
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 October), 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:

This is a special issue to celebrate the coming launch of my next book, *WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES*, to be published by John Wiley, November, 2009. That's this month!

I've written the book with a coauthor, Peter Economy, author of about a dozen Dummies books. Peter helped me channel all my teaching materials into proper Dummies format, and he's much smarter about living the organized life than I am. He's been an absolute joy to work with on this project.

WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES summarizes everything I've been teaching over the last 10 years. It runs to about 122,000 words and teaches the things I consider essential to getting your novel published.

The book has four main parts that cover the following major topics:

- * Getting organized to write
- * Creating your first draft
- * Editing your manuscript
- * Marketing your novel to publishers

I've received permission from my publisher to include excerpts from each of these main sections of *WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES*. (Thanks to David Hobson at John Wiley!) Here's a preview of these excerpts:

* Have you ever thought about who your ideal target reader is for your novel? Do you know why it's a bad idea to target "everybody?" Find out why in my excerpt, "Defining Your Ideal Reader."

* Some books sell themselves. Do you know WHY they do that? Do you know HOW they do that? Learn more in my excerpt, "Creating a Great Storyline."

* Editing your own novel is hard, sweaty, miserable, glorious work. The toughest part is getting started. Want to know my secret for getting into editing mode? Read my excerpt, "Psychoanalyzing Your Characters."

* It's hard to sell a novel without an agent, so finding an agent is crucial to your success. Want to know how to get started? Check out my excerpt, "The Agent Decision."

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

2) Organizing: Defining Your Ideal Reader

The following is excerpted from "Finding Your Audience and Category," Chapter 3 of WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES:

. . . Enough about you. Now it's time to think about your reader (that's reader in the abstract sense -- you'll have more than one in real life). You're going to find a publisher willing to invest in your book only if you can persuade that publisher that there are readers who'll want to buy and read it.

Many writers think that to get published, they need to appeal to a huge, broad target audience. Ultimately, yes, you'd like to have a lot of readers. But at the beginning of your career, you need to think narrow rather than broad. The early marketing has to focus on somebody. A marketing plan that targets everybody is going to be incredibly expensive, and it's also likely to dilute the message.

Your book's overall appeal will depend on how well you write your story, not on the size of your target audience. What small niche of readers can you interest better than any other author in the world? These few readers will burn hottest when you light your marketing flame. If you can find them, they'll help you find a broader audience.

This section helps you envision your ideal reader. If your ideal reader is a lot like you, you'll understand your reader's mindset well as you write. If your ideal reader looks nothing like you, that's fine -- as long as you do your homework and figure out how your target reader thinks.

These questions may be the most critical ones you consider: How do your ideal readers think about the world? What captures their interest? Are your ideal readers:

* Religious or not particularly so? If religious, are they Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Buddhist, for example? If not religious, are they agnostic, atheist, or just not interested?

* Political or not especially so? If political, what party are they affiliated with? Are they conservative or liberal? Militarist or pacifist?

* Well-educated, or not inclined to consider education a priority?

* Interested in auto racing? Molecular biology?
Parenting? Immigration issues? Submarine technology?
Erotic liaisons? Hegelian philosophy? Gambling? Camel
milking?

You have a profound opportunity to define your ideal reader in a way that excites your publisher. If you can show that you've identified some core group of readers who will love your novel, then you've found an audience worthy of a focused marketing plan. Here are some novels with well-defined target audiences:

* Dan Brown's *THE DA VINCI CODE* was targeted at readers skeptical of the official history of early Christianity. The novel combined lightning action with a series of intellectual puzzles that captured the imagination of the target audience and led to incredible word-of-mouth publicity.

* William P. Young's *THE SHACK* took aim at conservative Christian readers wanting answers to the tough theological question "How can a good and all-powerful God allow evil?" The novel touched the hearts and minds of these readers, leading to explosive sales.

Note that these two novels target completely separate audiences. The marketing campaign of each one was designed to appeal to a core audience, not to some vague "everybody." Both campaigns were far more effective because they were focused . . .

