
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 600 of you signed up in June), welcome to my e-zine!

This month, I have culled roughly 10% of my subscribers whose e-mail addresses were hard-bouncing. This was long overdue.

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 e-mail that will put you out of your misery.

If you need to change your e-mail address, there's a

different link to help you do that.

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:

The successful novelist needs good organization, good craft, and good marketing. In this issue, we'll talk about each of these in turn.

Half the year is over already. Have you accomplished half of your goals for 2009 yet? Want to know the first step in setting realistic goals? Check out my article on "Where Have All The Hours Gone?"

Your first goal in writing a novel is to get a first draft written. Does it matter how you do it, or does it just matter THAT you do it? Find out in my article, "Choosing Your Creative Style."

Marketing is a never-ending process, but for some writers, it's a never-beginning process. Want to know an easy first step for marketing yourself that many published authors get wrong? Read my article, "Your E-mail Signature And Marketing."

Are you reading my blog? Join the fun here:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

2) Organizing: Where Have All The Hours Gone?

On the day you least expect it, an editor calls. You remember pitching her your novel at a writing conference. You remember sending her the proposal and manuscript that she asked for. That was eight months ago, and you were beginning to think she wasn't interested.

"Our publishing committee took a look at your proposal," she says. "We really like your book, and I'm hoping we'll be able to make you an offer on it, but Marketing insists that it has to be a multibook deal to spread out the promotional costs."

White heat flashes through your brain. Your knees feel like jelly and your heart is beating its fists on your sternum. "Ermmmmmmmm," you say, as intelligently as you know how.

"Anyway," the editor continues, "what I'm gunning for is to offer you a three book deal, with publication

clean, polished copy per week. Your book was 300 pages, which means . . .

You reach for your calculator. If you need to produce 300 pages, and you can write 20 pages of finished copy per week, it'll take you 15 weeks to get the job done. The editor is giving you 26 weeks to write each book. That gives you a bit of slack to help with marketing and to handle the unexpected and to deal with editorial revisions.

"Yes," you say. "Yes, I can write two books per year."

"Are you sure?" she says. "You sound a little tentative."

"Well, I was kind of surprised when you called, but I just checked my log book and I write 20 pages of polished copy in a normal week."

"You keep a log book?" Your editor sounds impressed. "Can you e-mail that to me? It'll give me some ammunition when we take the final vote. The guy in Sales is giving me grief because you're a first-timer, and he's worried about your risk factors."

You pop open your e-mail program, attach your log book, and hit Send. "It's on the way."

* * *

If you know how fast you write, you can protect yourself from getting in over your head -- or getting stuck wading around in the shallows when you're ready for bigger things.

It's not that hard to keep a log book. You can do this however you like. You can do it electronically or on paper, whichever works best for you.

I usually make a spreadsheet for each writing project. Every line contains five columns:

- * The first column contains the date.
- * The second tells how many hours I worked on story development, research, and planning.
- * The third column tells how many hours I spent on creating fresh copy -- first draft material.
- * The fourth column tells how many hours I worked on editing.
- * The fifth column gives the total page count of the project to date -- which my word processor is happy to tell me.

At the bottom of the spreadsheet, I can always see the total hours worked in preparation, in writing first draft copy, and in polishing. The sum of these is the total hours spent on the project, which tells me how many pages I write per hour. The beginning and ending dates tell me how many weeks I worked on the project.

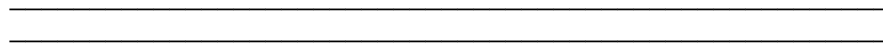
Spreadsheets are good at keeping track of this sort of thing. It takes a few minutes to set up a spreadsheet and less than a minute every day to update it with my daily time and production.

That minute per day is knowledge, and knowledge is power. Knowledge can mean the difference between a contract and no contract. Knowledge can mean the difference between a comfortable schedule and an impossible one.

Are you keeping a log book of your writing? It's never too late to start one, even if you're well into a project.

Spreadsheets are relatively easy to learn to use. If you don't know how to use one, show a techie friend this article and ask them to help you set up a log book now.

Your editor will love you for it.



3) Creating: Choosing Your Creative Style

There's an old saying in fiction writing: "Get it written, then get it right."

Fact is, there's a huge difference between the creative phase (getting it written) and the editing phase (getting it right). If you try to edit yourself while you're being creative, you're going to give yourself a nasty case of writer's block.

