
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.

"Fiction Writing = Organizing + Creating + Marketing"

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- 1) Welcome to the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine!

Those of you who have joined in the past month (about 300 of you have joined since the last issue), welcome to my e-zine!

You should be on this list only if you signed up for it on my web site. If you no longer wish to hear from me, don't be shy -- there's a link at the bottom of this email that will put you out of your misery.

If you missed a back issue, remember that all previous issues are archived on my web site at:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>

What's in this issue:

I believe that success in fiction writing comes from balancing three aspects of the writing life: organization, creativity, and marketing. I'll discuss each of these in one of my regular columns.

In the first column, on organization, we'll talk about managing your time. That actually comes down to managing three distinctly different activities -- habits, interruptions, and achievements. Do you know which of these is most important?

In the second column, on creativity, I'll tackle a subject I've never written about before -- nonverbal communication. I've written about the verbal kind of communication in a number of previous articles, but never the nonverbal kind. Can you guess what percentage of all communication is nonverbal?

In the third column, on marketing, I'll begin the first of a series of articles on web sites and blogging. We've been discussing this very recently on my Advanced Fiction Writing Blog, and it's drawn a large number of comments. I'll begin summarizing it in this article. Do you know the most common mistake bloggers make?

We've been talking about some of these topics already on my blog. Have you been missing out? Join the fun here:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

2) Organizing: Habits, Interruptions, and Achievements

In a recent comment on my Advanced Fiction Writing Blog, one of my loyal blog readers asked about the time management system that I've been using, the Simpleology system, which you can learn more about here:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/links/s101.php>

This system encourages you to dream big -- to define what your ideal life would be like. You can make a list of as many things as you want, and they can be anything you want. Paying off the mortgage. Climbing Mount Everest. Running a marathon. And, oh yeah, writing a novel and getting it published.

HOWEVER, this time management system only allows you to choose ONE "long-term target," ONE "medium-term target," and ONE "short-term target" at a time.

Isn't that rather limiting? Don't I get frustrated with that restriction? Wouldn't it be better if I could focus on as many targets as I felt like?

My answers are yes, yes, and no.

Yes, it's a limitation on myself to have only one "target" at a time. Yes, that's frustrating. No, it wouldn't be better to focus on multiple targets at once.

That's not focus. Focus is when you have only one "target" at a time. Anything else is being out of focus.

Those limitations are directly due to a very real limitation on all of us -- time. Each of us gets only 24 hours per day. And worse, most of that is already spoken for. So the actual time we have in any given day for reaching for our dreams may be very small. It might be an hour or two some days (if we're lucky). It might be no time at all other days.

What's a big-dreaming writer to do?

That brings me to the title of this article. I'd like to define three different ways we can spend our time: on habits, on interruptions, and on achievements. Let's talk about each of those in turn.

Habits are things we do routinely that we've mastered. They may be easy to learn or they may be hard to learn, but we're good at them and we execute them routinely without a lot of intellectual energy.

Flossing is a habit. Driving to work is a habit. Answering email is a habit. For many writers, producing X words per day is a habit.

Notice that these aren't everybody's habits. For some people, these are major achievements. But many people have mastered each of these and they do them routinely without thinking much about them.

Interruptions are things that pop up every day that MUST be dealt with NOW. They're not things that happen routinely, and so they may take a bit more effort to deal with.

Getting the brakes fixed is an interruption. So is the annual income tax grind. Answering the telephone is an interruption.

Interruptions can be good, of course. That phone call might your agent calling to let you know that you sold your novel. That's great, but it's still an interruption and it still extracts mental energy from you.

Achievements are things we want to do that are worth

doing but require serious commitment for an extended period of time. You often have to learn a new skill or expend enormous amounts of intellectual energy.

Paying off the mortgage is an achievement. So is scaling Everest for the first time. Or running your first marathon. Or publishing your first novel.

Notice that while doing something the first time is often a major achievement, doing it a second time may be merely a habit.

That's a very important point, and it cuts to the heart of the matter. Part of success in life means focusing on one achievement until you reach it the first time. After that, doing it again may be much, much easier -- so easy that it can correctly be called a habit.

