

How to Write a Novel in Ten Weeks

(or at least write good first draft)

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Lesson One

Lesson One - Theme

Theme is what your novel is really about. It is not the plot or the idea or the approach. It is the heart of your novel.

Some people confuse theme with story idea. They are not the same. Below is some information on what story idea really means.

The Story Idea

Unless you have a strong, focused idea, you will likely run out of steam around page 30. You have to be excited by the idea. It must matter to you. The old advice is “write what you know” and it holds true. But you know a great deal. Below is a list of sources for ideas, using what you know.

Sources for your basic idea for your novel

- Personal experience
- Actual experience
- What-if personal experience
- Philosophical conclusion based on experience
- Something we heard about
- History
- A friend's suggestion
- Strong feelings against something
- Strong feelings for something
- Current event
- Chance incident
- Desire for adventure
- New inventions
- Social upheavals
- Strong interest in some business

Lesson One

Setting up Basic Conflict

All novels need a basic conflict. To establish this conflict, you need two things:

1. A protagonist (or protagonists).
2. An environment

The environment can come from:

- Physical setting(s)
- Atmosphere created by the social situation
- Emotional mood

Setting the Stage

You must put the protagonist(s) in conflict with either his or her own environment or the environment of others.

10 principles for placing the protagonist in conflict:

1. Something changes in the environment
2. Moving the protagonist from one environment to another
3. Put the protagonist in an environment that is in conflict with other environments
4. Put the protagonist in an environment he or she wants to change
5. Give the protagonist an environment to conquer
6. Put him or her in a environment he or she wants to escape
7. Put the protagonist in an environment where he or she is not wanted
8. Put the protagonist in an environment for which he or she is unsuited
9. Change the protagonist's status quo in his or her environment
10. . Change the status quo of the environment

Give the protagonist a chief motivating force with a tangible object. His or her response to the environment yields a determination to do something about it (the chief motivating

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force) to achieve some tangible objective. It helps if you exaggerate the protagonist's reaction to the environment.

Note: I have relied strongly on [*Structuring Your Novel: From basic idea to finished manuscript*](#) by Robert C. Meredith and John D. Fitzgerald for coming up with story ideas.

I think this had to be covered before you begin plotting. You need to have an idea of what the conflict might be before you begin plotting.

Before you begin this course, there is something I must mention. Although all the basic topics concerning novel writing are covered in this course, there is one thing you must do. You must actually write the book. So before you finish lesson one, set up a writing plan for yourself. Be realistic. Some people like to plan it all out in detail, outline it and then just plunge into the writing and follow their roadmap from Page 1 to The End. Some people like to have the story revealed as they go. Others are somewhere in between.

You are either beginning from scratch or working on a stalled novel. In either case, there are some things you need to do right now. While I realize that there is a joy in writing and creativity and days the muse is with you and days it is not, the fact remains that it takes time. So the first thing you need to do is find 5 hours for this coming week. You can take an hour a day for five days, 40-45 minutes a day every day or one 5 hour stretch or four 15 minute sessions a day....well, you get the picture.

But right now make five hours' worth of appointments with yourself for the next week. By the way, I'm working along with you on this as I have this novel... Here are my appointments with myself.

Monday:	6:00-6:30 a.m. & 9:00-9:30 a.m.
Tuesday:	6:30-7:00 a.m. & 8:00-8:30 a.m.
Wednesday:	8:00-9:00 a.m.
Thursday:	3:00-4:00 p.m.
Saturday	10:00-11:00 p.m.

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Explanation:

I know I am going to resist getting into the novel. It's just the way I am. I think if I just wait another day, some amazing ability to write perfect prose the first time out is going to befall me. So I plan to begin in short bursts. I tend to be much livelier in the a.m., so I will begin then. However, I am trying Thursday p.m. to see if perhaps the afternoons will be kinder to me now than they used to be. And Friday I have other commitments that I can't control so I am not even going to try to work on the novel. I'll do my fifth hour on Saturday.

