't we? Engaging characters, a ripping, gripping plot, an inspiring setting and a nice underpinning theme. Too easy. In my workshops I coach adults and young adults alike about the importance of what I call the four golden eggs in a story:

- the characters
- the plot
- the setting *and*
- the theme.

We work hard on designing character and setting templates and on making our stories page-turners, with a plot that grabs the reader early and never lets them go.

But a great tale is more than that. Not only does your story need to contain all of these elements, but they need to pull together, and they can only do this if they are carefully blended. The more seamlessly they are blended, the more inspiring and engaging the tale, the more the reader is spellbound. What do I mean by 'blend'? And how do we do this?

I shall begin at the beginning. The choices you make when you start your story will have an impact on how, and how well, you, the writer, can blend your tale. Once you've made some fundamental choices and applied them, there is a range of writing techniques you can employ to further smooth the blending, to further enthrall your reader. There's no simple correct way to begin crafting a story – sometimes the characters appear to us first, sometimes the setting. Or perhaps it's the plot, the 'what if' scenario that sets our imagination racing. Some people tell me they get the whole thing in one vivid swoop.

The lead character in my trilogy, a fifteen-year-old prince named Kered, wandered around in my subconscious for almost eighteen months before I began his story. He even tried on different costumes and settings! Then the theme arrived – and I was away to my keyboard in a hurry because everything slotted into place and I knew how the tale was to be blended.

First choices – intertwine character and plot

We can ask ourselves – do the characters drive the plot or does the plot drive the characters? In a blended tale they are harmonised, and they drive each other so naturally that the reader can't imagine the story occurring any other way. In her book *Dynamic Characters*¹, Nancy Kress writes that conflict is where our characters and plot intersect in our story. She states that our choice of lead characters, and their behaviours and motivations, will influence how they respond to the obstacles in our plots, which in turn will take the plots down prescribed pathways.

¹ Kress, Nancy, *Dynamic Characters*, Writers Digest Books, USA, 1998.

How does this work? The theme for my trilogy presented itself as the resilience required for a human to recover from torture and trauma. Conveniently for someone wishing to write a trilogy, my research described three main stages of recovery. So I carefully wrapped Kered's tracking through one phase in each book with a matching series of plot developments. Allow me to illustrate:

In Book One, *Kered's Cry*, Kered's kingdom is invaded and he is captured, tortured until near death and then thrown into the nearby desert to either live or die. His response is consistent with phase one of recovery: he shows the symptoms of mild paranoia, terror and a reluctance to speak about what has happened. Kered is rescued, but he refuses to reveal his identity. This results in a period of safe haven at a desert village until he is recovered physically. After this, he and his companions undertake a long and danger-filled trek north through my fantasy realms, away from his traumatic past, until he is presented to a distant uncle who recognises him. At the end of Book One, Kered accepts his responsibilities and the focus for Books Two and Three shifts towards how he can retrieve his kingdom and save his remaining people.

If Kered had got himself up from the desert, yelling, 'You bastards! I'm coming to get you!' I would have had to use a very different plot – Kered would have immediately gathered an army and tried to retake his kingdom. Hence, my theme and my lead character are influencing my plot. Instead of a simple theme centred on revenge, I now have a story that leaves the reader wondering not only whether the young prince will win the battle to save his kingdom, but also worrying whether he *can* recover enough to even try. I have doubled the tension across the story arc because the character, the plot and the theme are all pulling together.

My working titles for the three books are based on the plot elements: *Kered's Cry* (the invasion and exile); *Kered's Call* (the gathering of his army); and *Kered's Crown* (the retrieval of his kingdom and crown.) However, an alternate set of titles could just as easily be based on Kered's personal progress: *The Sharid* (the 'stray' found in the desert, the boy without an identity); *Prince Kered* (the revealing of his identity and summoning of allies as the prince in exile); and *The Prince of Darkness* (his fulfilling of his role in the prophecy and becoming the ultimate victor. The plot and character parallel track throughout the trilogy.

Next choice – point of view

This is another decision that will affect the blending of your tale. I prefer to use third or first person rather than narration. Why? I feel you can more tightly weave the elements if you're not working in narration mode. Using third or first person point of view allows you to *show* to a greater depth than the omniscient slant does. It can be difficult to sustain point of view, and I believe this is one of the writing techniques that helps distinguish the advanced author from those of us still learning. Not only should we use our character's behaviours to *show* our story rather than *tell* the reader about their emotions, we can also weave our characters and setting together. We can avoid episodes of stark description by playing them through our characters eyes. Here's a short example.

From an early draft:

They passed through the gates and wove their way through the meandering crowds. Ashraf was pleased to see that many varieties of people and creatures milled together. He had already passed two green Echrans, narrowly avoided being skewered by the tusks of a Noxy, and closed his ears to a Lapo

screached argument. It was likely that someone from most of the neighbouring realms was present.

Narrow laneways criss-crossed the city, each bordered by low, stone walls. The uphill sites were reserved for the residences. These were a mixture of coloured bricks and tiled rooves that glittered in the coastal sunshine. The squareness of the design of the buildings and lanes was broken up by exotic trees, which provided welcome relief through patches of shade. The lower levels of the city were divided by stone walls into squares that could be reserved for trading. These were all numbered, and you could purchase a single block or a double block.

Here's the re-written version:

They passed through the gates and wove their way through the meandering crowds. Ashraf was pleased to see that many varieties of people and creatures milled together. He had already passed two green Echrans, narrowly avoided being skewered by the tusks of a Noxy, and closed his ears to a Lapo screached argument. It was likely that someone from most of the neighbouring realms was present.

As they walked along Ashraf could see easily over the low, stone walls that divided the matrix of lanes. Looking up the hill towards the residences, to the coloured bricks and tiled rooves glittering in the coastal sunshine, he wished they could afford to stay up there, where the evening breeze would brush away the day's heat and dust. He forced his gaze back to the lower levels, to where the low walls divided a large portion of the city into square blocks that could be reserved for trading. Frowning, he determined to secure a block with a tree in it for shade – it need not be one of the elegant, exotic trees that dotted the chequered squares – any tree would do.

Can you feel the difference between the two? Which did you like better? The first one has a technical point of view slip into narrator mode. The second one holds the setting and perspective from the character Ashraf's eyes. Now imagine the effect of this compounded throughout your entire story or novel...

Some summary tips

It takes me much editing to make sure my tale is blended *all* the way through. I think it's fine to capture my characters, setting and plot on the first write through, but after that, the hard work begins. When I begin the sweeps of re-writing, I now ask myself these questions:

- Does each scene progress the plot and character relationships in some way?
- Have I chosen the best point of view to portray this segment of the story?
- Am I showing and not telling?
- Is my setting, and the actions of the others present, reflected through my chosen character's viewpoint?

- Are my character's behaviours and motivations consistent with the plot that results from them?
- Are my main characters' behaviours all working consistently towards the resolution intended? (ie is my theme sustained?)
- Have I inadvertently set up any red herrings I don't intend to pursue?
- Does the plot feel contrived, or are my characters flowing naturally from one event to the next?

And what is the significance of all this? Your triumphant ending! The blended tale will also fulfil the readers' expectations at its conclusion. As I said at the start, the readers will not be able to imagine it ending any other way. In her book *Plotting and Editing*, Sherry-Anne Jacobs² suggests that the beginning of your book, your opening hook, will make a reader purchase your tale. But it is your *ending* that will have them asking when your next book is coming out. And this is worth the time it takes to blend a darn good tale.

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Kaaren Sutcliffe is a Canberra based author and professional writer. Kaaren has several books published, including a non-fiction book, a two part fantasy series for adults and young adults as well as stories for younger readers. She writes professionally in her work as a senior performance analyst for the Australian National Audit Office. She has Diplomas in Professional Children's Writing and Professional Editing and Proofreading from the Australian College of Journalism. During 2003 she added the role of freelance proofreader and editor/manuscript reviewer to her repertoire. Kaaren enjoys the challenge of writing, and she enthusiastically delivers workshops to young adults and adults in the ACT region on the essentials of engaging writing. View her works at www.kaarensbooks.com .

² Jacobs, Sherry-Anne, *Plotting and Editing*, Training Publications, Western Australia, 1998.

Writing Non-Fiction Articles For The Educational Market

By Susie Brown

The educational market provides many publishing opportunities for writers. Good quality material, both fiction and non-fiction, is required for a variety of subjects and stages of learning. Of these, perhaps the greatest chance for publication exists in the writing of non-fiction articles for educational magazines. Each magazine will have its own particular requirements, but it is important to keep the following points in mind whilst writing your article.

Study the magazine closely

Obtain a copy of the magazine you are planning on targeting. If you have school age children, this should not be too difficult, as many schools subscribe to various magazines. If this is not possible, try the local library or contact the magazine directly. A yearly subscription is usually relatively inexpensive and may be a worthwhile investment. Once you have a copy, familiarise yourself with the styles of writing and the intended readership. In the educational market, it is particularly important to represent a diversity of cultures, as well as including positive gender role models.

Look for themes

Some magazines will have an overall theme for each issue. If the magazine of your choice does have a theme, match your article to it.

Look for a clever twist or an unusual angle. You want your article to be interesting and engaging, but still relevant to the focus of the magazine.

Adhere to the word count

Many magazines will have a specific word count, usually determined by the stage of learning covered by each magazine. There is little point submitting an article of 2000 words for a magazine written for children under 10, no matter how brilliant it may be! As a general rule, non-fiction articles have the following approximate word limits:

- Readers aged 5-7: up to 200 words
- Readers aged 8-10: 500 – 800 words
- Readers aged 11 –14 years: 1000 – 1500 words

Consider your presentation

Decide if your article will be a straight recording of facts or whether you are planning on being more creative. You could present your article:

- Using point form or subheadings
- As a quiz or game
- As an interview
- As a “make and do” activity

- Including tables or illustrations

Do your research

Make sure that the information you include is correct. If your article involves numbers or techniques, make sure your facts are as recent as possible. If you are unable to verify a piece of information, don't include it. Also, make sure you acknowledge your sources. Write down website addresses. If you know where an accompanying picture for your article can be found, include these details. All this helps to show that you have thoroughly researched the topic.

Edit, edit, edit!

Once you have written your article, check it thoroughly for spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors. Articles in educational magazines will be used for instructional purposes – near enough is never good enough!

Follow the guidelines for submitting your work

Each magazine will have particular requirements for presenting and submitting your article. Ensure that you use the correct size and style of font and always include a cover sheet with your article, containing:

- The title of your article
- Number of words
- Your contact details

If you are writing for a particular theme, make sure you meet the issue deadline and always include a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Hopefully, this will be used to send out your publishing contract!

Writing for educational magazines can be both rewarding and profitable. Why not check out the guidelines on the following websites?

www.pearsoned.com.au/schools/magazines/Guidelines.asp

www.hotkey.net.au/~schmag/Contributor.html

Go on! What are you waiting for?

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Susie Brown is a qualified writer with extensive experience in a variety of writing styles. Her first book for beginning readers, entitled *Are We There Yet?* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2002 as part of their Bright Sparks Literacy Series. She has also been published by Pearson Education Magazines and will have 2 picture books e-published by Writers Exchange in 2004. Susie is a registered freelance journalist with the Australian News Syndicate and has written theatrical programmes and newsletters for local theatre. She also provides a fast and efficient editing and proofreading service.

Susie can be contacted by email at siusaidh_au@yahoo.com

Writing “Chapter Books” For The Education Market

By June Keir

The Education Market offers many different opportunities for writers of both fiction and non-fiction works. Educational Publishers provide schools with material that is used in classrooms from kindergarten to year 12 and beyond, to university.

The non-fiction range includes articles in school magazines, work sheets and information sheets to accompany school texts, black line masters, and textbooks. For this market you will be writing to specific guidelines and will have to do a lot of very careful and detailed research.

Fiction material ranges from very early reading material to full-length novels. Each level provides stories for a certain reading level or ability. Stories for children who are just beginning to read are difficult to write. There are very few words in these stories therefore the writer has to make each word count. This is not a field I would recommend for the new writer. Chapter books, on the other hand, allow more scope for story development, use of interesting words and more detailed plots. For this article I am going to concentrate on Chapter Books.

What Are Chapter Books?

Chapter books bridge the gap between emergent and early reading books, and full-length novels. They are aimed at children from six to twelve years. These books are a similar shape and size to books read by older children. They are divided into anything from 3 – eight plus chapters and will have between 500 and 10,000 plus words. Chapter Books for the younger readers will be heavily illustrated with pictures that support the text. As the number of words increases, the number of pictures decreases.

Chapter Books are used in schools by classroom teachers and support personnel to assist children to become confident, independent, and hopefully enthusiastic, readers. Children’s early reading experiences should be positive and rewarding. In order for this to happen, the material must be accessible to them. And thereby lies the rub. It is a challenge to write exciting and interesting stories that use rich, stimulating language that will engage children, and will fit within specific writing guidelines.

Publishers’ Requirements

Educational publishers have very specific requirements. To find out what these are, you must research the market. Find out which publishers are looking for this type of material. *The Australian Writer’s Marketplace* is a good place to start, but make sure the information is up to date.

Submission Guidelines And Other Research

Obtain submission guidelines from publisher’s websites. Talk to school librarians and classroom teachers. Talk to children and find out what they like to read. And remember, educational publishers not only have to please their readers, they have to please school principals, librarians, teachers and parents. Therefore, grunge and swearing are out. Kids may love them but educational publishers and teachers do not. Be wary too, of placing your protagonist in dangerous situations, e.g. befriending strangers.

Word Count and Illustrations

Publishers' guidelines will certainly give you a required word count for each reading level. They may give the number of chapters the book will have, and the number of pages. You will not have to provide the illustrations for works of fiction. Some publishers will want your story to be written at a certain readability level. If you are using Word or Word Perfect on your computer, you can check the readability levels of your work as you write. These levels are based on sentence length, word complexity, i.e., how many syllables in the word, and commonality of words used. Some publishers provide lists of words to be used at each level. This doesn't mean you can't use challenging and interesting words. But you need to use them in such a way that the reader can work out what they are from the context in which they appear.

What Should You Write?

Having obtained all this information, you are poised at the computer and ready to write. What should you write? There is no hard and fast rule about what to write for children at these ages. There is always a huge range of interests among children in any classroom. There will also be a wide range of ability. Some children will be from very literate families, and some children will come from homes where there is not a single book.

As a general guide, very young readers like to read about familiar things

Create stories about family, friends, neighbours and school. Their worries and fears revolve around changes to what is familiar. For this age group you would have one main character and two or three supporting characters. You would tell the story from the viewpoint of the main character. Although you should write the story for this age group on one level, you should still show the main character changing in some way as he/she solves the problem that drives the story.

For older children you will begin to use a more layered approach

Introduce subplots to give your story more depth. Children in this age group are beginning to take more interest in how their peers and other people deal with their life experiences. Children at this age are influenced by their peers. They are interested in topics that are relevant to their current situation. They are interested in ideas. As a writer you can present them with topics that explore relationships and broaden their horizons. You can give them books that inspire them.

Children like to read about characters their own age or a little older.

