
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 (more than 450 of you signed up in July), 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 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.

How often do you write? Many writers only write when they feel inspired to write. Is that a good idea or a bad idea? Find out in my article, "Writing When the Spirit Moves You."

How well do you know your characters? Do they ring true to life? Want to learn a handy technique for probing the psyche of your characters? Take a look at my article, "Personality Types and Characters."

Have you written the synopsis for your novel yet? Are you waiting for snowflakes to fall in hell before you start? Want to know the one most important thing to remember in writing a synopsis? Check out my article, "The Dreaded Synopsis."

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

2) Organizing: Writing When the Spirit Moves You

"I write when the spirit moves me," William Faulkner once said. "And the spirit moves me every day."

What about you? When do you write? What do you do on the days when you just don't feel like writing? Do you write anyway, or do you prefer to do your writing only on days when you know you'll be good?

I've heard from a lot of writers on this, and the strong impression I've gotten is that most writers, most days, don't feel like writing. That's as true of professional novelists as it is of the newest novices.

In fact, it may be more true for the pros. For a novice writer, writing is a new and exciting hobby -- a way to have fun during time stolen from boring Real Life. Whereas writing is a professional writer's job, every day, every week, every year.

What makes the professional novelist a professional is the fact that most professionals, most days, write their word count. It doesn't matter whether they feel like it or not. They sit in the chair and type their

quota.

Doesn't sound very sexy, does it? Well . . . it isn't. Writing fiction is a job. You put in the work. Then you get paid. If you don't put in the work, you don't get paid.

If that was all there was to it, then of course we'd all quit this game and go into something more fun and less risky, such as lion dentistry.

But the fact is that writing fiction is fun. When you're fully into the flow and the story is pulsing out of your fingers onto the page, then you barely notice time whizzing by. That's fun. When the spirit is truly moving you, it feels like you're flying.

What isn't fun for me is getting ready to write. Sitting down at the computer isn't fun. Opening up my word processor isn't fun. Staring at the blank screen for the first couple of minutes isn't fun. The fun starts after the first few minutes, when the screen isn't blank any longer and the voices in my head start talking.

Here are three things you can do to get past those first few horrible minutes when writing isn't fun:

* Daydream about what you're going to write before it's time to write. Do this when you're supposed to be doing something else. If you have a day job (most writers do, even most professional novelists), use any down time to daydream about your story. Some jobs have more down time than others, but most have at least a few minutes during the course of the day. Spend that time wishing you were writing your novel. When you finally get a chance to write, you'll be primed for it.

* Get a running start by editing what you wrote yesterday. It's hard to start typing on a blank screen, but if you quickly read through what you wrote last time and fix any small glitches, after a few pages your head will be fully in the game and you'll be itching to go. DON'T get so caught up in yesterday's work that you have no time for today's. Save the real editing for later. Just use this editing time to get the juices flowing.

* Make sure you're using the creative style that's right for you. Last month, I talked in this e-zine about various options you have for creating your first draft. Some writers work best by writing "seat of the pants." Others need to take an "edit as you go" strategy. Others prefer to map out the high level part of the story in advance, leaving the details to emerge in the first draft (using a tool like my Snowflake Method to guide them). Other writers do best when they've worked out a full, detailed outline up front. You are who you are. Use whatever creative style is best geared for your particular brain.

Writers love being creative. I like to think that being creative is what makes us human, or keeps us human, or helps us to fake being human. Whatever. We like being moved by that pesky spirit.

The trick is to regularly show up in a place where the spirit can move you. Then hang around long enough for the spirit to get rolling.

What happens after that is the magic of writing.

3) Creating: Personality Types and Characters

Different people are different. Albert Einstein's brain was wired differently from Al Gore's. Both of them are wired differently from you. And all three of you are wired differently from the characters in your novel.

And yet people are alike in a lot of ways. One very useful way to classify people is by their "personality types." Certain personality types behave in characteristic ways. If you know the personality types of your characters, you know very roughly how they'll behave.

For several years, I've been using the "Myers-Briggs" personality types as a convenient way to think about my characters. This is not a way of type-casting characters. It's a way of making sure that I've thought of all aspects of my characters before I turn them loose in my Storyworld.

In the Myers-Briggs terminology, there are four basic questions you ask of each character.

* Are you an "introvert" or an "extravert?" (Myers and Briggs spell "extravert" that way, so I'll follow their lead.)

* Are you an "intuitive" or a "sensor?"

* Are you a "thinker" or a "feeler?"

* Are you a "judger" or a "perceiver?"

We'll define each of these shortly, but first let's make one thing clear. Each of these questions is about a tendency or a preference. "Thinkers" are perfectly well able to feel, and "feelers" are perfectly capable of thinking. But each group has a preferred pattern of behavior.