You may try to schedule more hours for yourself or you may be on a roll and not want to quit after your appointed time is up. That is up to you but please take note the next day and see if you are resisting your appointment. If you are, perhaps part of you is saying, no, you lied to me yesterday and said this would only be an hour and I had to sit there for 2 hours. If so, try not to push yourself.

You may also sit there for your first hour and write nothing. If you're doing it on a computer and you find yourself drifting towards the games, telling yourself that you'll think about the novel's theme while playing a rousing game of solitaire, get away from the computer. Take a pad of paper and a pen and curl up in a chair, stretch out on the floor, sit at the dining room table, go to the park. Just try writing somewhere else using different tools.

If you're still not writing, doodle. Sketch a map of your hero's street. Write your hero's name and keep on going, like this: Jenny.... Jenny stood on one foot and then the other and finally she fell over.

Then keep on writing. This has two benefits. One, it gets the words moving and two, it gets you past the notion that every word you put down is precious. You have to learn to toss out pages and pages of your writing. As you write, you're working towards the freedom of tossing that first page.

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Some of you are working on a novel in progress. Just pick up where you left off and begin writing. If the novel is finished and you want to reshape it, then instead of writing, take a red pen and sit down with a print out. And begin to read it. Make notes in the margin as you go. Side note: If you began with your hero or heroine waking up in the morning and getting out of bed, preparing for the day in which his or her life changes, thus setting the stage for the novel, throw out that scene. It's the kiss of death to begin a novel with that scene.

But first – before you begin your first appointment with yourself, let's look at what this lesson is all about. Theme.

Theme

Ideas for novels are everywhere. Once you get the idea, you have to focus on the principal subject matter of the idea. Even more, you have to understand your own attitude toward the subject matter and your attitude should be strong and clear.

Example: I want to write a novel about Elvis. The principal subject matter is an ordinary country boy who captures the imagination of millions of people. My attitude is that people need heroes for very personal reasons.

The next step is to come up with the approach you want to take. Why do you want to write this book? You need a statement of purpose to clarify your approach.

Example: My purpose in writing about Elvis is to prove that people need heroes so badly they will refuse to acknowledge the reality of the heroes they chose.

My theme is fame. My approach to fame is that people in our society need fame so badly they create people to carry fame for them without any regard for how those people really feel.

The first important step is to focus yourself on your theme. If you are writing a romance novel, the theme most likely will be love. Your approach to love should be positive.

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Otherwise, you will be writing fiction that you don't believe in. At this stage, where you begin in your first appointment is just thinking and perhaps jotting down notes.

There is no right or wrong answer about theme. It's your story...make it what you want. But look into yourself and your feelings and attitudes so that you know how you feel about the meaning of your novel.

Example:

“But I just want to write about how I met the love of my life.”

“Why?”

“Because it was so unusual.”

“Why?”

“Well, there I was in New York City and I met this guy and it turned out that his room mate was from my home town so we met and I was thinking how odd that I had come all this way to the big city and there I was, meeting the guy from down the block.”

“It's a coincidence. What makes it unusual?”

“Well I fell in love with the first guy I met, not the guy from down the street in my hometown.”

“And what's unusual about that?”

“Oh – the thing is, I don't believe in romantic love. I think it's just a scam dreamed up by advertisers to sell perfume and flowers and things like that. I was just caught up in the coincidence of meeting this guy from my home town and because we knew each other we started hanging around together and I kept meeting his room mate and then he moved out and suddenly I realized I missed him and that I was in love with him and it was very unusual. And then I discovered that he moved out because he was falling for me but didn't think I cared so he wanted to get away from me before he got too attached to me.”

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That's how it goes – you keep talking to yourself about the novel you want to write until you chase down the core of it. This example above seems to have this theme: love is more powerful than reason. That's the theme as I see it. You may see it in another way entirely. But how we see it depends on our life experience and attitudes. There is no right and wrong. What we take from something is a reflection of our personality. For instance, some people thought *Pulp Fiction* was a terrible, violent and nasty movie. Others thought it was a huge comedy noir. Some thought *The English Patient* was a story of love destroyed by war. Others thought it was a story of sin and suffering.