Give them strong, real and interesting characters whose experiences they can relate to. But don't give them perfection. Your protagonist should have some faults. He or she should have some self-doubt, as all children do. Children, particularly those in the older group, often feel that they are stuck in a world where other people control their lives. Show them therefore, characters who solve their own problems and who grow, and learn something about themselves and others along the way.

If you can write with humour, children will love your books.

Younger children enjoy word play. They delight in puns and double meanings. Older children will handle humour that takes time to set up. Keep in mind though, that humour dates. A joke is only funny the first time you hear it. Slang also dates. Words like cool and dude may not have relevance for tomorrow's young reader.

Keep Your Readers In Mind

Consider the situation in which your young reader is placed.

He/she will most likely be in a reading group of four to six children. The group will read your book once, twice or even several times over a week or more. They will participate in stimulating activities based on your book: discussion, artwork, drama and creative writing. They may have to fill in endless worksheets. As a Chapter Book, your story will more than likely be required reading. So give your readers something they can work with and enjoy. Give them something that makes them want to read more of your books and others.

Children are not patient people.

Unless they are very competent readers, you will have to grab their interest in the first sentence. Your first sentence should contain elements of the whole story. The child's interest should be sparked so that he/she wants to read on to find out what happens next. If you don't do this they will lose interest and begin to think of something else. Plunge your main character into an interesting or threatening situation. Then keep up the pace with action that a child can easily visualise. Move the story along with interesting and challenging events.

Each chapter should show one main event and should end with a hook that entices the reader to begin the next chapter.

This is particularly important for Chapter Books used in classrooms where children may read one chapter a day, or one chapter every few days.

Give your story a satisfying ending.

A disappointed child will be reluctant to delve into further reading. Make sure your main character achieves his/her goal. If there are loose ends, tie 'em up! Your reader should put down your book feeling satisfied, but also with a feeling of sadness that they have to say goodbye to these characters and their lives.

We want our young readers to pick up the next book with enthusiastic anticipation, and even more importantly, to pick it independently and read it with joy.

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June Keir lives in NSW on the Far South Coast. She has been a teacher in both regular and Special Education and has worked as a private tutor in Reading and Literacy. In 2001 Ms Keir completed the Australian College of Journalism Professional Children's Writer's Course and the Writing For Success Career Booster Program. She is currently enrolled in the Australian College of Journalism Professional Editing & Proofreading Course.

In 2001, Ms Keir's story, Saving Josh was accepted for publication by NSW School Magazine. In 2003 her three titles, Lighthouse Letters, Without Speech and Set Free will be published by Macmillan Education.

Ms Keir can be contacted by email at jkehr2000@yahoo.com.au

And Now For The Title...

By Peter Taylor

I'm glad I go to my local shopping centre only twice a month. You see, there's a bookstore there. Though I aim just to go to the bank and the supermarket, I nearly always end up adding to my already bulging library. I've got enough recipe books to enable me to cook a different meal each day for years, but *The Chocoholics' Guide To Cakes And Desserts* was irresistible.

There is no doubt that cover artwork can influence the decision of a potential purchaser to browse, or not, but the title of a book is an amazingly powerful tool to tempt people to consider it and reach for their credit card. For an ebook, or an unseen online article that will attract a reader and eventually lead them to your website, the title is even more important.

As you can tell, I am a confirmed chocolate lover. There's nothing else like it. It's the smell. The silky smoothness as it melts and glides around your mouth. Any book with 'chocolate' in the title will gain my interest. It's quite easy with non-fiction to market your book, or article, to your target readers and grab their attention.

One way is to imagine that you are writing an advertisement. Salesmanship in print. Who is the book aimed at? How will the reader benefit? Though it is usually best to keep titles powerful, short and snappy, ***YOUR MORTGAGE and how to pay it off in 5 years, by someone who did it in 3*** is a great title and a very popular book by Anita Bell. (For online article titles in particular, using capitals, italic, bold print, or a mixture, can also help your work stand out from the crowd.)

Fortunately, titles are not copyright. There must be dozens of versions of *A Beginner's Guide to Bonsai* by different authors, and if you want to add to the list, that's fine. However if you're trying to think up a title for your latest novel, it's probably unwise to call it *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, *War and Peace* or *Alice in Wonderland*. Statistics show, however, that people are attracted to a title with a familiar sound to it - one a *little* similar to that of a famous and well-loved book.

With fiction, you may target people who like the genre of your book, giving people a little idea of what it's about - a clue at least that it's a murder story, a western or a romance, or what the setting is. Some authors decide to use a phrase from the story or hook customers with a title that breeds curiosity.

When you've chosen a winner, and your book has become a best seller, you may then wish to consider keeping some part of its title as a constant element for other books in the series that follows.

Happy Writing! Please let me know how you make your choice. My email address is peter@writing-for-children.com.

© Peter Taylor 2003: Author of *The Australian Manual of Calligraphy*, *Kangaroo's Visitor Gets a Surprise*, a wide range of other books for children and adults, and 'artist's specials' - one of which was presented to HM The Queen when she opened 'World Expo 88'.

Peter's website, www.writing-for-children.com, has his stories and non-fiction for children on it – but it also offers more articles; writing tips for children and adults; advice on how to win competitions; how to make greeting cards and bind books; tips on calligraphy, illumination and illustration techniques, something about the history of books... and much much more, suitable for all ages. At the time of writing this article, September 2003, the site is still under construction. If it is incomplete when you visit, please leave a message at peter@writing-for-children.com so that Peter can inform you when it's fully functional.

Using Drama Techniques For Inspiration In Creative Writing.

By Kate Sellen

You may wonder at the connection between Drama and Creative writing.

Drama is a visual art form: i.e. you go to the drama performance or the theatre to see a play (often the end product of drama is theatre). Drama and theatre present to the viewer/audience a pre-determined interpretation and visual impact, based on one individual – the director.

Writing is the words on paper that create visuals in the writer/readers' imagination. Writing is a solitary activity as is the reading. Many can read the same words and conjure up totally individual visuals, through their own understanding and imagination.

But both drama and writing deal with the same concept/formula. There is a plot. There is conflict. And there is a/the resolution.

Many techniques used in drama are aimed at achieving a story, exactly the same outcome wanted by the writer.

A very simple method of creating a story is through the use of the “Given Circumstances” technique. This basically offers key questions which act as a stimulus for creation. This can be used for a complete story (eg. Picture Books or a novel) or chapter (scene) by chapter (scene).

The Given Circumstances.

WHO; WHERE; WHEN; WHAT; WHY; HOW.

WHO: who am I? Who is the character(s)? Whose point of view?

WHERE: where is the story set? What country? Is it on a ship? In a school? A planet? In a fantasy/ sci-fi world?

WHEN: when is it? Day or night? Is it contemporary or historical? What time of year is it?

WHAT: what is happening? What does the character(s) do/want? Objectively, what is the character's immediate want/need/desire?

Apply the **super objective** or **life objective** and ask:

- What does the character want long term? (i.e. to be richer than anyone else; to be a successful and famous sleuth; to be the most popular person in school; to seek revenge from some past tragedy etc.)
- What must be overcome? What obstacles?

WHY: this is the motivation (for the objective). Why does the character do what he/she does?

HOW: how will the character(s) achieve, decide, move the story along?

- This refers to the actions of the character- the psychological and emotional means of influencing/ affecting other characters and the plot. ie. If X does a particular action, how will this action affect other characters? How will it develop/alter the plot and the story?

Neutral Mask Work

Neutral Mask work is used in mime. It can also be used in writing.

You have thought of a character and a story is playing around in your head.

Or you need to introduce a new character and are unsure what the character type should be.(ie. what *sort* of character; is it a protagonist? etc.) Perhaps you want more depth to the character, maybe you can't fully visualize what the character looks like (unsure about hair colour ; temperament etc.).

Let's make the paper cut-out solid.

The Four Elements.

Earth, Air, Water, Fire.

Which one is your character?

Write down examples for each (consider using cliches as well) i.e:

Earth	solid, slow, strong, base, robust, coarse. Down to earth; solid as an ox; common as dirt.
Air	breeze, gusty, light, transparent, hot, force. Air head; off with the clouds.
Water	stream, waterfall, river, ocean, drip, diluted. Babble like a brook; weak as water; cold as ice.
Fire	blaze, passion, wildfire, spirited, heat, spark. Out of the frying pan and into the fire.

Find colour(s) to match the element. Perhaps your character has more than one element in their makeup. Perhaps one character (element) meets another character (element)...what might happen?

Develop your character from here.

Basically, this relates to the literary term 'pathetic fallacy': meaning to create human emotions from inanimate objects or using nature to heighten or create a character's makeup (e.g. moods, emotions).

Shakespeare used the **elements** and the **four humours** to create characters. Man's physical life begins with food; the four elements; the food goes from the stomach to the liver where it is converted into four liquid substances (the humours). Each humour has

its counterpart in the elements. The humours determine the four basic personalities.

Element	Humour	Common Quality	
Earth	Melancholy	Cold & Dry	Melancholic man
Water	Phlegm	Cold & Moist	Phlegmatic
Air	Blood	Hot & moist	Sanguine
Fire	Choler	Hot & Dry	Choleric

Now think about the *huge* range of characters that Shakespeare created in his 37 plays!

Portraits.

Find a picture (magazines/newspapers etc) or a photograph. Focus on one person. Examine that person. The façade of the person will tell you certain, obvious details. From this point, start to explore.

- What does the body language tell you?
- What does/doesn't the face reveal?
- List age, status, possible occupation. Fill in the gaps. Create a biography or a 'day in the life'.

Alternately, choose a picture/photo that involves a group. Not only do you have a group of individuals, but you can explore the relationships and the dynamics between the characters.

A simple technique, yet very effective.

Take a character that you are planning to use in a story. Let's say you already know key details, for example, you know the age, the sex and what the character does (ie is a teacher, is a witch.)

From here, ask the character questions (it's lots of fun to do this activity with others). Discover the answers... make them up! Let the character have depth; make decisions; these may well lead the plot down a different street. Think of it as a map!

This technique can be used for your theme and plot, and will function to show any 'holes' in your story.

Playbuilding.

There are four main concepts in playbuilding. These are

- the theme play
- the story play

- the character play and
- the setting play.

Theme play	Episodic structure, main structural thread is the theme. Usually brief scenes (chapters) Ability for quick shifts of focus and mood.
Story play	Plot is the main thread. Demands precision and careful planning. Leads to tighter boundaries; then come the characters.
Character play	Characters need to interact. The richer the characterisation the less complex the plot needs to be. Characters do not provide as strong a background as the story/plot does.
Setting play	Allows great contrast of characters. Thrives on episodic structure with a variety of characters/actions linked to a single (or limited) locality/ies. Allows for tension and suspense. Strong contrast of incident(s) will enrich story (ie. murder, intrigue stories). Vital to have characters and incidents to fill this style to create and hold interest.

These four concepts can be used individually, or you can take elements of each.

If a script is well written, it will tell the actor everything he/she needs to know. This includes:

- the character (motivation, point of view, traits, appearance).
- the setting
- action/reaction and response (to other characters, the plot, the conflict and the nature of /or for the resolution).

This is no different to writing a story. One end result is visual, the other is the words on the page. An actor '*discovers*' his/her character from the script, and then proceeds to '*flesh*' out the character and attempt to get to know everything about them. A writer *creates* the character and then proceeds to '*grow*' and develop *with* the character.

In Shakespeare's plays the use of punctuation and stage directions were not used and were considered totally unnecessary. It was the 'helpful' editors of the 19th & 20th centuries that added these 'instructions' to help make texts more accessible, but usually they obscured rather than clarified matters for readers. Through the use of prose, blank verse, caesura, enjambment, verse lining etc., Shakespeare was a master, adept at telling the actor/ reader where to pause, where to question, where and how to move, to explain relationships between characters etc.

Essentially, this is what the creative writer of stories wants to achieve as well.

Remember, that the reader does not want to be 'told' every little detail – then there is no individual discovery. The reader may be bored or insulted and will often close the book.

The story and the character(s) do not start at page one as 'complete'. Whatever would have happened to poor little Harry Potter? He would have been 'completed' before he even started! There would have been no series.....

All the ideas presented here are actually very simple, and the relationship between drama and writing is straightforward. It is simply a case of borrowing from one art form and applying it to another. Mem Fox is one example of a successful Australian children's writer who sells well worldwide, particularly in the U.S.A. I still have Mem's drama books, which she wrote for kindergarten and primary. She moved on from this noble career of drama teacher to become a great writer.

© Kate Sellen 2003. For further information, email: katesellen@iprimus.com.au

Kate Sellen has a background in professional theatre, drama and education.

Her writing background includes the self publication of a book of poetry 'In Black & White' written with Ted Rickards, numerous scripts, poetry, short stories and educational articles. Kate's first two picture books are published with Writer's Exchange E-Publishing.

“How Can You Write This?” - Writing About Confronting Subjects

by Annette Chennell

What does ‘confronting’ mean?

The dictionary describes it as:

- Standing or coming in front of, standing in the way of
- Facing hostility or defiance
- Setting face to face
- Bringing together for examination or comparison

Some writers, through their writing, do all of the above. They may seek to expose and examine things that are generally hidden. Things that are buried under blankets of propriety, fear, discomfort, social norms and a host of other influences I can scarcely guess at.

So what subjects are confronting? It could be any number of things...think of subjects that generate that sinking feeling in most of us, the dull gnaw in the pit of the stomach. For me, that has meant writing about suicide and death. It could be rape, murder, mental illness, the homeless, the aged being lost or forgotten in nursing homes, world hunger, the holocaust, child abuse. Those things that we would rather dodge to avoid discomfort. They can be painful, stark or just plain difficult to deal with. They can take us into the shadowlands and challenge the equilibrium that we work so hard to maintain. So, in lots of situations, they become the undiscussables.

Discussing The “Undiscussables”

Writing about these subjects, we cross a line and decide to discuss the undiscussables.

This can be confronting to read. It can make us examine our actions, where did we sit or where would we sit, if something like this descended upon us. It makes us reflect. That in itself can be painful, and rewarding.

Why discuss the undiscussables?

More than anything else, difficult and confronting situations are real. They exist and people experience them whether they are discussed or not. If the experiences become undiscussable then loneliness, and a sense of isolation, can become their partner. Writing can be one way to break through this isolation; to say things about an experience, to reflect on it, to pause and take stock, to share.

If you are experiencing a tough situation, it’s almost guaranteed that there will be others out there going through similar things and perhaps no-one is talking to them about it either. So even though what you write may be dark, it may resonate and find its place out there.

Things to consider

Why are you writing this? Before setting out it is a good exercise to ask yourself why you choose to write this piece; the story, the article, the book. Be clear that you have something to say and what that something is. Write it down. This will help to shape the work, its structure and content. You can also refer back to it if and when you begin to have self-doubts. Writing confronting material can be tough and I have often wobbled on my path, wondering if I had anything meaningful to say on the subject. Sometimes the questions were just my way of looking for an escape hatch. Keep focussed on what you are trying to achieve.

What position should you write from? You can write from an observer's point of view, as a reporter. You can fictionalise the material. Or you can write from your own experience, from the heart. Only you can decide that and it will depend on your own circumstances. I chose to write from the heart as a memoir, so this article will be coloured by that experience.