Now let's look at each of these questions in turn.

An "introvert" draws energy from time spent alone. An "extravert" draws energy from being with people. This does not mean that introverts never hang out with people or that extraverts are never alone. Introverts can often be quite warm and friendly, and extraverts can be harsh and critical. The key question is where you draw your energy from.

Extraverts do well in people-oriented careers. The great majority of used car salesmen are flaming extraverts. That's a tough job, and it takes someone with a real talent for exuding warmth. Cops are often extraverts. So are nurses.

Introverts do well in jobs where they have to work alone for long periods of time. They don't mind this; they thrive on it. Accountants are often introverts. A lot of writers are introverts, because both writing and reading are solitary activities.

An "intuitive" likes to get the big picture before getting the details. A "sensor" prefers to get the details first and then work up to the big picture. Sensors are much more common than intuitives -- about 75 percent of the population are sensors.

Intuitives tend to be theoretical types who think in abstractions. Many scientists are intuitives. Al Einstein was a quintessential intuitive. People often think of intuitives as "having their heads in the clouds." This can be either good or bad. If you want somebody to solve the world economic crisis, an intuitive is a good person to have on your side.

Sensors are practical and detail-oriented. They are able to understand the big picture, of course, but they want to start with the facts and work up to abstractions. Sensors can be annoying because they want to "get the facts all straight." But if you want somebody to do your taxes done right the first time, you want a strong sensor.

A "thinker" prefers to solve problems rationally. A "feeler" prefers to solve them emotionally. Let's emphasize again that "thinkers" do have hearts and "feelers" do have brains. It's not a question of ability, it's a question of preference.

Feelers do well in jobs that require somebody who can connect emotively. Oprah Winfrey excels at her job because she's a feeler. Psychologists and social workers are often feelers. Bill Clinton is a quintessential feeler -- "I feel your pain" was practically a mantra for him.

Thinkers gravitate to jobs where they need to use their

heads. Science and engineering are obvious thinker occupations, but a mechanic needs to be a thinker too.

Certain occupations require people who are equally adept as thinkers and feelers. A doctor needs to be good at diagnosis (a thinker) but also have a good bedside manner (a feeler). Likewise, an attorney in court needs to make a great case (as a thinker) and yet connect well with the jury (as a feeler).

About two thirds of men are thinkers and two thirds of women are feelers.

A "judger" reaches decisions rapidly and decisively. A "perceiver" delays making decisions as long as possible, constantly looking for new evidence.

Judgers are often criticized as being too quick to make decisions before all the evidence is in. The fact is that sometimes making a quick decision (even if it's "wrong") is better than no decision. Soldiers on the battlefield can't afford the luxury of waiting for all the data to come in. They have to make tough decisions with limited information.

Perceivers are likewise criticized for dithering. Yet there's a time for withholding judgment until all the evidence is in. When you're trying to decide if a new drug is safe for human use, you want to make sure you've taken every scrap of data into account.

When I create characters for my fiction, I always ask each one all four questions. Since a character can give two possible answers to each question, there are sixteen possible sets of answers. Once I know how a character answers the four questions, I know quite a lot about him or her.

If my character is a CSI investigator and he's an introvert, a sensor, a thinker, and a perceiver, I'm confident that he'll do a good job. As an introvert, he won't mind pulling long hours in the lab alone. As a sensor, he'll look at every detail on the scene. As a thinker, he'll use his brain to come up with the answer. And as a perceiver, he won't jump to conclusions, he'll wait until he's got a complete picture.

If, however, that same CSI investigator is an extravert, an intuitive, a feeler, and a judger, I'd be worried. As an extravert, he's going to get restless alone in the lab. As an intuitive, he'll form a theory early and fit the facts to that theory, whether they work or not. As a feeler, he may be swayed by the fact that he doesn't like the main suspect. And as a judger, he may jump to a decision before all the evidence is in.

How well do you know your characters? Can you answer

the four basic questions for each of them? If not, spend some time getting to know them better. You may want to interview your character or just have a long imaginary conversation.

When you've assigned personality types to each one, do some research online. You can find general descriptions of each of the sixteen Myers-Briggs personality types. You may be surprised to find that these descriptions fit your characters surprisingly well. Or you may find that your characters are a bit muddled in your mind and you need to rethink them.

In any event, I strongly suspect you'll find the exercise very much worth your time. There are online Myers-Briggs personality tests you can take to learn your own personality type. You may find that the reason you click so well with one of your characters is that he or she is your type.

4) Marketing: The Dreaded Synopsis

Sooner or later, virtually every novelist has to write a synopsis. This is a little odd, because most of my editor friends tell me they hate reading synopses ("they're boring") and most of my writer friends tell me they hate writing them ("they're boring.")