That is the answer to the problem of "I have so many things I want to achieve, so why can't I focus on several of them at once?"

You can do whatever you want in life. But if you have a major achievement, then you are most likely to reach it by focusing all your available energy on it (for a time) until you reach that goal. Then, having mastered that skill, doing it the second time will become far easier.

There remains the question of balance. There are things you pretty much have to do every day. These are generally either habits or interruptions. Since you have to do them, my (excellent) advice is that you should do them.

On a bad day, that will leave no time to spend on trying to reach your dream. Tough beans. Some days are like that. There are one or two days every week when I end up expending every minute on the routine stuff or on putting out fires (or both). Life happens.

On a good day, you'll have time left over to spend on those pesky achievements. You can split that time, or you can focus it. I think you should focus it.

Focus means applying your time, energy, and money on ONE achievement to the exclusion of all others. Focus is risky, because you might fail. But focus is smart because it gives you the highest chance of success.

Diamonds are forever, but focus isn't. When you focus on one achievement, you are promising yourself that you'll actually reach your goal in a finite amount of time.

When you achieve something, you may very well be able to turn that into a routine habit, which doesn't take much mental energy. (It may still take time, but the

important thing is that you'll be able to do it far easier the second time than the first.)

Then you can focus on some new achievement. That's how successful people operate.

Finally, let's ask which are most important -- habits, interruptions, or achievements? My answer is that they are all roughly equally important. If you allocate time for all three of them, you'll thrive.

What achievements do you have on tap for this year? That depends on who you are and where you are in your writing career. Here are some possible achievements you might want to focus your energy on:

- * Learning to write a good scene
- * Learning to create a memorable character
- * Learning to structure a novel
- * Mastering dialogue
- * Developing a strong proposal
- * Going to your first writing conference
- * Finding an agent
- * Selling your first novel
- * Marketing your novel successfully

Each of these is a major achievement the FIRST time you do it. After that, it's just a good habit.

Which ONE of these will you focus on next?

3) Creating: Nonverbal Communication in Fiction

Last month, I mentioned that I was studying Margie Lawson's course "Empowering Character Emotions." I've now worked through the course twice, and all I can say is, wow! This is great stuff. Margie is a psychologist with a TON of insights into characters. You can order her course on her web site at this location:
<http://www.MargieLawson.com>

One thing I learned from Margie is that 93% of interpersonal communication is nonverbal. Only 7% is verbal.

The 93% that is nonverbal takes two main forms, visible and audible. Let's look at an example:

If I tell you, "Have a nice day" with a sarcastic tone of voice while handing you a dead weasel, I have sent you three communications:

- * "Have a nice day." -- verbal
- * Sarcastic tone -- audible nonverbal

* The weasel -- visible nonverbal

Note that the the verbal communication sends you one message, while the two nonverbal communications send you the opposite message. If you have any common sense at all, you'll ignore the verbal and believe the nonverbal communication.

Understanding and using nonverbal communication can enrich your fiction. Let's look at an example of nonverbal communication in THE PROMISE, by Chaim Potok. In this passage, the protagonist Reuven is at a carnival with his girlfriend Rachel and Rachel's young cousin Michael. The three are being cheated in one of those wretched carnival games that looks easy and is actually impossible. They're hoping to win an expensive radio, but they still need a couple of points.

When Reuven, Rachel, and Michael begin getting suspicious, the carnival pitchman's father comes in to reassure them. Like them, he's Jewish and he talks to them about coming to America from Russia. This resonates with Reuven, whose father also came from Russia. After some serious sweet-talking, the old carnie allays their fears and urges them to continue the game:

The old man shrugged apologetically. "I live and travel with the carnival. I know only the carnival. I do not know what goes on outside. Here and there I hear a little and read a little. But I was not so fortunate as you." He lapsed into silence. Behind him the pitchman stood very still, staring down at the gleaming radio. The old man was quiet a long time, his eyes moist and sad. He shook his head slowly. "Nu," he said. "Back to business. You are in good hands here now." He had reverted to English. "Schmeiss," he said, smiling. "See how much you will win from me."