Getting into the writing: To write about confronting or difficult subjects you may need to enter into quite a different space from the one you're in day to day. One behind or beneath your own natural defences and safeguards. You may have to go to more hidden parts of yourself; perhaps more vulnerable, where there are cracks, aspects of yourself you've not previously seen.

There are a range of techniques that might help you get into the right space; sitting quietly, visualisation, meditation, imagining.

Avoid editing as you write. It is so easy to be concerned with what readers may say in reaction to the material. Just write. Just write. Banish the internal editor from the room. There is plenty of time to edit later, and even then you'll need a firm hold on the editing process.

Honesty. If you have something to say, say it with all the honesty and openness you can. The openness about a situation can be as rewarding for the reader and for the writer, as the other content of the material. But be mindful of what you expose about others, particularly if you write non-fiction. One way to manage this is to be clear that what you write is your perspective, your experience of a situation.

Be real. You may be describing critical events or situations e.g., where someone dies, someone is hurt, something shocking has happened. It's important to write scenes and responses that are real. That is, as they were or as you would expect they might be played out naturally. As an example, when finding someone dead it would be highly unlikely that a character would say 'Oh bother!' or 'Dear me!'. It would be similarly unlikely for someone in the throws of a manic or psychotic episode to speak like that. You may need to enter into a scene or a memory again and again to portray all the stark detail that belongs there.

It is tempting to sanitise some of the writing to make it more acceptable. Don't. If what you write is not real it may as well stay unwritten.

Look for balance. Life is never all black, no matter what circumstances visit us. Inject other aspects of life or events into the material; everyday details, humour, laughing at even the blackest situations. The natural and real lighter details often sit right beside the confronting stuff. Go there as well. It can break the tension for you and for the reader. It might allow a glimmer of hope about survival.

Reader reaction. Some people will be inspired by what you write. Others won't like it for any number of reasons, their reasons. Confronting material, by definition, confronts people. Being an iconoclast carries consequences. You will get a reaction. Some people may take offence, wish you hadn't written it. You need to be comfortable with that and comfortable with your viewpoint.

Be prepared for but don't fear reader reaction. As long as you have written your experience, you've been honest and have not misrepresented events or people, don't worry about potential critics. Worrying about what people will think of you will stifle your writing.

Get over your self-doubt. If it is critical for you to write this material, there is a good chance that it is important for someone else to read it. And it may have far wider appeal than you think. Writing that raises awareness or puts something tough on the agenda strikes a chord with many people.

Be kind to yourself: If your material is confronting, it will confront you too. You won't be able to escape that. The writer has no immunity, indeed they may be even more affected than the reader. The very process of doing this may open the writer up, open the flood gates. If you write from your own experience, you'll have to re-enter it. If you are writing about someone else's experience you'll be seeing them do the same. At the very least you'll need to enter a space that may not be comfortable.

Being hit by your own material is natural and desirable and those moments may allow you to go further with it; you could examine your own reactions, develop more reflective material.

Be prepared for moments in amongst all of this when you'll think it's all too hard and you'll wonder why you gave yourself this task. If you are affected; take a break, or keep writing from another angle; talk to a friend; read something inspiring; take a bath or meditate. You'll let yourself know what you need. Be sure to listen to that. A break may help bring renewed freshness to the writing.

Putting it out into the world: Releasing the final product or even parts of it can be very, very difficult. Writing about confronting subjects can tap into your own vulnerability, those shadowlands, your heartfelt responses. So releasing it to the eyes of others, particularly editors, is like offering your soul up on a plate with a faint 'Hope you like it'.

It is exposing. That in itself is confronting. But again, if you are clear about why you want to do this and what you hope to achieve, you'll be more comfortable to let it go.

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Annette Chennell has recently finished a non-fiction book for the adult market. It is a memoir about suicide and provides a personal, frank, and human perspective of a woman who has suicided. It also traces the turbulence experienced by the survivors in their passage between loss and a new equilibrium.

She has written several professional and technical documents, on a range of topics that have been published in Australia. Annette has post graduate degrees in science and public health and has worked in the health sector for over twenty years, five years of that in mental health.

Annette can be contacted via email on anniechennell@hotmail.com

Some Tips On Writing Non-fiction

Aileen McLeod

Look to your own life to write a non-fiction story.

Because our lives are all very different, each one of us is unique.

- Think back to any incident in your life that had an unusual twist.
- Analyse the people who you meet; OBSERVE, LISTEN and WRITE!
- Some of you may have had awe inspiring incidents in your lives and if that is the case, you have a story in the making.

Remember, the simplest event can make a heart-warming read if told with passion and colourful words.

Non-fiction can embrace tragedy, mystery, romance and comedy. These are the ingredients that make up our lives.

I am fortunate in one sense and unfortunate in another as far as life's dramas go.

Fortunate, because unforeseen, unusual 'once in a lifetime events' have provided me with material for the non-fiction genre.

Unfortunate, because some events have been frightening to the point of seeming unreal.

A "Once In a Lifetime" Event... Fuel for Non-fiction

The car wound around the headland road en route the city, some forty-five minutes away.

I was the passenger in this car, driven by a male acquaintance. He was a quietly spoken man, with certain charm, and apparently a talented artist.

'Look after her,' a family member instructed him.

He smiled, towering over me, a young and shy girl.

During the journey the driver informed me that he was actually on parole for a serious crime. His personality changed as he described, in detail, the facts surrounding his crime.

Fear engulfed me as I realised my situation.

There was no way of escape until we reached the city and traffic conditions forced him to slow the car down. I opened the door, jumped out and made my way through the traffic to the pavement.

In shock and confused, I hailed a cab to return home. *Should I tell the family involved?* I pondered. I told my family, and we decided that a member of my own family would contact them the following day.

But... the next day brought a phone call from the other family. A young female member had been murdered the night before. Her body had been discovered that morning.

I discovered that I was the last person to travel in the murderer's car before he committed this horrendous crime.

The question 'Why not me?' haunted my mind – then we were informed that this murderer was painting the portrait of the murdered girl! It was obvious that he had already chosen his victim.

It was some time before I gathered all the material for my story.

I needed to collect facts regarding his initial prison sentence, then the trial and conviction following the recent murder.

Gradually I created a structure to tell my tale, and the 'life experience' became a non-fiction story. It has not yet been published. I am still sensitive, even after many years, to the heartache of the family whose lives were shattered that terrible day. My own life was changed!

But... I have written it and one day I will publish it.

The Risks of Using Real Life Events

It can be a risky undertaking to write about real-life events. (The risk of being disbelieved is a main factor.) But only you can write the story, because it actually happened to you... and because it did happen, sometimes, it needs to be told!

Some Tips on Writing From Life

When writing a non-fiction story which involves other people than yourself: change the names of characters. Even when you are one of the main characters in your story, change the location of the event.

- Always acquire permission if you intend to include other persons in your story.
- You have more freedom of expression if an incident/event has been revealed publicly.
- You, as the writer, need to empathise with other characters included in your story.
- To write non-fiction about another's life experience of life can be heart wrenching. It takes compassion, as a writer, to adequately express words that will conjure the correct picture as you focus on the subject and the outcome of the story.
- Become motivated and delve into the memories of your life, so far.

- Approach others who have 'life incidents' to share.

Life is full of surprises and we never know when a non-fiction story is just around the corner, waiting to be written.

'Fiction is based on life; non-fiction *is* life'

© *Aileen McLeod* 2003

Aileen McLeod has always loved to write. The desire to reach out to people with the 'written word' has been accomplished with her Art Lessons (some can be found online, most recently with <http://www.suite101.com> . Aileen has also been successful publishing poetry and in sharing true-life experiences in talks. Aileen says: "Art is a 'partner passion' with my writing and I use my expertise in this area to write lessons on Art. Some of these lessons can be viewed at: <http://astudio.gz.ee>"

Even though she has only one son, her passion for children has led her into the genre of Picture Books and she has had some accepted by Writers-Exchange. Here she can combine her writing with her talent for illustration. Aileen has had Picture Book CDs published by Arrowebooks .

Journal It!

By Susie Brown, 2003

Many people, at one time or another, write in a journal. Whether it is the brightly coloured, lockable variety, an electronic file on the computer, or an old school exercise book cut in half, the journal's purpose is essentially the same: to record memories, events and ideas. For a writer, the keeping of a journal can be an important writing tool. This article deals with some of the ways a journal can be used to enhance your writing.

A Way of Beginning

Keeping a journal can help to give your writing a jumpstart. When you get right down to it, writers need to write. However, many writers put off writing for a multitude of reasons, such as not having enough time to write, or not knowing what to write next. Let's face it – sitting down and trying to pen the next international bestseller can be a daunting task! A journal can be used as a method of quickly and easily putting pen to paper. Everyone will have memories of their day and these events can be recounted without the need to create complex plot developments or character analysis. At the same time, a number of writing techniques can be employed. Try these:

- Recount the events of the day in the form of a letter to a friend.
- Recount the day's events in the third person.
- Choose one event from the day, during which you had a conversation with another person. Rewrite the event from their perspective.
- If you travelled to another location during the day, write a detailed description of the journey.

The possibilities are endless and you can hone your writing skills using readily available material. Here's another suggestion:

- Set your alarm to go off after ten minutes. Then start writing the first thing that comes into your head. Keep going. Don't worry if you are writing nonsense. Don't stop to edit or correct. Just write freely for ten minutes.

A Way of Preparing

Eventually, you may feel ready to tackle that next best seller! When the time comes, a journal can be used as an ideas book. Use it to record such things as:

- That perfect opening line
- Character names and personality traits
- Story ideas and outlines
- Descriptions of places
- Snatches of conversations that might be useful
- Any research that you may need to conduct for your story
- Names and contact details of people you may need to contact

- Your goals. What are your short-term writing goals? How about in the longer term? By recording both in your journal, they will be easy to access and help keep you on track.

Basically, you never know when inspiration will strike. By keeping your journal handy, you will be ready to record it when it does!

A Way of Recording

By keeping a journal on a regular basis, you also have the opportunity to record a particular time in history, which will be invaluable in years to come. Whether your journaling ends up being published and read by millions, or just shared amongst members of your family, the ability to vividly paint a picture of an event is an important writing skill.

Try these suggestions:

- Choose a special personal event or celebration. Think about describing it in terms of the five senses. What did you see, hear, taste, touch or feel?
- Glue a photograph into your journal. Describe what was happening at the time the photograph was taken. Who was involved in the event? When was it? What happened directly before and after the photograph was taken?

So – where to from here? First of all, choose the type of journal that appeals to you and the way in which you are going to use it. With those two decisions made, you can get started.

Go ahead – journal it!

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Susie Brown is a qualified writer with extensive experience in a variety of writing styles. Her first book for beginning readers, entitled *“Are We There Yet?”* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2002 as part of their Bright Sparks Literacy Series. She has also been published by Pearson Education Magazines and will have 2 picture books e-published by Writers Exchange in 2004. Susie is a registered freelance journalist with the Australian News Syndicate and has written theatrical programmes and newsletters for local theatre. She also provides a fast and efficient editing and proofreading service.

Section 2

Writing As A Business Marketing Your Work



How To Use Your Writing Skills to Make Money - Online and Offline

by Marg McAlister

Of all the hobbies you could have chosen, writing is one of the best when it comes to making money. (Even if writing is *not* a hobby for you - if it's more of an obsession, or even if it's your career - you can use your skills to make money.)

Sure, you can make money writing novels. You can make money writing picture books. There's just one problem with writing fiction for a living.

Most fiction writers (not all - but most) find that it takes a long time for the money to come in. First, you have to write your book. That can take anything from an afternoon (for a very short children's story) to several years. Then you have to sell it. That means doing the rounds of agents and publishing houses. If you're lucky, you'll sell your book quickly (yes, it does happen to select few!). It's more likely, however, that it will take months - or even a year - for your manuscript to find its way to a buyer.

Sometimes, you won't find a buyer at all. That's disappointing, on many different levels. This book is your baby - but nobody wants it. It **hurts** - especially when you've spent hard-won hours each day for six months or a year writing it. Even if you write mostly for the joy of it, and will keep writing no matter what, you'd like to see it reaching a wider audience.

Some of you are hard-core fiction writers. You don't want to write anything else. You don't care about earning money. You just love writing fiction.

If that's where you fit... then this article is not for you.

This is being written for those who have skill with words, and want to use that skill to earn money. If you get great pleasure out of playing with the language, regardless of whether you're writing fiction or non-fiction, then you have every chance of turning your skill into extra income. If you're keen, it could be a very good income. If you just want to spend a few hours a week in return for a little extra money, that's possible too.

Writing is a wonderful way to earn a living. It's easily portable. There are infinite subjects about which to write. If you have an Internet connection, then your options are greatly expanded.

How Might You Use Your Skills?

In brief, there are two roads to travel. You can either be a writer-for-hire and use your skills to help other people bring their message to the world, or you can research a huge variety of subjects and write books and eBooks about those topics. (Even better: plan a book, eCourse or website about your pet interest.)

Writer-for-hire

As a writer-for-hire or ghostwriter, you will write books, articles, website copy or promotional material for others. It's quite possible that you already have the skills to do this. Most writers feel confident about their ability to write books or articles for others. They're not so sure about copywriting. You'll find that it's pretty easy to learn the basics of copywriting - there are many sites on the Internet with copywriting advice. (Note: I'm not

saying that it's easy to be a good copywriter. It takes time to learn any new technique. What I **am** saying, though, is that it's easy to find instructions on how to do this, and there are countless examples of sales copy on the Internet.)

As a ghostwriter, I have written books for others on Real Estate, Customer Service, Building Personality, Negotiating Skills, Networking and a lot more. I've written articles on sales and marketing. I've created promotional copy for businesses of all kinds. How did I learn to do this? I simply built on my existing skill with words. I knew I could write in different styles: lively and upbeat; friendly and casual; slightly more formal but approachable. When I wanted to find out more about copywriting, I bought a book on it. (Now I'd just go straight to the Internet.) My clients had all the facts, figures and information I needed - my job was simply to make their information as irresistible as possible to readers and editors.

You can do the same. If you possess skill with words, you can write just about anything. Be confident, and be prepared to do the research. (Hint: type 'ghostwriting' into a search engine like Google, and spend some time seeing how other ghostwriters advertise their services. Could you do this?)

Writing for the Internet

When I talk about 'writing for the Internet', I don't mean just sending off manuscripts and articles to someone else, hoping they'll publish it. The Internet is ripe with possibilities for writers. You don't have to write for others. You can use your skill with words to set up a **business**.

Imagine this.

You choose a subject that (a) interests you and (b) is often searched for on the Internet. It **must** be of interest to you to begin with. Otherwise, you'll become bored with it. Why would you want to choose something that doesn't interest you? You might as well just go out every day and work for someone else solely for the pay packet. This is your chance to set up a business. Make it a pleasure to turn up to 'work' every day!

Your subject must be of wide enough interest that people are searching for information on it every day. Here are some search terms that get lots and lots of exposure:

1. making money
2. setting up a home business
3. weight loss and fat burning
4. dating on the Internet
5. stop smoking
6. buying a car
7. astrology

...and these are just a very few!

Obviously, you want to choose a subject that generates a lot of interest - because you have a better chance of making money. If you are lucky, your own hobby will be one that lends itself to an internet business!

