

Becoming a Novelist

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7 Habits of Effective Writers . . .

Start . . . show up

Be consistent

Have a positive outlook

Be committed for the long haul

Be willing to pay the price

Never stop learning

Keep everything in perspective

Why creating authentic characters is important . . .

Choosing your characters

Protagonist should be someone the reader can identify with

Antagonist should be someone the reader loves to hate but also has a connection with

Giving Your Characters Heart and Soul

Draw much from your own experiences

Dig deep within yourself, your desires, your fears

Spend time talking to others about their desires and fears

Give your character something to fight for

POV

First person, second person, third person

Third person limited and omniscient

Third person vs. deep third person

Deep is like first person but written as third

Deep can also be written in the character's "voice"

POV "rules"

One POV character per scene/chapter—no head hopping!

Stick to the POV!

Description

Learn to observe people, take mental or real notes

Describe enough of the character's physical features so the reader can get a mental image but don't overdo it

Show action. People move in real life.

Dialogue

Learn to listen to people, take mental or real notes

Characters should sound different

Make their words count

Manipulating Mood in Fiction

Opening thoughts:

Why do you want to write? The writer's calling

Find a story you're passionate about.

Finish what you start.

Mood:

The advantage moviemakers have. Lighting, sound track, sound effects, camera angle. Writer's don't have those tools so we have to use other methods to manipulate mood/feeling.

Ways to manipulate mood in your story . . .

➤ **Characters**

Appearance

Name

Motives

Back story

Senses

➤ **Setting**

Location

Weather

Natural surroundings

Lighting (time of day, shadows, etc.)

➤ **Plot**

Motivations of characters

Conflict

➤ **Pacing**

Speed up pace . . . shorter sentences, shorter paragraphs, shorter scenes/chapters; action scenes, dialogue

Slow down pace . . . longer sentences, paragraphs, scenes/chapters; internal dialogue, descriptive scenes

Page layout . . . more white space increases speed

**Your story should have a rhythm of speeding up and slowing down

➤ **Word choice**

Synonyms and Similes . . . make sure they make sense and are consistent with the mood you want to evoke

Adjectives and adverbs . . . use adverbs sparingly, don't overuse adjectives

Strong verbs

➤ **Flashbacks**

Powerful tool for setting mood

Use sparingly

Note: flashbacks must serve a purpose to move the story forward. By their nature they stop progress of the story but the information they deliver should move things forward.

Take the time and effort to think about the mood/feeling your writing is evoking in the reader. This should be intentional and not just accidental.

Keep Up The Pace (Pacing your story)

What every author wants to hear:

“I couldn’t put it down!”

“I had to see what happened next!”

“I couldn’t stop turning the pages!”

“I read it one sitting!”

“I was up until 3 a.m. reading it!”

If your readers are saying things like this, it means you did your job as an author.

10 Techniques to up the tempo of your story and keep that reader turning pages . . .

1. Put them in the shoes of the bad guy.
2. End with a cliffhanger.
3. Speed up the dialogue.
4. Show ‘em the action.

5. Practice scene hopping.
6. Use the active voice.
7. Chapters and scenes that fly.
8. Sentences and paragraphs that speed.
9. Choose your words wisely.
10. Expect the unexpected.

Themes in Fiction: More than a Tale

Big question: Which comes first, theme or plot?

Some questions to ask yourself first . . .

Why do you write?

Why do you want to write this story?

What's the story about?

Now, what's the story really about?

What do you want the reader to get out of the story? What's the takeaway value?

Who are the main characters and what is it that they are going through?

Plot and Theme:

The two go hand in hand. Plot supports the theme.

The 7 primary plots:

Man vs. Man

Man vs. Himself

Man vs. Society

Man vs. Nature

Man vs. God

Man vs. the Supernatural

Or . . . another list:

Overcoming the monster

Rags to riches

The quest

Voyage and return

Comedy

Tragedy

Rebirth

Now, name some themes that may go with each plot.

Some Suggestions:

Get to know your characters.

Feel their story as if it were your own. Genuineness is invaluable and will resonate with the reader, making your story feel real and the characters authentic. When that happens, and the story is no longer perceived as fiction or contrived, then you can pass along your message with little resistance.

Don't just layer the theme over the story (or behind it), weave it into the lives of the characters.

Understand that characters rule.

Think about how the theme affects every aspect of the story (characters, setting, description, pacing, etc.)