Why am I harping on theme? Because I believe that the most crucial aspect of any piece of writing is its structure. This is why some writers are so successful in spite of prose that is less than sparkling. You write out your theme and place it somewhere prominently.

Now, you know you already have some scenes in mind. Start writing them. Remember that the heart of structure is its image. Images are based on verbs. We see people doing things. Each thing they do is an image. (This is the basic rule of writing: show don't tell.) Write some of those images. These will be used later as building blocks for larger scenes.

Just because you read a book from page one to the end doesn't mean you have to write it that way. And the important thing this week is to get you going on the project. So never mind looking for the perfect hook, the *mot juste*.

If you are working with a novel in progress, find the best scenes in it and use them to kick start more scenes. If your novel is finished but not satisfactory to you, find the best scenes in it and really really consider them. Are they truly strong? Pull them out and see if you can improve them. Or simple go through your novel and write its outline. It doesn't have to be elaborate. A simple two or three line description of each chapter will suffice. Then take each segment and ask yourself, does this relate to my theme? If not, tell yourself why that section is there at all and see if you can replace it with a better section.

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A story is constructed in this fashion. Clusters of simple images form focuses, which in turn are joined by simple transitions to form larger focuses. Those larger focuses then combine to form still larger focuses that are glued together with increasingly complex transitions that guide the reader through changing times, moods, subjects and characters.

- Jon Franklin, [*Writing for Story : Craft Secrets of Dramatic Nonfiction by a Two-Time Pulitzer Prize Winner*](#), page 72.

If this ebook is helpful, you might be interested in Nick Daws How to Write ANY Book in 28 Days... Or Less – Click here for more information:

<http://www.writequickly.com/?afl=16423>

Lesson One

Exercise - Theme

Answer in a single sentence:

1. What is your theme?

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Exercise - Story Idea

1. In a single sentence, explain what the novel is about.
2. How do you feel about this subject ?
3. Do you know enough already to write this novel?
4. If not, what are you going to do about this lack of knowledge?

Lesson One

DO NOT RUSH. Start by identifying your theme and then spend the rest of your five hours writing the scenes that are in your head and begging to get out. Or finding the scenes in your existing work and working on them. If over the course of the week, you think your theme is changing, take some of your time and think about why it is changing. Remember, nothing is carved in stone. Perhaps you did not fully understand your own ideas as you began but as you write, the understanding is coming to you.

If you find yourself not able to write at all during your allotted appointment with yourself, write to me and tell me what your feelings are. I'll tell you what mine are when I am resisting writing:

What will my family say? It's no good and this is a big waste of time because no one will buy it anyway. I'd be better off writing something that will sell. My back hurts. I'm thirsty. I'm hungry. I need to make a phone call that I've been putting off for weeks. I'm tired. And on and on and on. Now tell me, how is it that you can spend an hour watching the *X-Files* but you can't spend an hour with your own thoughts?

Still stuck? Go to the next page and...

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Write 300 words on why you can't write even one scene.

Lesson Two

Lesson Two - Plotting

What I hope you will get out of this session is a list of high points for your novel so that you will have a general idea of where your scenes should fit and what would happen next.

Plot or story line?

All novels have either a plot or a story line.

A plot is event-driven. With a plot, the emphasis is on events – things that happen and the protagonist comes through relatively unchanged. A plot has its point of recognition delayed to near the end.

A story line is character-driven. With a story line, the emphasis is on character and the protagonist emerges changed, either for the better or the worse. In a story line, the reader may see the point of recognition but the protagonist doesn't.

Note: I have relied strongly on *Structuring Your Novel: From basic idea to finished manuscript* by Robert C. Meredith and John D. Fitzgerald for ideas on plotting. I love this book!

According to them, in a plot driven novel, you can plot the external event that kicks off the chain of events that forms the backbone of the novel. You can also plot the point of recognition, the major complication and the ante-climax complication.

In the story line based novel, you also plot the external event that kicks off the chain of event and the major complication. However, you don't plot the point of recognition or the ante-climax complication because these come out of the character which drives the story. In the story line, the character changes and the point of recognition and the ante-climax come out of those changes.