Having chosen your specialist area, you turn your writing skills to writing website copy. Write interesting articles on a variety of topics within your subject area. Each of these articles can become a web page.

Let's say you choose 'astrology' as your main topic. (You either know a lot about astrology already, or it interests you and you're prepared to research it.) You could write additional web pages on:

- Chinese astrology
- astrology compatibility
- vedic astrology
- astrology chart
- astrology and your child
- and then branch out into:
 - online psychics
 - clairvoyants
 - life after death

and so on.

Apply this to any subject you like. You can see how you can build a website based on that area of interest.

Here are two excellent eBooks on making money from an Internet niche:

1. Rosalind Gardner's **Super Affiliate Handbook** (very organised, a ton of practical advice) Available from <http://shmyl.com/xvf>

2. Michael Holland's **Strike It Niche** (he actually gives 70 easy-to-use blueprints for high-demand, low-competition businesses you can start on the Internet. Try one of these or apply the information to your own pet subject.) Available from <http://niche.secrets4all.com>

So... how does this translate into money?

Simple. You're a writer. People are searching the Internet for *information*. Writers are experts at delivering information! You can:

- Write a series of eBooks related to your subject and sell them from your site.
- Put out an eZine on your subject.
- Write an eCourse on your subject.
- Link to other sites on the internet that offer a commission on their products, and make money as an affiliate.

Thousands of people are making money today through starting up their own Internet businesses. It's something that you can do part-time, spending just an hour or two a day, while you work full-time somewhere else. Or you can build your Internet business during school hours, leaving you free to look after your family and pursue other interests the rest of the time.

This is just a tiny taste of what is possible if you want to use your skills establishing an Internet business or a ghostwriting service.

Writing4Success has created an eCourse especially for writers on how you can create your Internet business. It encompasses things like:

- How it all works
- Building your own website
- Using autoresponders to stay in touch with your market
- Why you should write articles and create your own newsletter, and
- Planning and writing eBooks

... and when the eCourse is finished, you will stay on the mailing list and continue to get up-to-date information, special offers, opportunities and tips to put your writer's e-biz into high gear!

If you'd like to subscribe to this eCourse (totally free!) just send a blank email to writers-web-biz@aweber.com. Within minutes, you can be learning how to make a living as a writer - running your own successful e-business!

(c) Marg McAlister

Marg McAlister has worn many different writing hats, and knows how to create a successful career out of writing fiction and nonfiction for both adults and children. Her popular websites for writers will help you steer a course that is most suited to you and your writing needs.

Her websites:

www.writing4success.com

www.writing4success-newsletter.com

www.writing-for-success-online.com

www.ebooks4success-online.com

Her free tipsheets:

Writing4Success Tipsheet (sign up by sending a blank email to w4s-tipsheet@aweber.com)

- every 2 weeks: tips on technique and career-building

WebWriting tipsheet (sign up by sending a blank email to *****)

every 2 weeks: quick tips on all aspects of writing for success on the Internet

WriteBiz (sign up by sending a blank email to writebiz@aweber.com)

.. news of opportunities, writers' ezines, good articles, great websites, software and more.

What I've Learned About Being A Writer

By Jenny Mounfield

Writing for kids is NOT easy.

This was my first hard lesson. I embarked on a children's writing course planning to start at the bottom and work my way up to the 'real' writing. Well, hello, it doesn't get more real than writing for kids. And it's certainly challenging. Of course you're spared those complicated sub-plots that adult stories tend to have, but a children's story needs to be so much more: entertaining, educational – politically correct. Fortunately I soon discovered I love this genre.

Your first acceptance does NOT mean editors will beat a path to your door.

What a rude awakening this one was. My first acceptance was an article for a kids' magazine. I was on a high for weeks, plotting my next work of genius and debating over which lucky publisher I'd allow to purchase it. Needless to say it was a good twelve months and many rejections later before I managed to chalk up the next one.

No matter how well you did at high school English, you WILL probably need to work on your punctuation and grammar.

I always prided myself on my knowledge of English and its uses. I soon learned, however, that my teachers (it *must* be their fault) didn't tell me about comma splices, run on sentences and that the word 'practice' is sometimes spelt with an 's'.

Rejection IS a four-letter word (or is usually followed by one).

No matter how well prepared you think you are, rejection will always hurt. There is no way that I know of to cushion the blow. And believe me this is a subject I know a lot about. I've tried the 'expect nothing and everything will be a bonus' approach, the 'insanely optimistic' approach (no easy feat for a pessimist) and the 'I don't give a damn' approach'. None of them made rejection any easier. The only words of wisdom I can impart here are, 'suck it up'.

Worse writers than you DO get published.

Shock! Horror! And it's true. Chances are you read something almost every day that is inferior to your own work. So how do they do it? Are there editors out there who wouldn't know good writing if it jumped out of their slush piles and went for their jugulars? Or do they simply not care as long as their newspaper / magazine / newsletter is out on time? Possibly. I have to say that knowing what's good and what isn't doesn't come naturally – at least it didn't for me. It's something I needed to learn through years of reading and writing and networking with other writers. As for all that mediocre fiction churning its way out of printing presses this very minute, I have a theory: editors buy an idea more so than a story. I believe a story with a clever idea will win over good writing any day because, let's face it, editors love to edit and all but the most chronic writing blunders can be fixed.

Just because an editor requests your manuscript does NOT mean he/she will buy it.

The first time this happened to me I told just about everyone I knew that I was as good as published. I fantasised about rubbing shoulders with the literary elite and planned my acceptance speech for the CBC awards. You can imagine my surprise and

embarrassment when my manuscript crash-landed in my letterbox a couple of months later. Now I keep my trap shut until I've signed a contract. And these days I keep my trap shut a lot, I'm sorry to say.

An editor CAN change your story or article without consulting you.

If you sell something to a magazine this apparently goes without saying. I wish someone had warned me. While my first acceptance had me winging my way to Mars, seeing my work in print sent me plummeting back to Earth faster than...well, something that goes really fast. After the editing process my article no longer resembled anything I had written. Paragraphs had been cut, and extra words added. One short story I sold had a major component changed that altered the meaning of the story. Of course editing can be a lot subtler, but be prepared.

Strangers will NOT clamour for your attention when you announce you are an author (unless you're a household name, that is).

Picture this: my hubby and I are sitting in our bank manager's office applying for a home loan. Manager looks up from the application she's filling out on our behalf and asks, 'What is your occupation, Mrs Mounfield?' Fabulous, I finally have the opportunity to say something, *anything* other than 'homemaker'. 'I am (wait for it)...an AUTHOR,' I say, chest swelling with pride. Bank manager stares blankly at something over my left shoulder and plays with her pen. Hubby looks constipated. In case the poor woman has never heard of an author, I add, 'That is, I write.' (Chest deflates ever so slightly.) Long seconds crawl by and manager seems more confused than ever. Back to my flat-chested self, I finally say, 'Er, I'm a homemaker.' Bank manager beams and jots this down.

You WILL never stop learning.

If you think you know all there is to know about writing, you're in big trouble. An open and eager mind is a must. I discovered early on that I love to learn, something that would surprise most of my ex-school teachers. The difference now is that I've found something I actually *want* to learn. I've completed two writing courses and will soon enrol in an editing course. I also have a good collection of 'how to' books and articles. If finances are tight, and let's face it, whose aren't? there is plenty of free information on the net. Joining a critique group is also invaluable. I'm constantly amazed at what I learn from other writers.

An author's life is NOT a lonely one.

The act of writing may be a solitary affair, but it is never lonely. I used to believe authors were weird agoraphobic types who tended to grow their hair long, talk to themselves and live in isolation. (This, funnily enough, appeals to me.) But these days, thanks largely to the internet, an author's existence is quite social one. I go out a lot less than I used to, yet I have more friends than ever.

Success is NOT a holiday in the Bahamas.

Unless you're very fortunate, writing won't make you rich. The majority of authors, who have been able to quit their day jobs, earn their money through workshops, author talks and manuscript assessments. This doesn't mean that making the big bucks can't happen. In fact, I recently heard of a local author whose novel was snapped up by Hollywood.

I view the writer's lot more as a labour of love than a job. While the majority of rewards are not financial, this isn't to say they're worth any less. There is no greater buzz than seeing your name in print, or typing 'The End' on a story you've slaved over for months.

So you're a writer? Well, good for you. Believe me, there are worse things to be.

© Jenny Mounfield 2003. Email at rejectwriters@yahoo.com.au

Jenny Mounfield has achieved moderate success as a writer. While her preferred genre is fiction for children, she writes just about anything - with the exception of romance, which causes her to break out in hives. She has been the lucky recipient of some spectacular rejections. This led to her interest in the science of rejectology. You can see the result of this endeavour at, www.rejectwriters.com a website she created with author / illustrator and fellow rejectologist, Gail C Breese.

Working With A Co-Author

By Melinda Hutchings

Working with a Co-Author can not only be a uniquely rewarding experience, it can provide the opportunity to increase the potential success of your manuscript by adding to it's publishing appeal. However, if you are considering working with a co-author, there are areas that you need to be mindful of in order to ensure both you and your co-author's expectations are met. In sharing my own experience of working with a co-author, I hope to provide you with some insights into how to balance the relationship and ensure you meet your objective.

How I Found My Co-Author

Writing about the recovery process of anorexia was a natural progression from my first book, which dealt with the illness from onset to commencement of recovery. I wanted my next book to be non-fiction, dealing with both the emotional perspective of recovery, as well as the clinical perspective. I believed that this would provide a comprehensive insight into the actual process, and draw out the common threads. The emotional aspects of the book I knew I could write alone. However, I knew the book would have greater scope and potential if I could include a detailed account of the clinical steps. And in order to do this, I needed input from a health professional.

After some careful thought, I contacted the clinical psychologist who wrote the introduction to my first book, *Fighting for Life; Anorexia the Road to Recovery*, to verbally pitch the idea. Chris was both excited at the prospect of working with me on a follow up book, and eager to contribute. Knowing his very hectic schedule (it usually took him days to return emails and phone calls and they were always brief and to the point), I understood right from the beginning that I would have to do the bulk of the work. This didn't worry me though, because it was my idea in the first place ... and I intended to negotiate the majority of the royalty!

Once I had Chris's commitment, I bounced the idea for book #2 around with my publisher. He loved the concept, and the fact that a health professional would provide a professional 'rubber stamp'. I was allocated six months to do the research and pull together a first draft.

I let Chris know that our book project had been give the go-ahead, and that I would send him a draft outline so we could agree on the structure. I was eager to get started and make the most of the six months.

A week later, I sent Chris a two-page outline. After a few days, he sent me a one-line email informing me that it all looked fine, which I thought was strange because I expected him to add to the outline or at least comment on the proposed content.

Nevertheless, I set about writing the first draft of the book, leaving spaces where I needed the clinical perspective. The reason I did this was because I wanted Chris to understand the context of the book from my point of view, before writing his part, to ensure the work he contributed fitted with the general feel of the book.

Conflicting Expectations...

When I had completed the preliminary draft, I sent it to Chris, asking for his initial feedback. I did not hear back from him for one week. At this point I was starting to feel frustrated, so I phoned him to discuss our project and received a very curt reception. It was obvious that Chris was too busy to even look at what I'd sent him and didn't place the

same amount of importance on the book as I did. I left it another week and then contacted him again. Aware of my six-month deadline, and knowing from experience that Chris usually met deadlines one week late, I brought forward the deadline for him to look at the preliminary draft by a few weeks, still leaving myself enough time to complete the final first draft. After all, I had to ensure that I didn't let my publisher down, as well as keeping with my own momentum.

After informing Chris of the deadline, I asked him if we could meet face to face after he had read the preliminary draft, to discuss and agree the final structure and content. I also asked if we could set a date a few days before the final deadline so that I had enough time to edit and polish before submitting to my publisher.

When I arrived to meet Chris, he was half way through reading the preliminary draft. Needless to say, I wasn't very happy. My expectation was for him to have a bundle of notes about his impression of the manuscript and ideas for the clinical perspective so I could then take the first draft to completion.

When I expressed my disappointment, he apologised, explaining how busy he had been, and reinforcing the fact that the book was important to him too. I asked that we go through the basic outline of the draft together, and we worked on this for the next four hours, restructuring some of the content. At this point I realised that all his ideas were in his head and some very good ones at that. Although it was my style to write lots of notes, his style was to verbalise his ideas and for me to write them down! However, I found our differing styles complemented each other and I was able to write most of the book, therefore ensuring it maintained style, flow and tone.

Royalty Negotiations

During this same meeting, we negotiated how we'd split the royalty. Due to the fact that I had already done a vast amount of work, we agreed on 80/20 in my favour. I also made it clear that the book needed to be a priority and so together we set out a timeline to ensure he was aware of when I required his input and could plan it into his busy schedule. This worked quite well, although his submissions were always one week late – but as I already knew this would happen, I brought the deadlines forward two weeks. Once we were working in harmony, we both started to get excited because the book was really starting to take shape.

Final Feedback and the Editor's Reactions

When I completed the first draft, I organised to meet with Chris again. This time, when I arrived, he had actually read it, which showed me that he was as committed as I was. We went through it together and there were only a few minor changes. With Chris' timely feedback, I was able to do a final edit and polish before submitting the manuscript to my publisher just ahead of deadline.

My publisher loved the first draft and asked that we keep going in the same direction, adding information to the current structure in order to reach between 60,000 and 80,000 words. Chris and I corresponded by email and phone, and I knew he'd take about three days to reply. But once I understood how he worked, I was able to work in with him instead of trying to change the way he worked to suit me.

I met with Chris one last time before the final manuscript was to go to the publisher. He had gone through the whole final draft and marked out pages where he thought the information should be edited. In some areas, he had even written additional information that I was to add to the manuscript. It seemed we had finally found our balance of working together.

Once the final draft went to the publisher, he requested some additions, so I set about drafting these and then put them in front of Chris (again with a deadline brought forward a week). I received his comments back on time, re-edited based on his insights and then I was able to complete the manuscript.

When the book was in its final stages, a title and cover were chosen. The publishers wanted Chris' name on the cover as well – I had no objection because his involvement had been invaluable. However, I insisted that my name be in a larger font as I had done the bulk of the work. The publishers agreed (and ironically, the font sizes represented our whole working relationship; 80/20).

In summary:

- Set a timeline so that you are both aware of the deadlines and timeframes.
- Ensure you both share the same level of commitment
- Understand how the other person works and that you can't change this. Instead, find a way to work in with them.
- Ensure the royalty is split according to the balance of work, and that this is negotiated and agreed to from the beginning.
- If you become frustrated, be honest about it and work together to form a solution
- If you are both passionate about the subject matter, you will succeed.
- Ensure you both have a separate contract with the publisher stating your royalty percentage.