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3) Creating: Why You Need a Storyline

The following is excerpted from "Storyline and Three-Act Structure: The Top Layers of Your Plot," Chapter 8 of *WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES*:

. . . You won't die if you don't write a storyline, and you'll still be able to write a novel. So why spend the time writing one? Consider a scenario where a storyline comes in useful:

You're at a writing conference in a large hotel, waiting for the elevator. When it arrives, you walk in and a high-powered agent steps in beside you. You give her a friendly smile. She squints at your name tag and says, "Hi, what sort of fiction are you writing?"

The door chings shut and you feel your heart thudding just beneath your vocal cords. "I . . . well, see, there's this guy," you say, "and he's working in the bus factory. No wait, I changed that. He's driving a bus for the city. And there's this girl, too. Not really his girlfriend, see, but he'd like that, only she doesn't know he exists. I mean she kind of knows who he is, but not really. And he keeps having dreams about --"

The door opens at the next floor and the agent steps out. "Wow, sounds great. Got to run."

You stand there rubbing your sweaty palms on your shirt, kicking yourself, because you hardly got started. Matter of fact, you never even got to the cool part of your story, which is that the guy who drives the bus is having dreams of an impending terrorist attack on Disneyland, just like the dreams he was having in early September 2001. No matter. That agent is gone, and you've blown whatever chance you had.

Rewind that movie halfway and play the last bit of it again:

The door chings shut and you feel your heart thudding just beneath your vocal cords. "I'm writing a paranormal suspense novel about a bus driver who has dreams about a terrorist attack on Disneyland, just like the dreams he was having in September 2001."

The door opens at the next floor and the agent steps out. She turns around and studies your name tag again and she's got a funny look on her face. "Listen, I'm on my way to an appointment, but that's exactly the kind of book I love to read. Can we talk? Here's my card with my cell phone. Call me in an hour."

See the difference? In both cases, you have the same great story. In the first case, you don't know how to present it in one sentence. In the second case, you do.

If you don't write a great storyline, then everyone in your selling chain will make up a storyline of his or her own. None of these people know your story as well as you do, nor do they love it as much as you do. They'll do their best, but the storylines they come up with may fail to capture the heart of your story. If your agent or editor knows your storyline right from the start, she'll make sure that everybody else in the selling chain knows it, too. The simpler your storyline is, the easier it'll be to pass it down the chain.

The storyline isn't merely a selling tool; it can serve to focus your own creative efforts during the arduous months when you're planning and writing your novel. Knowing what your story is "really about" can keep you on track when the inevitable rabbit trails pop up. Even if you don't figure out your storyline until after you write your first draft, it can be a powerful tool in

helping you cut out the nonessentials when you get into revisions. Although the storyline isn't essential, it can be as valuable to you, the writer, as it is to all those links in the selling chain . . .

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4) Editing: Psychoanalyzing Your Characters

The following is excerpted from "Analyzing Your Characters," Chapter 12 of WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES:

. . . The biggest problem writers have with characters' motivations is not giving them any. The main solution is to make a conscious effort to name the following core pieces of motivation for each main character (which we introduce in Chapter 7):

* Values: What are the core truths for your character? You can have several of these.

* Ambition: What one abstract thing does your character want most in the world?

* Story goal: What one concrete thing does your character believe she needs to do or have or become in order to achieve her ambition?

If you have these worked out for your characters, that's great! Then your goal in editing is to make them better to deepen your character, sharpen the conflict of the story, and make it all reasonable to your reader. This section can help you do so.

ARE VALUES IN CONFLICT?

Every character has values, and great stories thrive on conflicts between values. Values are core truths -- things your character believes to be true without examining them. When your main character's core truths are in conflict, then he can't be predictable, and neither can your story. Consider two conflicting values of Don Corleone, the mafia leader in Mario Puzo's THE GODFATHER:

* "Nothing is more important than respect."