So the old saying is great advice. Unfortunately, it's not enough.

How, exactly, are you supposed to "get it written?" Should you just slam out that first draft without any planning, or should you plan it carefully and then slam it out?

If you want to start a war at a writing conference, ask this question and then put on your flame-proof cloak. Different writers will make wildly different claims on how best to write that dreaded first draft.

I've been thinking about this for many years, first as a clueless wannabe novelist, later as a published author, and most recently as a writing teacher. My well-known "Snowflake method" is one answer to the question of how you write a first draft. But it's not the only answer, and it's not the only right answer.

The more I've thought about it, the more I've come to see that different people are wired differently. Different people use different "creative styles" to produce their first drafts.

And that's OK.

I don't think anyone knows all the different possible "creative styles" that writers use. There's a spectrum, depending on how much planning a writer puts in up front. Normally, the more planning before the first draft, the less editing after it.

At one end of the spectrum is the "Seat Of The Pants" writer, commonly called the "SOTP" writer or sometimes the "pantser."

SOTP writers typically just start writing, often with no clear idea where they're going, who their characters are, or what's going to happen. The act of writing makes the story unfold. It's like driving through fog with the headlights showing only a few feet ahead. This is exciting to SOTPs, often excruciatingly scary.

But it works. Stephen King writes this way, as do many other famous novelists. If you write the SOTP way, you're in good company.

On the other end of the spectrum is the outliner, who writes a meticulous, detailed synopsis of the story before writing the first draft. Outliners don't have a cool acronym, nor do they have the sexy, stubble-chinned image of the SOTP. Outliners are sometimes regarded as emotionless accountants who want to keep chewing their gum long after all the sugar is chewed out of it.

But outlining also works. Robert Ludlum was a well-known outliner, with some of his novels requiring 150 pages of synopsis. Many excellent novelists find it impossible to work without a very long synopsis. If you're an outliner, you've got some great compatriots.

These aren't the only options, of course. Another approach is a modification of the SOTP creative style. I call this the "Edit As You Go" creative style, because the writer first writes a page or two, or even a whole scene, seat-of-the-pants. Then, instead of continuing on with the story, the writer edits the page or scene several times. I've heard of writers who edit it 20 or 30 times before moving on. By the time the page or the scene is done, it's in final form, ready for the editor.

"Editing As You Go" works. Dean Koontz writes this way. If you edit as you go, you're among stars. Just be sure that you aren't mixing the creative phase with the editing phase. Write first; then edit.

I'm known around the world as "the Snowflake Guy"

because of a fourth creative style which I call the Snowflake method. (Google it if you want all the details.) In the Snowflake method, you do quite a bit of planning up front, both with your characters and with your plot, but the longest synopsis you ever produce is only four pages. You leave the details of the story unexplored, so your first draft will have some surprises for you.

The Snowflake method works. Every novel I've written has used some elements of the Snowflake. I hear from writers all the time who find that the Snowflake works for them.

I'm currently writing a book titled WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, in which I cover these creative styles in more detail. Early in the planning process for the book, my editor asked me to make it a little clearer which style is "the right one."

I'm afraid I shocked my editor a bit. I told her there isn't any such thing as "the one right way to write your first draft." The best way for one writer will be the worst way for another writer.

I've met writers who thanked me effusively for the Snowflake method, which gave them hope after years of struggle. I've met other writers who told me that the Snowflake almost wrecked their story.

The same is true of ANY of the common creative styles. For some writers, SOTP is salvation. For others, it's damnation. Ditto for editing-as-you-go and for outlining.

The important thing is to find the best way for you. Your best creative style may be one of those I've named, or it may be some mix of them. That's for you to find out.

When you find the right way for you, stick with it. There really is one best way for you. Just don't assume that it's also the one best way for everyone else.

4) Marketing: Your E-mail Signature And Marketing

If you hang out on e-mail loops, you have a fine opportunity to advertise your work every time you post to the loop. All you have to do is create a signature in your e-mail software that tells a bit about you and your writing. It can include a link to your web site.

This can be a very effective way to market yourself, especially if you write posts to the loop that people

find valuable, unique, understandable, or entertaining.

I've noticed that a good many authors fumble this opportunity, though. Either they use a signature that tells nothing about their work, or they use a signature that's so long and self-promoting that it puts people off.