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Melinda Hutchings is a twice published author: *Fighting for Life; Anorexia the Road to Recovery* and *How to Recover from Anorexia and Other Eating Disorders* have helped many thousands of people understand the dynamics of eating disorders, from onset right through to the recovery process. An inspiring role model and experienced public speaker, Melinda has often been invited to address young adults on the topic of body image at high schools and forums throughout Australia. Melinda launched www.bodycage.com to provide an anonymous vehicle through which to offer comfort and support. To date, bodycage has received in excess of 280,000 hits and Melinda has responded to thousands of emails from people all over the world seeking her help and advice. She has been featured in *The Australian*, *Sun Herald*, *Dolly*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend*, *Who Weekly*, *Sky TV News*, *Time Magazine*, *Marie Claire*, *Good Health Magazine*, *Good Medicine*, *North Shore Times*, *Mosman Daily*, *Daily Telegraph*, Channel 7's *Sunrise* and *The Morning Shift*, *A Current Affair*, SBS and several ABC Radio programs across the country.

For more information on Melinda and her books go to www.bodycage.com/MelindaBio.html

The Isolated Writer

By Raelene Hall

Of course I want to be a writer, and I've got the talent – but it's just too hard from way out here. How could I possibly have a writing career stuck out here on an isolated cattle station in Western Australia? My nearest neighbour is nearly 100kms away; it takes 2 ¼ hours to drive to the nearest town and a further 9 hours to reach the city. Our mail is delivered once a week.

I can't afford to travel to locations to seek out and write articles, I'm unable to post material to an editor who requires it the next day and I don't have a local library right at hand to borrow market guides from. So let's get a touch of reality here – it's just not possible right?

Wrong, wrong, wrong!

Of course it's possible, with the help of modern technology, lots of determination, a little courage and huge amounts of encouragement from friends and fellow writers.

Internet and Email

Internet and email – what wonderful tools for a writer. If you can't get to the world then bring the world to you. I use the Internet to research possible markets and ideas that I can present to those markets. Email allows me to contact editors with article suggestions and in many cases to forward my articles to them. Very few editors I have worked with, both in Australia and overseas, have been opposed to having articles sent to them via email.

Through the Internet I have also been able to make contact with writers all around the globe. Together we share ideas and markets, support each other in good times and bad (not only connected with writing) and help promote one another's writing. This ability to network is invaluable and I doubt I would have got to where I am in my writing career today without it.

Another brilliant way of building up your writing career is by subscribing to some of the myriad of writing based e-zines on the Net. There are general writing e-zines and ones that specialize in various types of writing e.g. freelancing, children's writing, romance, fantasy, science fiction and more. Type 'writing e-zines' into a search engine and check some out. You can usually look at a sample of the e-zine on the website before subscribing. If you subscribe and don't like it or find it useful – no problem, just hit the 'unsubscribe' button. Most e-zines are free and many also offer free 'e-books' that you can download, which are chock full of useful information. Again if it isn't useful to you don't download it or just delete it. When you get really clever start your own e-zine.

Whilst email makes it very quick and easy to contact editors don't make the mistake of assuming you can lower your writing standards in the email. Just as in a hard copy query the email needs to be polite (if you know the editor's name use it; if not stick to Sir/Madam). Keep your query brief and ensure your punctuation and grammar are correct. Don't be too informal or chatty. Do not attach anything to the email on your first query unless requested by the editor. With the increasing problem of spam many editors will delete any email with an attachment if they don't know from whom it has

come. If they want writing samples forwarded they will advise you if attachments are acceptable or not.

And of course, the phone...

As well as the Internet and email I also find the phone very useful for contacting editors and people I wish to interview for articles. At first I found this incredibly nerve wracking and put it off for as long as possible but have now found that the majority of people are very friendly and willing to help out. Just remember editors are busy people so don't expect them to chat about nothing, just discuss the business at hand and leave it at that.

If you try writing non-fiction articles, as I do, you'll find that many editors request photos to accompany the article. Whilst I am not a brilliant photographer I have found that I can usually manage to get photos of a standard acceptable to the editor and printer. Some editors will accept digital photos but they must be of a certain resolution and quality. However, as I do not have a digital camera, I rely more on prints, some of which I scan and email, others I send the actual prints. Editors will tell you what their preference is. In situations where I am pushed for time to obtain photos some editors will agree to develop the prints and return them to you after photos for the article have been selected and copied. It's a good idea to always have a camera handy and take photos whenever an opportunity presents itself. That way you have more chance of having photos on hand when required.

Writers are wonderful at finding excuses why they can't write. I know because I've used them all myself but I've now proved the only real barriers to becoming a writer are those that you build yourself. If you want to write do it, don't build barriers for yourself, build stepping-stones and cross them one at a time.

Raelene Hall © 2003. You can contact Raelene at nedscreekstn@bigpond.com or check out her website at www.outbackwriter.com

Raelene Hall is a freelance writer living on an Outback property in Western Australia. She has written numerous non-fiction articles for magazines, newspapers and the Net on a wide variety of topics, including education; the outback; communications; nature; spirituality and children. Raelene is a regular columnist for the Midwest Times newspaper in WA and www.writerscrossing.com. Her inspiration is taken from her life as wife, mother, teacher, station hand, cook and voluntary worker on the million-acre cattle station she shares with her husband and their three children. Raelene's writing catchcry is *'From the Outback to You.'*

Plant The Seeds Of Success

By Kerrie Lindsay

The Write Time

Can you relate to the following scenario (or something similar)?

You have two small children. During the day you do the typical household chores and spend some wonderful time with your children. When your husband arrives home from work, you leave for your paying work. Three hours later you return, read each child a bedtime story, sing some songs and tuck them in for the night. You eat your evening meal and clear away the dishes.

It's 9:00pm and you're worn out!

But...

You love to write. So instead of relaxing in front of the TV or going to bed, you turn on your computer.

Your ideas begin to flow. Your fingers are desperately typing, trying to keep up with your thoughts. You can tell this is going to be a good story.

One of your children wakes. You are momentarily distracted but comforted in knowing that your husband values your writing time and attends to her. He does his best to settle her, but this is one of those nights where she needs her mum. You soothe and comfort her and she settles again. You return to your writing.

It's 10:00pm. You're really tired, but you want to capture your thoughts before you lose them.

By midnight you're struggling to stay awake. You go to bed.

Your sleep is disrupted several times throughout the night and at 6:15am you're woken up for the last time. Your eyes ache. Your body feels fatigued. You start your day all over again.

This is not an ideal environment for you to develop a writing career. You are begging for a few uninterrupted hours every day (and some uninterrupted sleep at night!), so you can get some momentum into your writing. For the next few years that's not guaranteed. But, deep within, you have a vision and a very strong dream. You tell yourself to 'go-with-the-flow' at the moment and make the most of any time you have for your writing. One day you know you'll become a successful full-time writer!

So, how do you remain motivated and focused?

1. Write short pieces - articles, educational material, picture books, early readers, emergent readers.

2. Write scenes and outlines. As more time becomes available to you, these can be turned into longer manuscripts.
3. Network with other writers. Store the information and knowledge you receive and use it to develop and fine-tune your writing skills. By networking you'll also pick up some great writing opportunities.

How do you write?

1. **Manage your time well.** When you sit down to write, get straight into it, realising that at any minute your time could be disrupted.
2. **Jot down all ideas that come to you throughout the day.** You can find a few minutes to do this. Keep a small notebook handy. Make brief, but clear notes, so the words you write are good prompts later.
3. **Spend time during the day thinking about your stories.** (What else do you do when you're pegging out the washing, washing the dishes or preparing meals?)
4. **Set a goal.** Write and edit 1000 words a week. Break that down into daily tasks. Write 200 words, at least, a day. Then spend two days editing. (I edit on Saturday and Sunday evenings. My daytime schedule is different, I have no work commitments, and I'm less tired and more relaxed so I can cope with the intensity of editing.)

If you write 200 words easily on a day, keep going. Write beyond your quota. It tends to have a positive psychological effect on you, which flows through to your writing. It also sets you up well if an unexpected interruption occurs. And... you may still end up reaching your weekly goal! If you find you're writing beyond your quota on a regular basis then change your goal to, say, 1500 words a week.

5. **Avoid editing until you've written the first draft.** It's important to get the ideas down quickly before they're lost or you're interrupted. If a writing problem arises while you're writing, jot down a word or two near the problem to help with your editing later. It could be something like [?], [tense], [why did he do this?], [show, don't tell]. If you are using the word processor, type these in bold. If you are handwriting your draft, write the prompts in a different coloured pen or underline them.
6. **Print out your first draft (with a word count) and then begin editing.** It's easier to return to a printed copy than to turn the computer off and on if you have continual or unexpected interruptions. And having a word count helps you to fine tune your editing.
7. **Edit ruthlessly.** If in doubt, leave it out. If a word, phrase, sentence or paragraph doesn't sound right, get rid of it.
8. **Read your manuscript aloud to someone.** If it doesn't flow, it will stand out. Often the person you are reading to will point out parts that don't make sense. Listen objectively.

By having such a tight writing schedule, you have to be very focused and organised, knowing that time-wasting tasks are unproductive and that your time could be taken from you at any time.

Further tips:

- Continually look for ways to increase your writing time. For example, keep the time you spend preparing meals to a minimum. Prepare quick, healthy meals in bulk so that portions can be frozen, then reheated quickly. Also, delegate tasks to other family members.
- If you need to work, try to find a job that pays well but requires fewer hours of your time. If you have professional qualifications, this is a real possibility! You could probably earn \$20 000 a year to help the family budget by working two to three days a week. Without those qualifications you may need to work four to five days a week to earn the equivalent income.
- Avoid becoming frustrated, jealous or angry when you see writers in your writing group being published regularly. Maintain belief in yourself and your ability. Accept the situation you're currently in. Know that it will change and when it does your years of perseverance and toil will be rewarded.
- Be selective about what you write. If several publishing opportunities are presented to you, choose what you know you can achieve with minimal research. There's no point stopping one manuscript to start another when there's very little chance of meeting the deadline. Know your limitations. You won't do yourself any favours by sending off your manuscript after the submission deadline.
- Keep your writing area in order. It takes ten seconds to file one item properly. It takes forever to remove it from the pile building up on your desk!
- Finally, continue to write for the sheer enjoyment of it. After all, why else would you be writing under these circumstances?

Plant the seeds of success.

Don't look at the external influences on your life as inconveniences. Be realistic. Be smart. By continually writing you are planting the seeds. If you stick to your goals, you'll eventually acquire the time you need to write. You'll also have accumulated much material upon which to draw.

Hang in there! Believe in yourself! Keep your eyes firmly fixed on your dream!

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Kerrie Lindsay enjoys writing in a variety of styles and genres. She has written picture books, emergent readers, chapter books and non-fiction articles for the children's market, as well as personal tributes for special occasions and an article for a writer's magazine.

Her main ideas come from the diverse range of careers she has developed, personal experiences and keen observations of people and surroundings.

When she's not writing, Kerrie likes to keep active with gardening and landscaping, bike-riding with her children, jogging, exploring caves and organising family outings. She also can't resist calling into her favourite coffee shop for a nice latte.

You can read some of Kerrie's published work on the following websites:-

<http://www.writing4success.com> (Go to the article archives - "From Gift To Business.")

<http://www.ebooks.writers-exchange.com> (Illustrated children's picture ebook - "Is This My Present?")

Kerrie's Three Top Tips for Writers

1. Visualise your story.
2. Write your first draft without stopping on the way. Just let your ideas flow.
3. Develop good time-management skills.

How To Organise Your Writing Business

Carol Faulkner

Introduction

Hi there! The following advice comes from one who is just starting out in the writing business. I gave up my regular daytime job 18 months ago to pursue writing for children as a career. Sure, I love writing, but I also want to be able to make a living out of it. If I can't, it's back to the office for me. So I really want my writing business to succeed.

It's amazing how much material I've accumulated in these early stages of my writing career. As well as a mountain of reference material, there are the manuscripts I'm working on, the manuscripts I've submitted, and of course, the manuscripts that have been..sniff..rejected.

I realised early on that I would need to keep track of everything somehow. Coming from a background in project work, it felt quite natural for me to think of my writing in terms of a project. And projects require planning, and management. In short, you need to be organised.

I still have a lot to learn about the writing business. Having just secured my first major contract, I am really only on the verge. Nevertheless, here is what has worked for me so far – it may work for you too.

Before You Start

Two things have been invaluable in kicking off my writing career. The first was undertaking a professional writing course. I believe a writer's work is a combination of natural talent and learned techniques. You may think you don't need to be 'taught' how to write, but there are many technical aspects of writing which few of us would understand instinctively - things like viewpoint, the rules of writing dialogue, showing characters' thoughts, plotting, setting, character tags, chapter hooks – the list is extensive. If any of these have you scratching your head, enrol in a course today. From the right course you can also learn useful practical information such as how to set out a manuscript, how to write a cover letter, query letter and synopsis. You can also learn about copyright, agents, marketing, and lots more. Perhaps the most valuable thing you will gain from a writing course is feedback from a professional tutor – quality advice which will point out your writing strengths and correct your weaknesses.

The second invaluable thing for me was joining a writer's group. You can probably find one in your area by consulting *The Australian Writer's Marketplace*, or you can join one of the many on-line writer's groups. What will you gain? Support, encouragement and a sharing of ideas and information that is worth its weight in gold.

Choosing Your Writing Projects

Well, I've said it already – *I want my writing business to succeed* – so when choosing a writing project, a key factor I consider is its likelihood of success ie what are the

chances that all the hard work I'm going to put into this project will pay off (eg with a publishing contract). Remember, you want to put yourself in the best possible position to achieve your goal of writing for a living. Soooo...

Write what you write best. For me, that means writing for children – anything from children's picture books to junior fiction and the occasional non-fiction article. Your absolute best chance of getting published is by producing top quality work. As in every competitive situation, it's the cream that rises to the top. So if your niche is non-fiction, steer clear of fantasy. Or if it's crime you write best, don't attempt romance. Leave the unfamiliar genres for when you retire as a successful author and you can write purely for fun!

Research the market. Find out what's hot and what's not. Read the best sellers and award winners. Get a feel for what works in the genre you write in.

Find out which publishers want what. Search the internet. Visit publishers' websites – if they accept unsolicited manuscripts, they will usually have author guidelines on the website. Sometimes publishers will actively seek manuscripts for a specific series via their website. And if what they are looking for matches what you write best – Bingo! There's a starter. But how do you find these particular websites? Well, you might stumble across them yourself while browsing the net, but remember that writer's group I said was worth its weight in gold? Tips about such publishing opportunities from your writing colleagues are little golden nuggets rolling your way.

Planning Your Writing Projects

If you don't have a publisher's deadline to meet for whatever writing project you're working on, set your own deadline. Self-discipline is very important. Decide how many hours per week you are going to work on your project, and try to stick to it. As a deadline gets closer, you may need to allocate more hours to it - let something else go (in my case, housework is the first thing that gets the flick).

Record the details of your writing project(s) in a table or spreadsheet. I use a simple table in Microsoft Word to record the following:-

- type of project (eg picture book, chapter book, short story, article)
- main details (eg required word count, genre, theme)
- working title
- target publisher
- deadline

I call this my *pending projects* table. It has the details of the project I am currently working on, as well as details of other projects I may want to tackle next. That is to say, even when I am working on a particular project, I keep my eyes and ears open for any other publishing opportunities that crop up, and record the details. Even when you're working flat out on something, you don't want to miss those little golden nuggets that may evolve into future projects.