* "Nothing is more important than family."

Don Corleone's troubles begin when a rising young

mafioso comes to him with a proposal for a joint venture in narcotics. Corleone believes that this sort of crime is bad business, and he'll have nothing to do with it. But Sonny, the oldest son of Don Corleone, exposes his interest in the matter by questioning his father's judgment in front of the drug-dealing mafioso, an act of blatant disrespect. Afterward, Don Corleone reprimands his son, but he doesn't oust him. His love of family has come into conflict with his need for respect.

It's a fatal mistake. The spurned mafioso, sensing weakness, tries to assassinate Don Corleone so he can negotiate a deal with Sonny. This leads to a terrible war of attrition between the Corleones and the Five Families of New York.

As you read your story, ask whether the values of your lead character are in conflict. If not, can you revise them to be in conflict? Can you add a new value that will conflict with the existing ones?

DO THE VALUES MAKE SENSE FROM THE BACKSTORY?

Your characters generally can't give any reasons for their values. A value is a truth so sacred, so true, that it simply can't be explained. If a character can explain his values, then you haven't taken him far enough -- some core truths beneath those values explain them. In that case, those underlying core truths are his real values.

You are not your character. You are the god of the universe that you're creating as your story world. You are omniscient, and you can explain your character's values -- at least to some degree -- from his backstory. Somewhere in the half-remembered mists of time lie the reasons for your character's values.

Why does Don Corleone value respect so much? Why does he call himself a "man of respect"? He can give no reason, because it's obvious to him. But the answer is that Don Corleone is a Sicilian, raised in an honor culture. In such a culture, honor is worth more than money. Corleone's criminal enterprises in the U.S. depend critically on holding the respect of his friends and his enemies.

Why does Don Corleone value family so much? Again, it's part of his Sicilian culture. Blood loyalty is everything; no explanation is needed. None is possible, and Don Corleone would be astonished that anyone would ask for one.

But not all Sicilians become mafia dons. What explains Don Corleone's rise to power as the head of one of the most vicious crime families in the country? Don Corleone holds another value that we haven't discussed yet: "A man is responsible to use power in every possible way to benefit his family and those who

respect him." . . .

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5) Marketing: The Agent Decision

The following is excerpted from "Approaching Agents and Editors," Chapter 17 of WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES:

. . . When you have a strong manuscript for your novel and all the elements of a solid proposal, you're ready to get it published. Publishing a novel is a high-risk, high-reward business partnership between you and a publisher. Because the publisher takes most of the risk in the deal, it also wants most of the reward. Two key types of people help you broker a deal -- a literary agent and an acquisitions editor.

A literary agent is someone you hire to help you sell your novel to a publisher in return for a fixed percentage of your writing income. An acquisitions editor is an employee of a publishing house (usually in the Acquisitions department) whose job is to find authors and buy their manuscripts for publication.

In this chapter, we describe the roles of agents and editors and help you find people who are a good fit for you and your writing.

DEFINING THE ROLES OF AGENTS AND EDITORS

You need to understand some crucial differences between agents and editors. Note that both of them have divided loyalties:

* **Acquisitions editors:** An editor represents the publisher's interests in the deal. Her goal is to minimize the risk to her employer and maximize the reward by shifting as much risk to you and paying as little money as you'll tolerate. The editor's first loyalty is to the publisher. However, she is not your enemy. She likes you and she likes your writing, and she knows that if you starve to death, you won't write any more books for her.

* **Literary agents:** An agent represents your interests in the deal. His goal is to minimize your risk and maximize your reward, but not at all costs. The agent has strong incentives to be an honest broker, because he represents many writers. The agent will do best if

he brings excellent writers to publishers and negotiates good deals for them. However, agents aren't out to impoverish the publisher, because tomorrow is another deal.

FINDING THE BEST AGENT FOR YOU

Agents are optional, so the first decision you need to make is whether you want one. This section explains what an agent does and why hiring an agent may be a good idea.