Ever seen an e-mail with just the writer's initials for the signature? Would that be useful to you if you didn't know the writer well?

Ever seen a one-line email with a 20-line signature? Did you read the whole 20 lines? Or did you skip the whole thing?

I used to collect signatures years ago, and the longest one I ever saw was over 1000 lines long. That's Xtreme!

I don't know whether anyone's ever done a scientific study about how to create the most effective signature for marketing. I have some thoughts on what I like and dislike in author signatures, and I'll share those here.

Things I like:

- * Your name. I like to see a first and last name, right away.

- * Something unique about you so I know what kind of books you write.

- * A recent title of one of your books.

- * A URL for your web site.

Things I don't like:

- * Initials or a cutesy nickname instead of a name. I hate having to guess who it is. This is especially true when a person has chosen an email address that doesn't contain their name. I've gotten countless e-mails that contain no clue as to who the writer is. That's pretty poor advertising, if you're an author.

- * A tag-line that sounds self-promoting or that could apply to a zillion other writers. Let other people brag about your writing. Tell me what's unique about you. If I'm interested, I'll find out more.

- * Too many lines of text. Really, three lines is enough. If I see more than that, I'm going to skip over them all. Less really is more in a signature.

- * Effusive praise by reviewers. There is a time and a place to show off your great book reviews. Your e-mail signature is not one of them. It feels braggy.

* Graphics, especially large ones. These just chew up space. When I get a one-line e-mail that has a huge graphic in the signature, I'm annoyed because I don't want to save the e-mail and waste space on my computer. This isn't such a big issue as it used to be when most people used dial-up modems and had small hard drives. I often check e-mail on the road and some wireless connections have a lot of users and are slow. I'd rather not have a ton of images coming in as e-mail attachments.

* A non-clickable URL. When you include a link to your web site or blog, it should include the front part that starts out "http://". The reason is that some e-mail programs don't recognize links unless they have this part in front. So these programs will recognize the first line below as a link, but not the second:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>
www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com

* Multiple URLs. If I'm going to click on a link, I'm going to choose one, not several. It's a pain to have to guess which one.

Here is the usual signature I send on my emails:

Randy Ingermanson
Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

That's three lines, which is my limit. The first line has my name, leaving no doubt who I am. The second line tells what I do that's unique -- I'm the publisher of this e-zine. The third line has a double-clickable link to my blog. It could have had a link to my e-zine page. I don't think it would make sense to have both links. Too many choices are as bad as too few.

As I noted already, I don't think there are any scientific studies on how best to do a signature. I designed mine to be the kind that I find most useful.

You'll note that this e-zine carries a signature that doesn't quite follow my rules. There's a simple reason for that. I use a commercial bulk e-mailer to deliver this e-zine to my readers. I'm required by law to include a valid physical mailing address when sending bulk e-mail.

My bulk e-mail service automatically creates a signature with my mailing address. It also automatically includes an opt-out link and a change-your-address link. I have no control over these, other than to give my system the correct mailing address to use.

But you have a choice. You can get as creative as you like in your signature. You can choose to entertain, to inform, to annoy, or to do anything else you want. Have

fun!

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

In April, I signed a contract with the publisher of the popular "Dummies" guides for a book titled WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES. This will, I hope, be an essential guide for pre-published novelists, and a useful reference for published authors. I've now gotten three quarters of the book written in first-draft and should be done by the end of July.

I recently posted the latest installment in my monthly humor column. This month's title is "The Wife Coach," in which my plumber Sam decides to go into coaching, hampered by his usual fractured grammar. Can you guess where Sam went wrong? Here's the link:
http://www.ChristianFictionOnlineMagazine.com/biz_rooney.html

I teach at roughly 4 to 6 writing conferences per year, depending on my schedule.

I'll be teaching two workshops at the Oregon Christian Writer's Conference at the end of July. Details here:
<http://www.oregonchristianwriters.org>

I'll also be teaching my infamous workshop on "Writing the Male POV" at the American Christian Fiction Writers conference in September. Details here:
<http://www.acfw.com/conference>

If you'd like me to teach at your conference, email me to find out how outrageously expensive I am.

If you'd just like to hear me teach, I have a number of recordings and e-books that are outrageously cheap. Details here:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info>

6) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 3456 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, 2009.

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 2-paragraph blurb with it:

Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 16,000 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.

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Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>