Keeping Track

It didn't take me long to get the hang of how the manuscript submission game works. If you want some initial practice, buy yourself a boomerang, or two or three. You send the manuscripts off...and they come back. Then you send them off in another direction and they come back again. Then you send those plus some more off in other directionsand they come back too. Hang on. Did they all come back, or am I missing some? Pretty soon you've lost track of which boomerang you've sent off in what direction and when. It's time to keep a *manuscript submission record*. That's exactly what I call another simple Word table in which I record:-

- the title of the manuscript
- the date it was submitted
- the publisher it was submitted to
- the date a response is received
- the publisher's response

Don't be discouraged by the number of times you have to type "rejected" in the "publisher's response" column – rejections are a normal part of being a writer. Treat them as I do; each one is a spur, goading me to try harder. They only make me more determined to succeed!

When a manuscript is finally accepted – oh joy! – it's a good idea (after you've recovered from sousing in champagne) to start keeping a *record of events* relating specifically to this manuscript. There will be many important milestones on the road to publication and beyond, and if you're like me, unless they are written down, they'll all blur into a fond, but hazy memory. As an example, some of the things you could record are:-

- when the manuscript was started
- when it was submitted
- when it was accepted
- the date of the contract
- the date and amount of advance payment
- when the advance copies of the book are received
- the dates and amounts of future payments

Money Matters

Keeping financial records is of course very important. Make sure you file *everything* associated with the financial side of your writing business. Basically, everything can be divided into two groups – income and expenses.

Income

I keep a record of payments received in the *record of events* I create for successful manuscripts. Perhaps, when I have more successes under my belt, a spreadsheet devoted solely to income will be a better option. I file all my royalty and ELR statements, in chronological order, and keep a running total of amounts received.

Expenses

Keep receipts for all your writing-related expenses. These may include stationary, postage, courses, subscriptions, reference books, office furniture and equipment. If you work from a home office (ie a room in your house specifically designated as the place where you conduct your business), you may be able to claim a proportion of your household bills (electricity, gas, insurance). The 'catch 22' with claiming expenses is that you have to be earning income as a writer to do so. It's a complicated area, and everyone's situation is different – the best advice I can give is to consult your accountant.

ABN and GST

When you are offered your first contract as a writer in business (as opposed to someone who writes as a recreational pursuit or hobby), you should register for an Australian Business Number (ABN). If you don't, your payments will be taxed at the top marginal rate (48.5%). I chose to register on-line at the Australian Business Register's website: www.abr.gov.au

This is a well designed and informative website with lots of help fields which explain each step in the process.

If your annual turnover is \$50 000 or more, you must register for GST. This can be done on the same website. Registering for GST puts you into the realm of quarterly Business Activity Statements and GST payments. For more information...please consult your accountant!

Your Filing System

My old boss used to say "*you can judge an office by its filing system*". I agree - that is the test of being organised. Can you find whatever you're looking for (whether it be a particular piece of information, letter, manuscript, receipt, email etc) at a moment's notice? Personally, I'm not happy unless I can answer 'yes' to that question. Of course, everybody's filing system should be tailored to suit their own circumstances, but the following may be useful as a guide.

Hard copy files

Firstly, invest in some good quality folders – Marbig lever-arch folders are my favourite. And I like to use plastic sheet protectors; they protect your documents, they do away with the need for hole-punching and they're easier to flick through. I use a separate folder for each of the following:-

- Study material – course notes, handouts, assignments etc
- Reference material (writing-related) – any information that comes to hand to do with writing eg writer's newsletters, notes from author talks, writing tips, publishing tips, publishers' details etc

- General research/reference material – I have a collection of interesting data about everything from whale behaviour to lunar landings. I keep all the stuff I research while writing a story; you never know when it may come in handy again
- Manuscripts – rejected, accepted and pending
- Financial records

Electronic files

The golden rule with electronic files is – if it's important, back it up. That is, keep back-ups of your work on disk or CD so that they're safe from anything that can attack your computer. Other than that, you can use much the same method for sorting your electronic files as your hard copy files – just create folders in your C drive replicating your hard copy folders, and file things accordingly. The wonderful thing about electronic files is that you can create endless folders, and folders within folders. For example, in my electronic manuscripts folder, I have separate folders for picture books, chapter books, articles, readers and covering letters.

Email is another thing that can get out of control if you don't keep on top of it. Check your emails regularly, and once you've read them, decide then and there if you need to keep them or not. If you do, file them away. If you don't, delete them.

© Carol Faulkner 2003 *You can contact Carol at* c_faulkner2003@yahoo.com.au

Carol Faulkner works from her home office in Adelaide's western suburbs. She writes fiction for children – mainly picture books for young children and chapter books for primary school age.

Carol decided she wanted to write for children when her own offspring showed the same love of books and reading as their mother. Her first book – *My Cat the Alien* (Macmillan Education Australia) – was written in snippets of time around her day job and domestic demands. She now writes in slightly larger snippets of time, having given up her day job, and ignoring domestic demands where possible, to pursue a career in writing. She has recently secured a publishing contract with Omnibus Books for her picture book, *Chester and Gil*.

Storytelling: Keep This Art Alive

By Helen Evans

Hey, isn't this book about writing stories?

Yes. But which comes first, the chicken or the egg?

We can't win that argument. But with stories, we know for certain that storytelling was around for eons before writing was invented and the first books were produced. Countless generations of people have handed down their histories, their cultures, their beliefs and creative imagination by word of mouth. Storyteller's tales travelled across continents and oceans. They were translated into many languages and formed the basis of modern literature.

In Australia, storytelling was the chief means the first white settlers had of keeping and teaching the traditions of their homelands. Oral stories continue to be highly important in the culture of indigenous people everywhere. The wonderful stories of our indigenous people are a priceless addition to the heritage of every Australian. Some of these stories are now in books, but the oral tradition remains strong.

Who is a storyteller?

A storyteller is anyone who relates anecdotes real or imagined, to others. Parents are very important storytellers. But not all storytellers are good at their art. A good storyteller is one who holds the interest of the listeners and leaves the audience wanting more.

Why tell stories?

- Stories stimulate the imagination and encourage children to make their own stories - a big step towards literacy.
- A good storyteller tailors a story to suit an individual child, or group of children.
- A told story encourages comment and conversation just as books can. It is an excellent way to help the child's language development.
- Stories help memory and concentration.
- Stories reinforce personal experience.
- Children can be actively involved. They can make sound effects, repeat refrains, place aids in position, practise social skills, recall and relate relevant experiences.
- Story telling is not expensive.

Aren't books better than told stories?

We have books by the millions of millions these days. But that does not make them better. Both are excellent. Both are important. Let us encourage both the storyteller and the writer. Let's encourage quality writing and quality storytelling.

As the children's book industry developed, oral storytelling declined. Picture books are a feast for the eyes and a delight to the mind. Through schools, libraries and bookshops, books are available to everyone. Parents and teachers, the chief storytellers of modern times, have turned more and more to reading to their children instead of telling stories. Children love books, but they love told stories too. There are so many endangered species in our world, don't let the storyteller join the ranks of the extinct.

I'd like to be a storyteller but I don't know any stories.

Everyone knows stories. If you say to your baby 'You are the sweetest baby in the world.' You have told a story. Babies need simple stories.

- They need stories that are true.
- They need stories about their daily life.
- They need stories about the people they love.

Telling stories to your baby will give your child a head start in the language arts of listening, understanding, speaking, reading, and writing.

The most important attributes of a storyteller are the voice and the face. Think about the story above. You could tell that story in a number of ways. If you cradle the baby in your arms and smile and speak softly, that story will be a winner. Your baby will want more. However, if you scowled, and shouted the same words, the baby will have been frightened. The words could be said in a whisper, in a sing-song way, with laughter.

Soon your baby will be a toddler, a preschooler, a school-aged child, a beginning reader... Your stories will still be needed.

What story will I choose?

- You may choose a traditional story.
- You may choose a story from a book. You may alter it.
- You may choose one you have heard.
- You may make up your own story.

Preparing a told story is not the same as writing a book. In picture books, the illustrations are vitally important. Part of the story is told by the illustrations and the detail in them, rather than in the words. The good writer selects words carefully. The good writer prunes and changes the words and their order, to find the right rhythm for the tale.

In story telling, the detail comes in words. You choose words for impact and meaning, but you can also explain and expand. If you are retelling a story from a book, it will generally become longer. Most picture books can be read in five minutes. A four year old child will concentrate for up to 20 minutes, for a told story.

What does a successful storyteller need?

- You need a repertoire of stories you like. Whether selecting books to read or stories to tell, choose ones that you like.
- You need stories of interest to the child. A great story about a dragon is not appropriate if the child is frightened of dragons. Match the story to the child's stage of development.
- You need to know the story. It is not necessary to know it off by heart as long as you know the details and the correct order of events.
- You need a plan. The told story still needs a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning must hook the children in, just as the hook does in a book. The listener must want to know what will happen next.
- You need to practise telling stories. Use a number of different voices. Is the story the right length for the child audience? How will you organise aids so that some will be produced as a surprise as the story progresses? Very young children focus and concentrate really well if the story is about something they can see.

I've chosen a story, what next?

You are going to tell a story to a group of children. You have followed the hints above. But there are other things to consider.

- Look at the space you will use. How will the children sit? A tight little group may not suit your story. The teacher holds a book up for all to see. Do you need a table or a clear space on the floor for aids you have chosen?
- Can every child see what you are doing? Can you see every child?
- Have you thought about child involvement? A told story offers more scope for involving children than a book does.
- What will you do if children interrupt? Can you adapt your story as you go? Can you incorporate ideas the children offer?
- Follow-up is important. Objects related to the story can be shown at the end. These can be hidden in a bag for children to select, or passed around for everyone to inspect.

How big is the group? Preschoolers do best in groups of 15 or less. If the group is as big as 25, individual involvement will be a problem, but vocal involvement, saying refrains for example, will work.

There are different ways to tell stories. Which ways are best?

A good storyteller uses different methods of storytelling. Variety is interesting for the teller as well as the audience, especially if you regularly meet the same group of children. In all methods, though, the voice and the face remain the most important vehicles for your story. Suit the method of telling to the story type.

Storytelling methods include:

- Voice only. You can make your voice sad, scary, happy, angry, silly, old, babyish, growly etc.
- Felt boards. Do not have too many pieces if using a felt board. Make the pieces big enough for the children to see clearly. Make the pieces in proportion to one another. A spider shouldn't be bigger than a cow, for example.
- Puppets. A puppet theatre is not necessary. Children will focus on the puppet. It is good if you can see the children and their reactions.
- Pictures. You may use a sequence of pictures or have a picture of key people or events in the story.
- Aids such as dolls, toys, and items constructed from recycled materials. Excellent ideas for this type of story can be gleaned from watching Play School, ABC TV
- Drama and dressing up. Children love humour and some great effects can be achieved using props in an unexpected way. For example, how many different ways can you put on a coat?

So what about it?

When you tell a story, there is no anxious waiting for the publisher to send a contract; no disappointing rejection slip. If you have chosen the right story for the child or group, if you have prepared well, the children will let you know instantly that your story is a winner. You will come away feeling happy, and successful. Stand up for storytellers. Tell some yourself.

© Helen Evans 2003

Helen Evans is a former Pre-school Director and teacher of Child Studies at TAFE. She is well known as a storyteller in early childhood centres in the Armidale district of NSW. Helen tells her own stories as well as traditional tales.

Helen has had articles and stories published in *The Dawn* magazine, *Donkey Digest* magazine, and *The Cystic Fibrosis Newsletter*. Helen's illustrated picture books, *The Christmas Dragon*, *Finian's Magnificent Ice Cream Machine*, and *Humpty and Beatriz*, are awaiting publication by Writers Exchange E-Publishing. Details of these books can be seen under Upcoming Authors at <http://www.writersexchange.com/epublishing>

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Rejection to Publication – The Connection

By Margaret Warner

I held the envelope tightly, unwilling to let it fall into the mailbox. I had just finished the Children's Writing course and my tutor's encouraging comments were the catalyst to take my writing further. This was my first attempt at sending my work to a publisher. I loosened my grip and it was gone.

I had heard of an educational publisher who was commissioning a new series and would accept unsolicited manuscripts. With some trepidation I emailed the publisher who responded promptly and positively. They wanted outlines of books mainly for boys who were reluctant readers. Each book was to contain writing from three different genres...and the deadline for submissions was a week away.

I spent every spare minute after work and every minute I could spare on the weekend putting together my proposal. In total I sent off outlines for fifteen books. I hoped the publisher would think I was very enthusiastic. I had no reference point as to how many proposals were acceptable.

Rejection

Some weeks later I received a polite and encouraging rejection. Many of the topics I had suggested were already commissioned and some were "too Australian". I learnt from this that publishers need material that will "travel" and not be specific to a particular country.

My Australian animal stories were not suitable so now I am careful to take that into account with some publishers.

I was pleased that I had sent out my proposal. Holding the rejection letter in my hand meant that I had actually achieved something. I now had experience in contacting a publisher and had a bank of ideas to work on.

That was my first attempt at publication. During the next twelve months I continued my writing with some small successes but I still hadn't been published.

Almost exactly twelve months after sending off my fifteen proposals I received an unexpected email from the same publisher asking if I would be interested in submitting ideas for books about the topics of *Fast Cars*, *Big Machines* and *Castles*.

I dropped everything. I worked on my ideas for the three books and submitted them. My manuscript for *Castles* was accepted.

The Process from Acceptance to Publication

The process from acceptance to publication was an interesting learning experience. I was elated the day the contract arrived and my advance royalties cheque was something I savoured for weeks before I banked it.

I knew the actual process of publishing a series took months. When the free copies of my book arrived unexpectedly many months later I was amazed when I saw my name on the cover. I turned the pages and saw my manuscript transformed into text and illustrations...a book titled *Castles*.

I was a published author... and this had happened as a consequence of my initial rejection.

Building On That First Acceptance

After this initial success I contacted the same publisher some months later to enquire if they were producing any new series. The response was positive and the deadline was close.

Again, I sent in numerous submissions for the series. Many topics had already been commissioned but one of my proposals was accepted. *Gone Feral* was later published as part of an Australian History series.

Since my success with these two books I have had other writing successes. I have also had the confidence to approach other publishers – by email, by letter and even by phone.

Rejection to publication...there is a connection.

© *Margaret Warner 2003*

Margaret Warner is a writer, teacher and wildlife carer. She writes for a wide range of readers and interests. Her first attempt at publishing a children's book was successful with "Inside the Castle Walls". This was followed by "Gone Feral". Margaret was national runner-up in the Life Be In It 2002 animal story competition with "Bushfire Survivor".

Margaret is also a freelance journalist and has written articles for children and adults mainly on Australian wildlife.

Her business *Write Effect* provides a range of writing services from editing and proofreading to ghostwriting and letter writing. Ph /fax 02 4228 8912
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How To Get That Novel Finished!

By Michelle Stewart

Writers all know the feeling.

You sit down at your desk to write... and nothing happens. The screen flickers back at you, its blankness mocking you. You think of things you'd rather be doing:

Going shopping.

Organising your desk.

Eating the entire contents of your fridge.... or even cleaning the house.