Seems like there's a pattern here. And yet we still have to write the miserable things. I'm not going to speculate on why the synopsis is such a staple of the process of selling a book. It just is. The best thing to do is to write the wretched beast right the first time and get it out of your hair.

First things first. Always find out how long of a synopsis you're expected to write. Generally, the editors I've worked with wanted about two pages. If you find an editor who wants only a page, send her a page. If you find one who wants more, then send more.

Formatting for a synopsis is pretty simple:

- * Use 12 point type that has a serif. Times-Roman or Times-New-Roman are good readable fonts with serifs. Helvetica and other sans-serif fonts are less readable.
- * Use one-inch margins on all four sides.
- * Single-space your synopsis.
- * Either indent the first line of all paragraphs or

else add an extra blank line between paragraphs.

* Number your pages in the center of the footer.

* [Optional] I normally put my last name on the right side of the header of each page. I don't use the title of the book, because the title may not work for the editor, and I don't want to keep reminding the editor that I have rotten taste in titles.

If you follow this formatting, then a two-page synopsis will run roughly 1000 words. If your novel has 80 to 100 scenes, then that gives you 10 to 12 words to explain each scene, which is not enough.

Let's repeat that, because it's important: You can't describe every scene of your novel in your synopsis. You don't have enough word count in two pages.

What's a writer to do?

That's actually pretty easy. You're going to have to combine scenes into "scene sequences" and write a paragraph that summarizes each "scene sequence." I got this idea from the book *STORY*, by Robert McKee, who develops the notion of sequences of scenes.

This is absolutely fundamental to writing a good synopsis. Break up your novel into 10 or 15 "scene sequences." Write a paragraph on each one.

Keep doing that until the end. That's your synopsis.

If you have a book with multiple point-of-view characters, then you'll need to go heavier on the scenes that deal with the lead character and lighter on the scenes featuring the other characters. You don't have any other choice.

You may be worrying that this isn't enough, that your editor won't be able to understand the story unless you give her more details.

I don't believe this for a second. Your editor is smart. What she wants is the big picture of your story with only enough details to prove to her that you have some idea how your story works. Two pages is plenty for that.

If you think two pages isn't enough, then remember that you can summarize your story in a paragraph of 60 words if you strip it down enough. You can slash it down to a sentence of 15 words if you cut it all the way to the bone. Compared to a sentence or a paragraph, two pages is a scandalous waste of words.

Here is a simple checklist for writing your synopsis:

* Write a "scene list" that contains one sentence

telling what happens in every scene in the story. This is convenient to do in a spreadsheet.

* If the ordering of the scenes is out of whack, then feel free to reorder them slightly so that the related scenes are together in blocks.

* Color-code the scenes in groups of related scenes. Each group should be roughly three to seven scenes. The colors that you use don't have any meaning, so just use any convenient colors. You might make one set yellow and leave the other set white.

* Count the number of groups of scenes you have. You're looking for roughly 10 to 15 groups. If you've got too many or few, then either combine groups to get fewer, or split groups to get more.

* For each group, figure out the main story idea and focus on that. Write a paragraph that summarizes this plot thread. If you can end the paragraph with a major setback, then that's ideal.

* Read the whole synopsis and edit it for flow. Are the paragraphs well-connected? If not, tweak them so they are.

* If you have a brilliant surprise ending, should you tell your editor? That's up to you. You can tell it all, or you can be vague. You might even opt for an ending that appears to be a brilliant surprise ending but which still doesn't give away certain critical details which make it even more of a brilliant surprise. That way, when your editor reads the story, she'll get to enjoy at least some of the surprise.

When your synopsis is done, have a writer critique it, preferably a writer with experience in writing synopses. Edit the synopsis based on the critique you get back.

Above all, don't spend three months writing your synopsis. It's only two pages. Write it. Edit it. Move on. If you're going to spend extra time polishing something, spend the time on your sample chapters, not your synopsis. If your synopsis is a little boring, well, your editor expects a boring synopsis, doesn't she?

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 completed the first draft and am working through the editorial revision process.

I recently posted the latest installment in my monthly humor column. This month's title is "Preaching to the Choir," in which my plumber Sam "explainifies" a simple fact about marketing which many writers fail to grasp. Does Sam know something you don't? 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 my infamous workshop on "Writing the Male POV" at the American Christian Fiction Writers conference in September. Ever wondered why men and women just don't understand each other? I'll give my thoughts on all that in this workshop. Details here:
<http://www.acfw.com/conference>

I'll also be teaching two workshops at the Oregon Christian Writer's One-Day Fall Conference in October. Details here:
<http://www.oregonchristianwriters.org>

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 6543 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>.

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