Writing Christian Fiction Without Being Preachy

Intro:

Writing . . . an occupation, a duty, a calling?

Time to be honest . . .

Why do you write? Money? Fame? Because you "have to"? A calling?

What is the desired outcome?

Is a Christian's motivation for writing different than a non-Christian's? Should it be?

General Questions . . .

What is Christian fiction? What makes it "Christian"?

What should be the purpose of Christian fiction?

Should Christian fiction be about more than just telling a story? Should it have "an agenda"?

What is preachy? What makes a book (or scene) preachy?

Getting started . . .

Some questions to ask yourself:

What story do I want to tell?

Why do I want to tell that story? What about it attracts me, interests me? Why do I want to share that particular story with the world?

Is there a greater message I want to share?

Sharing the message . . .

Warning: DO NOT SHARE YOUR FAITH!

Keep in mind, you're just the storyteller. The characters are center stage, not you.

Share the characters' faith. It may be influenced by your faith, but should not be about you preaching a sermon through your story.

We, as Christians are living sermons . . . it should be the same for your characters.

If you write authentic characters struggling with real issues and wrestling with their faith along the way, you can be as "preachy" as you want and still hold the readers' attention.

Tap into your own spiritual journey for authenticity. Talk to people about their journeys, their struggles and triumphs. How they found their way to Christ and how they walk the walk now.

Dialogue is key, both external and internal. Use them appropriately and effectively.

Internal: People wrestle with their faith, everyone does, they ask questions, doubt, seek truth and answers, stumble, fall, get back up, and eventually find the light, find truth, maybe not all the answers, but they find peace.

External: Keep dialogue real, engaging, relevant. Listen to how people talk, what they talk about. Keep dialogue consistent with the character.

Don't be afraid to ask tough questions, bring up sensitive issues; don't be afraid of offending someone. Tell the truth!

Determining your characters arc . . . predetermine or let it evolve as the story evolves.

Some final thoughts . . .

Writing takes boldness, courage, honesty. If you know why you're writing, you'll find those things.

If you're passionate about your story and honest with your characters, the reader will know it and "buy it."

Finish what you start.

Be honest! Be transparent!

Writer's block is a vicious cycle: block . . . frustration . . . anxiety . . . block

Writer's block is a monster. You know the kind. Bulging eyes, dry, scaly skin, little tufts of matted hair here and there, long, dirtied nails and rotting teeth. It's a gruesome thing, a ruthless beast that lurks in shadows and creeps in the corners of a writer's mind, waiting for the right time to charge in and terrorize, devour time, energy, hope, and any pleasure found in writing. Writer's block eats creativity and imagination for breakfast then picks its teeth with what's left of your motivation.

Here's how the cycle works:

The block sets in.

The block then leads to frustration.

Frustration then leads to anxiety.

And it doesn't end with that session. Nope. That anxiety carries over into your next session. You begin to doubt yourself, your ability, your story, your topic. Questions run through your mind. Voices try to talk you out of this writing thing altogether. Maybe you don't have what it takes after all. You got in over your head.

And this—surprise, surprise—leads to more writer's block.

STRATEGIES FOR AVOIDING WRITER'S BLOCK

Strategy #1: Know what you're writing ahead of time.

For most of us this probably seems like a no-brainer. Who would sit down at their computer to write without knowing what it is they want to write?

Takeaway: Get to know your idea before you sit down to write. Gain an intimate knowledge of it and take the time to build a relationship with it.

Strategy #2: Know why you're writing.

Knowing *what* you're writing is important but it's not the end of it. A head knowledge is a great start, you need to gather information and become familiar with your idea; you need to get to know that special someone. But if head knowledge is as far as it goes, it won't last. It won't. I promise you it won't. Sooner or later you'll find yourself sitting in front of your monitor with a head full of nothing wondering why you got into this relationship because it just isn't going anywhere.

This where you make two important decisions that will fuel your fire and passion for the next six to twelve months.

Decision #1: Why do I want to write fiction/non-fiction?

Decision #2: Why do I want to write this particular book?

Takeaway: Take time to decide why you want to write in the first place and why you want to write your specific project. Keep in mind, writing is a long process and good reasons will stand the test of time.

Strategy #3: Know what the theme or “point” is.

Now, honestly, this is where things get a little controversial. There is much chatter in the writing world about whether a fiction author should have a particular theme or message in mind before writing the story or whether he should focus on the story and let the themes develop organically.