I felt calm and protected. The tension and fear were gone now from the game. I put seven dollars on the counter next to the one-dollar bill.

"Go ahead and play," I said to Michael. "I'll pay and you'll play. All right?"

Michael grinned eagerly and picked up the cup. Rachel nodded, her eyes very bright.

Randy sez: What's going on here is that the old con man has allayed the fears of Reuven and his friends by a carefully orchestrated set of nonverbal communications that precisely match his verbal communications: "You are in good hands here now."

Let's take this passage apart in slow motion and analyze everything the old man (and his son, the

pitchman) do. I'll insert my own running commentary between segments. My comments are based on the entire context of the chapter, including those parts I'm not showing here.

* The old man shrugged apologetically.

Randy sez: Nonverbal visible communication that transmits the message, "I'm just a humble man who knows nothing."

* "I live and travel with the carnival. I know only the carnival. I do not know what goes on outside. Here and there I hear a little and read a little. But I was not so fortunate as you."

Randy sez: Verbal communication that says precisely the same thing his shrug said earlier.

* He lapsed into silence.

Randy sez: Nonverbal visible communication that reinforces the idea that this is a humble, honest man.

* Behind him the pitchman stood very still, staring down at the gleaming radio.

Randy sez: Nonverbal visible communication that shows his fear that Reuven and Rachel and Michael will win the radio, and that the old man has gone over to their side and will practically give them that radio. They're playing good-carnie/bad-carnie.

* The old man was quiet a long time, his eyes moist and sad.

Randy sez: Two distinctly different visible nonverbal communications. The first is being quiet. The second is having moist, sad eyes. Both tell the same story -- that the old man is resigned to losing the radio to Reuven and Rachel and Michael if they play one more time. The clear message is that they can't lose.

* He shook his head slowly.

Randy sez: Another visible nonverbal communication that gives the same message -- he will inevitably lose that radio to them.

* "Nu," he said. "Back to business. You are in good hands here now." He had reverted to English.

Randy sez: The old man has been speaking to them in

Yiddish, gaining their trust by an appeal to their shared heritage. Now he switches to English, which is an audible nonverbal message, that it is time to get back to the business of the game. This is identical to the verbal message he gives, "Back to business." Then he reinforces the message of trust he has been building for several pages with another verbal communication, "You are in good hands here now."

* "Schmeiss," he said, smiling. "See how much you will win from me."

Randy sez: Another set of mixed verbal and nonverbal messages that all say the same thing. There are three primary messages:

"Schmeiss" is Yiddish, so it conveys once again using an audible nonverbal signal that they are safe, because he is their fellow Jew and will treat them honestly.

He smiles, a visible nonverbal communication that reinforces the message that he is their friend.

"See how much you will win from me." is a verbal communication that tells them they can't lose.

* I felt calm and protected. The tension and fear were gone now from the game. I put seven dollars on the counter next to the one-dollar bill.

Randy sez: The above elaborate set of communications has put Reuven completely at ease. He is now quite certain that he's about to win. He communicates this certainty with an action, putting his money down, which is a visible nonverbal communication that he's ready to play.

* "Go ahead and play," I said to Michael. "I'll pay and you'll play. All right?"

Randy sez: Verbal communication that reinforces the message Reuven just sent nonverbally.

* Michael grinned eagerly and picked up the cup.

Randy sez: Visible nonverbal communication that shows, in two actions, that Michael is also ready to play. He too has been completely conned by the old man. We see this by his actions, even though we're not inside his head.

* Rachel nodded, her eyes very bright.

Randy sez: Two more visible nonverbal communications. Rachel nods, showing that she agrees with Reuven. Her

bright eyes show us that she, too, is taken in. She believes that they are moments away from winning.

In the pages that follow, the old man cheats Reuven, Rachel, and Michael out of every dollar they have and then verbally abuses them when they accuse him of cheating. Reuven, Rachel, and Michael are furious when they realize they've been had.

But why were they had? People lie all the time, at least verbally. Why didn't Reuven and friends realize the old man was lying?