You're not alone. All writers have felt that way. The longer you sit there, the more you tell yourself you can't think of any new plot twists. Your characters are boring you. You're tired from working all day and caring for your family at night, and... groan... it all seems like such a long haul!

You might as well give up, you decide. You'll never finish your novel.

Stop!

Finishing that novel doesn't have to be an impossible dream. Think of it as being like eating an elephant. Small bite after small bite.

Write your novel word by word, page by page, chapter by chapter. And of course, reward yourself along the way. After all, what better way to strive for a goal than when you know there's a treat at the end?

If you approach it like this, you'll be able to type those magical words "the end". Guaranteed!

Eating An Elephant...

Now about those "bites": You'll need to decide:

- where to write,
- when to write and
- how much to write.

Where to write:

This could be anywhere: a dedicated office, a desk squeezed in the corner of your bedroom or even in the garage. As long as it is a place where you can be creative and free from distractions. Sitting near a blaring TV and squabbling children just won't do.

Why not try some mood music, or burn some essential oils?

An answering machine is a worthwhile investment. At the very least you can screen calls.

Nothing, bar an emergency, should get in the way of your writing time.

When to write:

It doesn't matter if you write in the morning, the afternoon, the evening or just the weekends. However, it probably *is* preferable to try to get in at least two-hour stretches, three or four times a week. That way you get consistency and it keeps your novel fresh.

Find a time that works for you and stick to it. Think of it as a date with yourself. Now you wouldn't break a date would you? So, don't break this one.

Mark it in your diary, on your calendar, or stick it on your fridge door. Whatever it takes. Make sure those around you know that this is your time to write.

How much to write:

Estimate how long your novel will be. Then work out how many pages you think you can write in your writing date. It might be three pages or it might be five.

Grab your diary and mark in it how many pages would be completed each week. You can then project when you'll complete each chapter and your novel.

You mightn't reach these targets but they'll give you something to strive for and be a guide as to how you're travelling.

Reward Yourself

When you've completed a chapter, treat yourself. Your reward might be simply taking a long bath or catching up on some gossip magazines.

The good news is, the bigger the achievement the bigger the reward. Think of how you could reward yourself when you've finished the beginning or the middle. It could be an afternoon at the shops or an aromatherapy massage. Not to mention the huge reward for finishing your novel. That might be an evening at your favourite restaurant or a weekend away.

What are you waiting for? You want those rewards don't you?

The next time you sit down to write and nothing happens, don't despair and don't let that blank screen mock you. Reread what you've written so far. Go over the plot outline. Think about how you might tackle an upcoming chapter.

Try and stick your date out. The chances are by the end of it you'll be writing. If you can't well, there's always the next date.

It really is like eating an elephant – persevere, take small 'bites' and one day, you'll have finished an enormous undertaking!

I'll leave you with one last thought: an unfinished novel can never be published!

© Michelle Stewart 2003.

Michelle Stewart was raised on her family's rural property before heading to the city to pursue an accounting career. She now lives on Sydney's northern beaches but makes sure she has regular trips back to the country.

Her desire to write was ignored for many years. Enrolling in a writing course was the impetus she needed. Currently she is working on her first novel and has ideas for her second and third novels.

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Computer Eyes

By Wendy Nichols

Been spending too much time staring at the computer lately? Feeling blurry eyed and sore tailed? Well I can't do much about the sore tail but if you'd like to know how to improve your eyesight, read on!

Time's Up

We all know we should only spend twenty minutes at the computer before we have a break but how many of us actually do it? You're inspired, your fingers are racing over the keys and suddenly two or three hours have disappeared and your coffee's cold.

If you know you're one of the guilty ones, buy a timer with an alarm, set it for 20 minutes and *force* yourself to look up for two minutes when the alarm rings. If you can stand the interruption, use those couple of minutes to empty the dishwasher, make the bed or put a load of washing on.

Think "Window..."

Blank walls aren't good for eyes! If your computer is situated facing a blank wall, you need to move it. If possible, move your computer under a window. Open the window and look up and out when you're thinking. If you don't have a convenient window near your computer, try turning your computer around so you're looking into the room. If that's impossible, buy a large poster of a forest scene or waterfall. Stick that up on the blank wall and pretending if the poster is three dimensional, look up and *through* the poster as often as you can.

Natural light is best

We're not cats, we don't see well in the dark and even fluorescent lights can be tiring so whenever possible, allow that natural light to flood your computer.

If it's night time or there's not enough natural light near your computer, purchase a halogen spotlight. Halogen light is better for your eyes than fluorescent light and cheaper than a pair of glasses.

Exercise your eyes!

Healthy eyes, like healthy bodies, need exercise. The simplest way to do this is to rush down to your local optometrist and purchase an eye patch. They cost about \$10 and come with padding around the inside. And no, the pirate patch from the bottom of your child's toy box isn't good enough!

Now it's curl up with a good book, watch your favourite TV show or go about your daily household chores swapping the eye patch over to the other eye every couple of minutes. You'll be amazed at the improvement in your eyes. Until you get used to the single lens vision, you may find this a little irritating so it's best to avoid juggling knives or skipping down the stairs while you're wearing the eyepatch but other non-lethal activities such as making beds, folding clothes and getting the mail are fine. You might even give the neighbours something to talk about! My son wore an eyepatch for a few

hours the day before his optometrist's appointment and reduced the strength of his glasses.

Drink plenty of water

Your eyes need water so if you're a bit of a caffeine addict like me, make sure you're drinking those eight glasses a day.

Try to start the day with a glass of water and drink a glass of water for every cup of coffee you have. Leave a glass of water near the computer and sip while you're thinking. It will force you to look away from the computer while you find the glass!

Limit your solitaire

The rapid eye movements we use as we scan the screen when we're playing solitaire definitely tire my eyes so if you have the same problem, avoid playing too many games.

Natural Vision

Most bookstores carry a range of books by Natural Vision Instructors. If you'd like to know more, have a browse through these. Janet Goodrich has written quite a few books and managed to improve her own severe myopia to the extent where she was able to throw away her glasses. A few optometrists offer Natural Vision exercises and Natural Vision classes are sometimes available through your local TAFE.

So... say goodbye to computer-tired eyes by impersonating your favourite pirate!

© *Wendy Nichols 2003.*

Wendy Nichols has a Bachelor of Education majoring in Drama and English. She has also taught Maths and Social Science to secondary children, 'everything' to primary school children and run her own jazz ballet school in PNG. At the moment she is writing and lives in Brisbane with her husband, Rob, two boys, James and Mark, and Marco the attack cat. She has recently signed an e-book contract with Writers-Exchange for two junior novels and is off to a John Marsden conference with her Young Adult manuscript at the end of the year.

Writers-Exchange can be found at www.writers-exchange.com .

Promotion of eBooks and Print Books To School Libraries

By Suzanne Fisher

Getting your print books / e-books out there and into school libraries requires a lot of work by both yourself and your publisher. Publishing Companies send catalogues, faxes and brochures (promoting specialised products) and sometimes free sample copies, out to schools constantly.

This can be quite daunting and time consuming for the people who work in the library due to the time needed to give maximum attention to each article/catalogue. The publishing companies attack this with bright brochures and selling gimmicks: (e.g. “agree to have these books on consignment and you will receive one free”). If you aren’t lucky enough to be published with one of these companies, it’s extremely difficult to get your books into school libraries.

Librarians and Literacy Coordinators generally work hand in hand to ensure that the resources purchased, are the best for the students of the school. So **you** need to get their attention. Teachers can also be influential with the purchasing of resources for their schools. If they’ve used a certain book/s in a previous school and liked it, they will certainly try to get it for their new school. That’s ‘Word-Of-Mouth’.

But how do you get it there in the first place? How do you get your e-book/print book into the schools or communities to trigger the ‘Word-Of-Mouth’? Here are a few tips that can help you catapult your e-book/print book into a million-dollar product! Or certainly get you started, anyway!

Introduce yourself to all the local schools. Tell them that you are a local author. That’s sure to win them over, and that you have a new e-book/print book and ask if you could use their school as one of the launching pads to assist in promotion. Maybe you could offer them one free copy for their library for starters.

Make yourself available to read your e-book/print book to a class that has the appropriate age level. Or let the teacher read it, but be there for assistance and ready to answer questions etc. Kids love to meet the person behind the product. A photo of you and some of the students (parent’s permission of course) could be given to the local paper. Schools love to be recognised in the community for having a good literacy focus. What better way to advertise than that! And the paper should be willing to help promote new and local authors.

Also, because the e-book concept is still very new in Australia, (a point worth making them aware of) - that alone should be enough to get their interest. Tell me what editor doesn’t want to have the first scoop! More and more schools are pushing education via computers. So e-book authors need to capitalise on this by believing in their e-book and getting out and making sure that everyone else believes in it too.

How To Promote Your eBook

This may come as a surprise to some of you, but there are still a lot of teachers who have little if any knowledge of computers and how they operate. So the e-book would be lost to them. Maybe you could contact the school’s IT person to introduce the

concept of an e-book to staff by using **your** e-book as an example. Offer your assistance in workshop sessions where the students create their own e-book. Of course you would have a few copies of your own e-book handy in your bag.

And that brings me to the next point. **Always** carry spare copies of your e-book/print book on you. You never know when someone will want to buy one.

Capitalising On Book Week

Book week is a great opportunity to promote your e-book/print book. Librarians in schools are always looking for guest authors during this time. A local author would always be welcomed. Not only would you have the chance of promoting your e-book/print book but you may also pick up a few story ideas from the students themselves – bonus!

Contact your local library. Ask if you can book an area (a lot of libraries have reading rooms) for a storytelling session. Advertise in the local paper (maybe at a small cost) and schools newsletters (free) the date and times etc. The **parents** that bring the children along will then be your ‘Word-Of-Mouth’.

‘**Word Of Mouth**’ is an extremely powerful marketing method. If you belong to a writer’s network, it could be a tremendous help to the promotion of your e-book/print book. A network is surely to include people who work at a school, have connections at schools or know someone who works at a school.

© Suzanne Fisher

Suzanne Fisher is the mother of four children and Nana to four grandchildren. She lives with her husband and youngest son, on a five-acre block south of Darwin in the Northern Territory. She is 47 years old and in charge of the library at one of the local primary schools. Suzanne has been associated with school libraries for seven years. After completing a course by correspondence – ‘Short Story Writing’ – Suzanne decided that children’s writing was where her love was. Then she completed the Professional Children’s Writing course with the Australian College of Journalism. She is now a member of the Career Booster Program and since doing so she has had four e-books accepted. Three of them are illustrated picture e-books and the other is a short story that will go on an educational web site that schools across Australia subscribe to.

Since becoming an author of e-books Suzanne has realised how difficult it will be to promote them – but being in the school system, she can also see how to overcome this!

Editors Aren't Ogres

By Raelene Hall

I'm sitting at my desk, stomach quivering, phone held in sweaty hands waiting for someone to answer. Am I ringing about a life or death situation? No, much worse – I'm phoning an editor!!!

Why do I feel that editors are ogres who are going to swallow me whole the minute I dare to approach them? I honestly don't know why I, and many other writers, feel this way but I think it has to do with the fact that it is editors who can give us the accolades we are looking for in the form of publication. Handing your precious manuscript/article to a strange person who has the power to determine its future is scary, to say the least. We all know we have written a masterpiece so why would any editor reject it?

Editors Are Human!

But guess what I've found out? One of the great secrets to helping you become a writer, are you ready for this monumental piece of information? Editors are human! Simple isn't it. They are humans just like you and me, they laugh and cry, they have good days and bad, and they have a job to pay the bills. That job just happens to be as an editor.

I've contacted editors of Australian magazines such as 'Digital Camera', 'G'day G'day', 'Christian Woman' and even overseas editors in places like New Zealand and the USA and each time I've found a perfectly reasonable human being at the other end of the phone or email. I've written articles for each of these editors, some more than once and found them to be professional but also polite and helpful. In other words, not scary at all.

Different Strokes for Different Folks

Yes, editors are busy people and they often don't like to have their time wasted by unnecessary phone calls, constant barrages of emails or work being sent to them that obviously hasn't been presented in a professional manner. They are all different and work in different ways. Just like you are never going to get on with every person in the world, there is a good chance you won't get on with every editor you send your work to.

However, if you follow some basic rules about working with editors then you will have a much better chance of getting the editor to look at your work and hopefully consider it for publication.

- Do your homework first. Ensure you are submitting to a suitable market e.g. don't send a romance novel to publishers of mostly non-fiction
- Ensure you are sending your submission to the correct department
- Be courteous. Attempt to find out the editor's name and address your query letter to them or use the formal Ms/Mr/Mrs.
- Find out how the editor prefers work to be presented and ensure you send it that way e.g. email (with attachments or in the body of the email) or post, on disk or in hard copy, full manuscript or sample chapters

- Include cover letter and query letter but keep them brief and to the point.
- Be patient. Whether you send your submission by mail or email do not expect an immediate reply. Wait 8-12 weeks before making follow up inquiries
- Ensure the work submitted is of the highest possible standard, both in writing and in presentation i.e. clean paper, wide margins, clear print, pages numbered
- If your work is accepted ensure you meet any deadline requirements

No Guarantees....

Whilst these rules will give you the best possible chance of having your work looked at and hopefully published, remember there are no guarantees. The important thing to remember is a rejection of your submission is not a personal rejection of you nor does it necessarily mean you don't have what it takes to get published. There are a myriad of reasons why your work may have been rejected, some editors will tell you and others won't. It could be as simple as the fact they have just accepted/published something very similar to your work.

No one has ever said writing is easy and getting published even less so but persistence does pay off. If your work is rejected print out a fresh copy and send it somewhere else. As long as it's circulating the editorial world it has a chance of finding a home.

Next time I pick up the phone to the editor I'm going to take my own advice and remember... **editors aren't ogres.**

Raelene Hall © 2003 You can contact Raelene at nedscreekstn@bigpond.com or check out her website at www.outbackwriter.com

Raelene Hall is a freelance writer living on an Outback property in Western Australia. She has written numerous non-fiction articles for magazines, newspapers and the Net on a wide variety of topics, including education; the outback; communications; nature; spirituality and children. Raelene is a regular columnist for the Midwest Times newspaper in WA and www.writerscrossing.com Her inspiration is taken from her life as wife, mother, teacher, station hand, cook and voluntary worker on the million-acre cattle station she shares with her husband and their three children. Raelene's writing catchcry is *'From the Outback to You.'*

Cover Letters – Panning For Gold

By Peter Taylor

Your latest masterpiece is complete and ready for the post. All you have to do is slip in a cover letter, stick on a stamp and give it a hug and kiss good-bye, for luck, before you drop it in the mailbox.

Then wait.

You know it's good, but you also realise that there is a possibility that you could be getting it back with a rejection slip. Such has been the fate of manuscripts from even the most famous and well-established authors. Returned to sender.

Maybe the publishing house has just accepted a picture book about a chicken ...and yours is about a chicken too. Or they have just accepted their last picture book to complete their catalogue for the year. So is that it? Not necessarily. Yes, in these cases you'll receive a rejection, but your cover letter could uncover gold for you.

Now I've heard many editors say that they don't read the cover letter before reading the manuscript, but a lot do, so it's a good idea to write it as well as you can and make a good impression. If it's not professional, they may not even bother reading what you're offering.