Here is a truth: Knowing the theme of your story up front will keep you focused, keep you motivated, and do double-time for keeping the block outside.

Takeaway: Knowing the theme of your story will be the rock you fall back on when you get frustrated with your writing and progress threatens to stall.

Strategy #4: Plan ahead.

This is where you take the time to get the map out and plan the route for your journey. You'll plan which roads will give you the best travel time with the least amount of traffic. Maybe plan the longer, scenic route over the shorter drive-through-the-middle-of-city route. You'll plan where to stop for lunch, where to stop for dinner, some sight-seeing stops along the way.

Here's my rule of thumb: You can't plan too much but only plan as much as needed.

Regardless of how much you plan and outline, do something. Plan ahead. Whether you're a bit obsessive and need to plan every chapter, every scene, every point-of-view change before starting to write or whether you just plan one chapter ahead and take the story where the wind blows it . . . just plan.

Takeaway: Take time to plan ahead. You may want to outline the entire book from first sentence to last or you may want to outline as you go, one chapter at a time. Doesn't matter which you choose but do something. Planning ahead will keep you on course and your foot on the gas pedal.

TECHNIQUES FOR DEFEATING WRITER'S BLOCK

Below are three surefire techniques for dealing with writer's block when it does attack. And the sooner you employ these techniques the better. The longer you allow the block to dig-in, the deeper its roots go and the harder it is to defeat it.

Technique #1: Write through the block.

One technique that is popular and taught in almost every writing course or book you'll encounter is simply writing through the block.

Takeaway: Writing blocks are a lot like slumps. Keep writing, push through. You won't keep any of what you wrote but that's not the point. The point is to keep throwing junk up there until the slump snaps and you find your groove again.

Technique #2: Get inspired all over again.

Writing is an art. And as most artists will tell you, to do good art one has to be inspired. That's not just some flaky thing men in round glasses and berets with little neatly trimmed goatees talk about. It's a truth: art requires inspiration.

So how do we find inspiration when we lose it? Where do we look?

Here are a few suggestions . . .

Suggestion #1: Listen to music that inspires you.

Suggestion #2: Read poetry.

Suggestion #3: Read an author who inspires you.

Takeaway: We don't have to be passive when it comes to inspiration, waiting for it to arrive like waiting for the rain to stop and the sun to emerge again. We can turn the key and rev that inspiration. Find something that inspires you and keep it handy and use it often.

Technique #3: Take a break; walk away.

Sometimes, you just gotta walk away. Give yourself permission to miss a day or two of writing and put some distance between you and your work-in-progress. It needs time to simmer; you need time to cool off.

Takeaway: Sometimes, you just need a break. Separate yourself from your writing and find something else to do, to occupy your brain with. Relax. Enjoy. This isn't life and death stuff.

Proven Techniques for Making Time to Write and Finishing What You Start

The Big P

Authors get asked lots of questions.

Where do you get story ideas?

Where do you get ideas for characters?

Are you famous?

How do you write a whole story?

How do find time to write?

The time is there, trust me. There's more than enough time in a day to squeeze in some writing.

Really, it's a matter of priorities.

And believe me, it's been done before:

T. S. Eliot worked in a bank.

Robert Frost put in time at a factory.

Harper Lee worked as a ticket agent for Eastern Airlines.

John Steinbeck ran a fish hatchery.

Nicholas Sparks was a real estate agent and sold dental products.

Stephen King was a high school teacher.

All these folks and so many more knew the value of making time to write, sacrificing, scheduling, organizing.

They knew the value of the Big P. Priorities.

One Word at a Time

The Heart of the Matter

What do I want to write?

Why do I want to write?

How many words am I shooting for?

How long do I have to write it? When is my deadline?

Am I an outliner or seat-of-the-pantser?

Before the Big Dance

Know where you're going.

Know who you're writing about.

Know the "point" of what you're writing.

Find your time to write.

Develop a plan and stick to it.

It's Go Time

Stick to your schedule as best you can but don't obsess over it.

When you're not writing, be thinking about what comes next.

Avoid time-wasters.

Avoid interruptions.

Protect your time . . .

Keep a bread trail of where you've already been.

Use unexpected opportunities to catch up or get ahead.

The Highlights

Please oh please don't ever say again that you don't have time to write.

Writing a book takes perseverance.

Do some soul searching before starting to write.

Develop a plan and stick to it.

Lastly, enjoy yourself.

MORE . . .