When we're lied to, we usually know it or suspect it. The reason is that we pick up on the many nonverbal communications that tell us something isn't right. Shifting eyes, nervous tics, faltering voice, and many similar nonverbal cues tip us off.

The reason Reuven and his friends were conned is that the old carnie gave them a very long string of nonverbal cues that completely lined up with his words. In order to show this, I'd have to copy off several pages on either side of this passage.

There are hundreds of forms of nonverbal communication, both visible and audible. As novelists, we often settle for a few easy ways. So our characters are constantly shifting their eyes, nervously ticking, or faltering in voice. Or whatever cue we decide to overuse.

But we have many more options, if only we'd use them. Watch some of the great actors. What tricks do they play in order to show you nonverbally far more than they're saying? Watch Bruce Willis in action, or Meryl Streep, or Nicolas Cage, or Judy Dench, and see what they can show you with their eyes, face, hands, voice tone.

For a LARGE number of examples that cover many more aspects of showing character emotions, I'll point you once again to the terrific course on Margie Lawson's web site:

<http://www.MargieLawson.com>

4) Marketing: Web Sites and Blogging, Part 1

In the last couple of weeks, we've been talking about blogging for novelists on my Advanced Fiction Writing Blog. In this column, I'd like to summarize some of that. I'll continue on this topic in the next several e-zines, because I think it's of high importance to novelists.

The first question people often ask is "Does a blog work?"

That depends on what you mean by "working." A blog won't wash your dishes or vacuum the carpet.

What a blog does, if you let it, is to bring in traffic to your web site. One of my loyal blog readers asked just a couple of days ago if I'd be willing to give hard numbers on my site visitors.

Yes, I'll do that.

I've had a web site for about nine years. In the middle of last April, I launched a blog. It lives on my web site, so I just now had a look at my web stats over the past year.

In March, 2007, just before I launched my blog, my Advanced Fiction Writing web site was averaging 686 page views per day. That's not bad at all. In fact, that's pretty good.

In January, 2008, the most recent full month of data, my web site was averaging 3390 page views per day. That's a boost by a factor of nearly 5!

I'm looking right now at the month-by-month bar graph of page views. It shows clearly that there was a huge leap in April and May of last year and then steady growth since then.

So yeah, blogs "work." I'm getting an extra 2790 page views per day that I wasn't before.

Please note those extra 2790 page views per day aren't all blog readers, because I don't have that many.

So what accounts for all those extra page views?

The answer is that the search engines pay special attention to web sites with blogs on them -- they "index" those sites more often (because they've got fresh content more often). And sites with blogs tend to attract incoming links.

The combination of those two factors tends to raise a web site's importance in the eyes of the search engines. I've noted that since starting my blog, the search engines have raised their ranking of many of the pages on my site. This means that more people come to me from the search engines.

The important point I want to make here is that part of a blog's value to you is to increase traffic to your web site. But that only happens IF you put your blog on your web site.

What do I mean by that? Look at my blog's address:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

It's ON my web site. It's not on Blogspot.com or Blogger.com or WordPress.com or anybody else's web site. It's on mine.

If my blog were on one of those sites, it would bring in traffic to THAT site, not to mine.

A lot of writers are blogging these day, but many of them don't host their blog on their own web site. That's not a crime, of course, but it's a mistake for writers who want to bring traffic to their web site.

Not all writers want their web site to have lots of traffic. For some writers, a web site is effectively a brochure. It provides information to people who already know about that author. But it's not expected to bring in new people who never heard of that author before.

That's a legitimate decision. It's just not a good marketing decision. If you want a web site that's a useful marketing tool, then you want it to bring in traffic. You want it attracting people who never heard of you before. A blog can help you with that.

So my first suggestion if you're planning on starting a blog in the future is to put it on your own web site. If you don't have a web site, you should reserve your domain NOW. You can register a domain at numerous places on the web. I use GoDaddy.com, but there are many others.

And what should your domain be?

I recommend that it be your name, or some variation on it. In fact, I recommend that you register all variations of your name, if you can.

For example, I've registered all of these:

www.Ingermanson.com
www.RSIngermanson.com
www.RandyIngermanson.com
www.RandallIngermanson.com

My personal web site lives on the first of these. All the others are "parked domains" that simply forward people to my real domain.