If you decide that you need an agent, how do you find the right one for you and then get his or her interest? If you've got an excellent manuscript, then finding an agent really isn't that hard. Finding an appropriate agent is a bit harder, but we give you some guidelines in this section. We also tell you how to contact that agent to pitch your novel.

DECIDING WHETHER YOU NEED AN AGENT

Do you need an agent? That's a complicated question. An agent does tough, difficult work for you, but he costs you money. The usual fee for a literary agent is 15 percent off the top of your writing income. Here are some common tasks that an agent may do for you:

- * Critique your manuscript and help you polish it (not all agents do this)
- * Work with you to develop a strong proposal (see Chapter 16 for the basics on writing a proposal)
- * Pitch your proposal and manuscript to editors
- * Negotiate your contract
- * Be the bad guy when you have bad news to bring to your publisher (if you're going to miss a deadline or you have any kind of disagreement with your editor, get your agent involved immediately -- that's his job)
- * Give you career advice, including help on branding yourself and developing marketing skills (not all agents do all this)
- * Check your royalty statements to verify that your publisher is paying you correctly and on time

If you can do all of these things very well yourself and if you're willing to take time from your writing to do them, then you don't need an agent. If you see even one item on this list that you can't do competently, then you probably need an agent. Please remember that the major publishing houses don't accept unagented queries from authors they don't know. Many mid-sized publishers don't, either. . .

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6) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

I have completed work on a software product, "Snowflake Pro," and will be releasing it soon. Watch your e-mail in-box for a special note about Snowflake Pro in the near future.

My new book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, will be hitting the stores later this month. If you're on my list to receive this e-zine, you'll hear from me when it launches.

PLEASE NOTE: I plan to give you some special goodies if you buy the book on Launch Day. Stay tuned . . .

I recently posted the latest installment in my monthly humor column. This month, in "HonestInjunReviews.com," my plumber Sam has created a book-reviewing business. Want to know the unorthodox ways Sam generates revenue? 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. My schedule for next year is already beginning to fill in.

In March, 2010, I will be doing a small group mentoring workshop at the Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference. More info:
<http://mounthermon.org/adult/professionals/writers-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>

7) Randy Recommends . . .

I don't take paid ads for this e-zine. I do, however,

occasionally recommend people I like. I'm a huge fan of Margie Lawson's courses, both the ones she teaches in person and the ones she sells on her web site at <http://www.MargieLawson.com>

Margie is a psychologist who applies what she knows about human psychology to writing fiction. Her material is brilliant. That's not a word I toss around lightly. Margie is brilliant.

Margie will be teaching Master Classes at the following locations in the next few months:

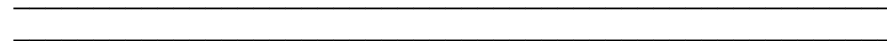
- * November 7, 2009: Dallas
- * January, 2009: Portland, Oregon
- * February, 2009: Silicon Valley
- * April, 2010: St. Louis

See Margie's web site for details.

Margie will also be teaching several online courses next year:

- * January: Defeat Self-Defeating Behaviors
- * March: Empowering Characters' Emotions
- * May: Deep Editing: The EDITS System, Rhetorical Devices, and More
- * June: Writing Body Language and Dialogue Cues Like a Psychologist.

If you want to buy these courses in electronic form, you can get them at Margie's site NOW:
<http://www.MargieLawson.com>



8) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 4481 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>

9) Reprint Rights

I usually am very free with granting rights to reprint articles in this e-zine. However, please note that the articles in this issue are all excerpts from my forthcoming book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES.

These excerpts are, in my opinion, somewhat longer than the amount normally allowed by the "fair use" rules of US copyright law. Therefore, I asked permission from my publisher, John Wiley, to print these excerpts here.

I don't have the right to grant you permission to quote these excerpts in full. Only my publisher has that right. You only have the right to quote parts of these excerpts, so long as they qualify as "fair use."

Randy Ingermanson
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