A Few “Rules”

First, make sure you're sending your manuscript to the right place - you don't want to send a picture book story to a publisher that only deals with adult nonfiction. Second, get the editor's name right. Phone the company, explain that you wish to send them a manuscript to be considered, of whatever genre it is, and ask who would be most appropriate person in the organisation to address it to. Some prefer 'The Children's Editor', some the name of an editor. Ask them to spell out the person's name for you.

Keep in mind that editors move around. Even if you have sent something to a person before, it's still a good idea to phone and check first that your contact hasn't left or changed departments.

The Letter

The salutation

You can be familiar and call them by their first name if you have corresponded previously, or met them, but I always feel it's safer to use a title that won't offend.

If you have met them before, use the first paragraph to jog their memory. Another approach is to thank them for their presentation at the xxxx Festival (to butter them up a fraction, but also to let them know that you are a serious writer who attends these kinds of thing).

The First Paragraph

Start by saying that you are enclosing a manuscript / proposal for consideration, give its title, and in about 5 or 6 words or so, expand on its genre, e.g. 'a humorous adventure story suitable for 7-9 year old children', or 'a guide book to Australian nature reserves'. (You may also mention meeting them before in this paragraph.)

The Second Paragraph

In one or two sentences at most, you then sell the book. The idea is to explain what it's about as if trying to tempt someone to buy it (hopefully, the publisher). Think of it as an entry in a competition with the prize of being published. You know the sort I mean: '...in 40 words or less, compel someone to read your book.'

'Kookaburra and Owl have seen Kangaroo's latest weird invention, but who is brave enough to visit him and find out what it is? Koala volunteers, but finds that the new machine does more than he expects.'

The Third Paragraph

Editors don't want to know that you're completing a course, or that grandchildren liked the book, or that your best friend fell about laughing after reading it – this paragraph is about you as a writer. That's easy if you've already had things published, but if you haven't, think of what you have written. For example :-

'... in my normal work I have written training manuals for many years, but am now writing ...'

'... I have written extensive educational material for school use ...'

'... I have regularly written articles on ZZZ for newsletters of the XXX Club and the YYY Society, to which I belong, but am now concentrating on writing ...'

If you are sending a proposal, list what you are providing, e.g.

- A synopsis and explanation of the book concept (what gap in the market it fills)
- A short blurb about you as an author - why you are qualified to write it
- Its potential market - what kind of people are likely to buy it, and how many of them there are - e.g. if it's a book on photography, you could provide numbers of people who belong to camera clubs, how many photography magazines are bought each year , ...
- Sample chapter (s)
- Sample illustrations
- SSAE

Publishers of non-fiction often like some input into the length and style of a book, so you may wish to send a proposal before it's completed. Give them some realistic idea, however, of how long you think it would take you to finish it.

Now for *the 'panning for, and discovering, gold'*, even if your manuscript is rejected. Unlike many authors, before closing, I slip in a paragraph about other books I am working on. For example:

I have many writing projects completed and in progress, and have :-

An illustrated picture book ready to send

...and at various stages of planning and writing :

Making Origami Animals - Simple ways to make realistic models

Planning a 'No Watering Required' 'Desert' Garden

'Before' and 'After' - A collection of photographs of prize-winning house renovations

I am wondering if any of these have appeal, or if you would like me to fast track any in particular towards filling a requirement that you may have? Would you like me to send them all to you in due course?

[If they say 'yes', write '*Requested Manuscript*' on the envelope when you send your manuscript(s), and, in the accompanying cover letter, again state that they have asked to see your title(s)].

They may like the style of your writing, even though your submission does not fit in with their present acceptance policy. You will probably never know what they are looking for unless you ask. I have certainly found opportunities this way, particularly for non-fiction.

The Final Paragraph

Finally, let the editor know if you are making simultaneous submissions to other publishers. Some accept that, some don't like you doing it. You should check their preference in your initial phone call to the switchboard to confirm mailing details.

If you know that they don't like simultaneous submissions, a compromise could be that you tell them that if they have not replied within three months (a reasonable time to expect a reply - but some can take longer), you will be sending it to others.

In the last sentence or two, you thank the editor for reading your manuscript, tell them that you hope that it will be a successful book for them (their interest is only in making a profit), that you look forward to hearing favourably from them (fingers and everything else crossed until you have arthritis) and that you enclose a SSAE.

© *Peter Taylor* 2003. Author of 'The Australian Manual of Calligraphy', 'Kangaroo's Visitor Gets a Surprise', a wide range of other books for children and adults, and 'artist's specials' - one of which was presented to HM The Queen when she opened 'World Expo 88'.

If you use this guideline and are successful with a submission, please let me know at peter@writing-for-children.com. At my website www.writing-for-children.com you will find a complete sample cover letter. Though the site is largely about writing for children, and has my stories and non-fiction for children on it, it also offers more articles; writing tips for children and adults; advice on how to win competitions; how to make greeting cards and bind books; tips on calligraphy, illumination and illustration techniques, something about the history of books... and much much more, suitable for all ages. At the time of writing this article, September 2003, the site is still under construction. If it is incomplete when you visit, please leave a message at peter@writing-for-children.com so that I can inform you when it's fully functional.

Date With A Synopsis

By June Whyte

Writing a synopsis is a lot like dating. You're out to sell yourself, impress your date (the editor) and encourage a winning relationship (have your full manuscript read and hopefully published).

Instead of a romantic dinner, well-placed candles and a good vintage wine all you have to accomplish this seemingly impossible task are two single spaced pages. Impossible you say ... your book is a 150,000 word tome. That's okay. The same rules apply whether you're writing a synopsis for a 20,000 word novel or a saga.

- **Start with a hook.** It can be the theme of your book, the condensed story in one sentence or the back-cover blurb. As long as it makes the editor sit up and take notice.
- **Always write in present tense** as though you're telling the story to a friend.
- **Write in the same style as your book.** If you've written a comedy keep your synopsis light. If you've written a serious drama don't go making jokes.
- **Show your characters' personality but unless it's important to the plot leave details of their appearance for your book.** E.g 'Shauna's hair is the colour of a ripe plum in the middle of summer' is unnecessary. However 'Shauna has an ugly purple birthmark down one side of her face which has left her scarred mentally' is important to your story.
- **Don't wander off into sub-plots.** You only have two pages to tell your editor what your book is about so stick to the main plot with perhaps a hint of a sub-plot if it's vital to the main story. The same applies to characters. Unless a minor character is important to the outcome of your story don't mention him/her in your synopsis.
- **Stick to the basics of your story.** Your synopsis should give the hook, the obstacles to overcome, the climax and the resolution. Remember two pages of single-spacing does not allow for wandering off and describing your favourite scene.
- **Some published authors advise no dialogue in a synopsis.** The only time I would use dialogue would be to strengthen a point or if a line of dialogue creates a good opening hook. E.G.

'Make a sound and you die!' These chilling words breathed into Shauna Kay's ear on a balmy night in January plunges her into the most terrifying two weeks of her life. Two weeks in a rat-infested cellar chained like a dog to the wall. Two weeks at the mercy of a deranged psychopath whose favourite hobby is inflicting pain – just for the fun of it.'

- **Keep details of the setting of your book to a bare minimum in a synopsis.** Even when setting is almost another character there's no room to elaborate or illustrate your flowery descriptive skills. It's far better to show how well you can describe the setting in a few well-chosen words.
- **All the editor wants to know is what happens and who it happens to.** That's all. This doesn't mean your synopsis should be boring. Heaven forbid ... your synopsis should tantalize, show your craft, make the editor so intrigued/excited/on the edge of her seat she can't wait to get her hands on your manuscript.
- **Never ever leave the editor up in the air.** If you build up to the climax of your story then inform her she'll have to read the book to find out how your protagonists found their way through the maze of poisonous man-eating weeds and defeated the slimy giant lizard-creatures, a rejection slip will hit your letter-box faster than the proverbial speeding bullet. Your synopsis must present a dynamic opening hook plus obstacles to overcome and a satisfying resolution.

The following synopsis persuaded Harlequin/Duets to request my full manuscript. Okay, *The Making of Marni* failed to 'tickle their funny-bone' ☹ but at least the synopsis had them wanting to read more.

THE MAKING OF MARNI

SYNOPSIS

There's no man in Marni Peppard's life. And never likely to be. As soon as she comes within touching distance of an eligible bachelor, she spills food over him, scalds him with hot coffee or watches him break track records running away from her. What's even worse - there's no cure for Marni's disease. She's a klutz. Has been ever since she first drew breath twenty six years ago then promptly wet all over the midwife's new shoes.

[This is my opening hook. 'The Making of Marni' is a romantic comedy so I've tried for a light humorous style to fit the Harlequin/Duet line. Notice I haven't described Marni. I haven't said she's 5'6" with untidy fair hair that she pulls back in a pony-tail and she has freckles galloping across her nose – the main point of the story is that she's a klutz.]

But to be arrested for disturbing the peace and shoplifting . . . Marni can't believe it. Okay, she slipped on the wet floor in the supermarket and crashed into the display of baby's diapers which brought down a stand containing assorted biscuits and unfilled sponge cakes, which in turn sent the newly stacked tins of cheesy spaghetti running in noisy rivulets across the cement floor -- but how the packet of Oreo cookies got into her bag during that little debacle is anybody's guess.

Marni's bummer of a day hasn't ended. After wearing out her welcome at the local police-station, she decides to walk away, move on to another unsuspecting little town.

She doesn't see where the dog came from.

She doesn't hear it barking at the blackbird.

All she remembers before the lights go out is that something has crashed into her, folding her over like the flap on an envelope.

[I'm telling the story in present tense as though talking to a friend. My main aim here is to show Marni at her lowest ebb and to set the synopsis up for the introduction of the hero.]

Troy Finnigan, owner of the Flying Horseshoe Stud is on his way to Adelaide for his uncle's funeral. Not only is Troy about to have his racing-stud repossessed by the bank through no fault of his own, but he's also about to lose his inheritance. Uncle Albert has always been eccentric, but the terms of his will are way-off, even for him:

'THE TOTAL SUM OF \$500,000 WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO MY NEPHEW'S BANK ACCOUNT ON ONE CONDITION: HE MUST ATTEND MY FUNERAL IN THE COMPANY OF HIS WIFE.'

In the company of his wife . . . WHAT WIFE?

[Introducing Troy. He's the louse who does her wrong. This paragraph touches on the reason for his behaviour. Notice I haven't gone into details about why his racing-stud is due to be repossessed by the bank or how his Uncle Albert died. Leave that for the book.]

Troy, a confirmed bachelor, would rather break in the wildest, orneriest critter with four legs and a tail, than take on the job of taming himself a wife. So, when he finds a beautiful girl lying on the side of the road. A beautiful girl who's conveniently lost her memory. Well, it's just too tempting to resist. He decides to pick her up, brush her off and pretend to be her ever-loving husband ... for a week!

[You don't know the colour of Troy's hair – but you certainly get a pretty good picture of this cowboy. The first obstacle has been successfully hurdled. He's found himself a suitable wife for Uncle Albert's funeral!]

While Troy tries to keep this farcical relationship on an impersonal level, Marni does everything but tap-dance naked on the roof of his car to make him notice her. She can't understand why, if it's their honeymoon, her husband breaks the two minute mile every time she gets within smooching distance of him.

[Another obstacle presents itself. Marni is acting like a newly married woman who wants to share a bed, a shower or even the roof of the car with her new husband! There's no room in your synopsis to present more than a glimpse of the humour that this scenario generates.]

Naturally, under these circumstances, Troy's brilliant plan starts to come unglued. Unglued. Unravelling. Unworkable. He's so intoxicated with Marni that every time she brushes against him his heart races like an out of control locomotive. She only has to run one finger lightly across his thigh for chaos to hit on all levels. Even wearing baggy pants fails to hide his desire. Of course it's lust. Has to be. But Marni has him wrapped around her little finger. She's

flirtatious. She's irresistible. She's like a breath of fresh air in his hitherto loveless life. Using *her* amnesia and *his* bogus case of impotence Troy is fast running out of rational excuses for not dragging her into his cave and having his way with her. After all, there's only so long a man can stand under an icy shower before things start to shatter!

[Troy's point of view touches on the problems he's encountering with his fictitious wife. It also takes the story closer to the next obstacle.]

Troy finds that being Marni's husband is a full-time job. After fighting off a trio of enamoured businessmen outside the shopping-mall and rescuing her from knuckle-dusting bikies in the front bar, he admits to himself that he may be falling in love with his sassy wife-for-a-week.

[Notice I've only touched on minor characters here. Although these characters provide humour to the book they bring nothing to the synopsis. Also we come to the next obstacle in the story. Against his better judgement Troy is falling in love.]

So -- all bets are off. Troy doesn't want the money, confesses to the lawyer and subsequently discovers that Uncle Albert has been playing a trick on him. The money is his anyway! But will Marni forgive him?

Marni's memory returns slap bang in the middle of Uncle Albert's funeral service. Mourners go down like ninepins as she trips in the high heels she *never* wears -- leaving chaos and hubbub in her wake as she crashes and crawls her way from the church. Then, to make her day even blacker, two policemen, handcuffs in hand, are waiting for her on the church steps.

Behind bars, Marni gradually sorts out the jigsaw. Memories of Troy using her to claim his inheritance make her feel dirty and used. So why is her heart breaking? Why is she still in love with the son of a bush-pig? She recalls Troy's anguished words in the church, 'Marni, you can't leave me now. I love you!' If he loves her, why hasn't he bailed her out?

[This is the climax of the story. The biggest obstacle yet. Everything looks so black and hopeless for both characters there doesn't seem to be any way out. I've used dialogue here, 'Marni, you can't leave me now. I love you!' to heighten the problem.]

To win Marni back Troy begins 'operation romance'. A dozen red roses delivered to her cell. Love songs harmonised outside her barred window. A gorilla-gram filled with apologies and declarations of love. And to top it all off, he smuggles a cake into the jail-house concealing not a file, but a diamond ring. 'Operation romance' accomplished, he proposes marriage, sweeps her off her feet and takes her back to their hotel room.

[The resolution. Troy accepts that he's acted like a jerk and is determined to win Marni back because he wants his 'wife for a week' to become his 'wife for life'.]

At last they are alone. Determined not to be disturbed *this* time, Marni rips the phone off the hook and locks the windows. Troy hangs a DO NOT DISTURB sign on the door-knob then barricades the door.

After that ... the roof could have caved in and they wouldn't even notice!

[A one –sentence ending that says, 'All obstacles have been negotiated and Troy and Marni look set to live happily ever after.']

Okay, that wasn't hard was it? So next time you sit down to craft a dynamic synopsis for that masterpiece you've spent the last nine months sweating over, don't sag, don't scream, don't throw up – just treat it like a fun date!

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June Whyte has worked as a receptionist, a swim instructor, a school-teacher, a dancing teacher, a riding instructor, a non-fiction writer, a greyhound trainer and a greyhound muscle manipulator. However, her unfulfilled dream is to walk into Target, K-mart or Big W and see her fiction (romantic comedy, adult and children's mysteries) adorning the bookshelves so she can shuffle the books to the front of the shelves then pick one up and pretend she's rapt in the opening page.

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