Writers email me all the time with some variant of this question: "I tried to register my domain as "www.JimBobSmith.com" but it was already taken. What should I do?"

Sigh. The answer is that you should have registered it years ago. But since you don't have a time machine, you can't. You might possibly be able to convince whoever owns "www.JimBobSmith.com" to sell it to you, but they probably registered it because that's their name too. If so, then you're out of luck.

This happens all the time. What are your options?

You don't have good ones, but you can try some of the following:

www.JimBobSmith.net
www.JimBobSmith.name
www.JimBSmith.com
www.JBSmith.com
www.JimBobSmithAuthor.com
www.JimBobSmithBooks.com

All of these will work, but you'll be forever explaining to people why you didn't choose your name as your domain, and you'll feel like a lunkhead.

Avoid that. Register your domain now. GoDaddy charges about \$9 per year. (And it's very smart to pay an extra \$9 per year and get the "private registration" so people can't look up your home address on the web. Privacy matters.)

One last point. It's fast, cheap, and easy to register a domain. But that is only the first step in getting a web site. You can register a domain without putting up a web site.

Registering a domain is nothing more than staking a claim to a domain name. It's cheap insurance against the possibility that somebody else will register it first. Do it if you think there's even a remote chance that you'll ever need a web site.

Next month, we'll talk about what happens next -- actually creating a web site. This takes a lot more work, and you have lots of options.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

I mentioned last month that I had recently written a technical article for publication, but I didn't say what it's about. I can now say a bit more.

What happened was this. About a year ago, I got involved in the rather heated scientific discussion surrounding the alleged "Jesus family tomb."

The Discovery Channel had shown a documentary on the tomb and quoted a statistician, Dr. Andrey Feuerverger, who estimated the odds to be about 600 to 1 in favor of the hypothesis that the tomb belonged to the family of Jesus of Nazareth.

That would be an Xtremely important discovery, if it were true. But after looking at the data and running my own computations, I didn't think it was true, so I wrote a couple of articles on my web site.

Professor Feuerverger submitted his article to the Annals of Applied Statistics, a peer-reviewed statistics journal. The journal editors came across my articles on my web site and asked me to be one of the referees for Dr. Feuerverger's article. They also invited me to submit a ten page article in response, which would include my own calculations. So I did, and I took the time to run a new series of computations that explored several million possibilities.

Because of the huge hullabaloo over the tomb, there has been a high level of secrecy surrounding Dr. Feuerverger's article. The few people who've read it were asked not to distribute it. So I've respected that request for secrecy. (Until recently, Dr. Feuerverger didn't even reveal that his paper had been accepted for publication. He announced it at an international conference in Jerusalem in January, 2008.)

As I said above, I did a new set of calculations for my response article, and my results will be published in the journal. I won't reveal here what those results were, since I don't have any desire to steal Dr. Feuerverger's thunder. He worked very hard on his paper, and his article deserves serious attention.

That's about what I can say for now. If all goes well, the journal articles will be published this month, and then the secrecy thing will be over.

I mention all this to point out how valuable the web is for bringing disparate people together to discuss things. I've made some new friends around the world while investigating this tomb. This summer, I'll be working in Jerusalem on an archaeological dig run by one of those new friends.

6) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 33 times what you paid for it. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2008.

Extremely tasteful postscript: I encourage you to email this E-zine to any writer friends of yours who might benefit from it. I only ask that you email the whole

thing, not bits and pieces. Otherwise, you'll be getting desperate calls at midnight from your friends asking where they can get their own free subscription.

At the moment, there is one place to subscribe:
My fiction site: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

7) Reprint Rights

Permission is granted to use any of the articles in this e-zine in your own e-zine or web site, as long as you include the following blurb with it:

Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 11,000 readers, every month. If you want to learn the craft and marketing of fiction, AND make your writing more valuable to editors, AND have FUN doing it, visit <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>.

Download your free Special Report on Tiger Marketing and get a free 5-Day Course in How To Publish a Novel.

Randy Ingermanson
Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine