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In other words, you still need to have a framework for your novel...you know what the theme is, what the story idea is and what the major complication is. You still need to have a beginning, middle and end for the novel. In the story line, you need to get right into the heart of the character's personality in the first chapter. You have the character jogging along in the same old rut, day after day and bingo, in the first chapter, something happens that jars her out of her rut.

I like to think in terms of something that would cause me to stop and think, well, now, what do I do now, in this situation that I never expected and don't think I can handle. Abortion is a good flash point which I use in working through examples because it is such a painful and emotionally laden topic. In real life, I never discuss it but, this is fiction. Okay...the character is living a good solid happy life and suddenly discovers she is pregnant, although she took all precautions. She cannot have child, not in her situation and she cannot bear the burden of having an abortion. The fact is, she is going to have to do one or the other. Chances are, at the end of this particular tale, her character will have changed. Certainly her view of who she was has changed.

As you begin writing, you may not know if she is going to have an abortion or a baby, so you don't know the point of recognition or what will cause it and you don't know the final decision yet. But you do know the character and you explore that.

You still need to outline – don't get caught up in just letting the character drive the story. There must be a roadmap – guideposts along the way. This is my own idea, but I think that each chapter in a story line novel should have a little complication tossed in along the way, just to keep the pages turning.

Below I talk about plotting. You have the beginning and its complication, the first plot point which leads to the middle, the mid-point action, the second plot point which leads to the ending and of course the resolution. However, in a story line, these probably should come from the character's interior...a sort of getting to know herself plot point (where she discovers that she could not live with herself if she had an abortion – something that she didn't know about herself before because she never had a reason to look into that aspect

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of her life) rather than an externally laid on plot point (where she discovers that her best friend lied or something like that).

Steps in plotting your novel

1. Begin with an event outside the protagonist that sets off a chain of events. You don't need to go into great detail about the event at the beginning of your novel. You should start with the changes that this event brings into the character's life.
2. Try to pick the right point of departure for the story. Suppose it's a murder mystery (always plot driven), do you begin with the murder, the incident that drove someone to want to murder the victim, an intro to the victim, an intro to the murderer...well, you get the notion. Perhaps you won't know until later on in the process where the precise beginning should be so don't hesitate too much with Chapter One. It can all be re-arranged later. For now, you're setting up a plan for your novel. You can make it pretty later.
3. Define the events that happen in the novel and detail how each event leads to the next event. (Yes...the events should be linked like a chain. Each event causes a reaction which is another event.)
4. Create one (or more) major complication(s) and several minor complications.

(A complication is something unpleasant that happens to the character that he or she would prefer had not happened. In mine, a character is going to meet her clandestine lover and has a flat tire which makes her late, which causes him to leave their meeting place early which causes her to lose her temper entirely and create a great scene. Which leads to something else...and so on. A complication does not have to be big but it must change the direction of the story.)

1. Will the protagonist succeed or fail in reaching his or her objective?

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2. Mark the point of recognition in the novel – the place where the reader knows whether the protagonist is going to succeed or fail.
3. As a result of the chain of events, an event occurs that causes an ante-climax complication (or more than one). This forces the protagonist to make a decision that resolves the major complication or the decision is forced upon him or her by another character or characters. In other words, create a complication that resolves the major complication. (You've seen it done in action films. Just as the chase scene ends, and the protagonist is about to lose, along comes a small complication that completely flips the scene around. You're looking for something like that here.)

By now, you should have a few scribbled notes on complications. In my novel, Jenny goes home for her father's funeral and her first complication occurs when she realizes that her sister is losing her mind. It's a bad complication because Jenny has been in exile for a number of years, after a scandal involving an affair she'd had, and she doesn't want to get involved in her sister's life. But her sister is behaving so erratically that Jenny, who thinks she is a caring person, cannot ignore the situation. She also has an inner conflict between her view of herself as compassionate and her inexplicably overwhelming urge to give her sister a swift kick in the arse.

Syd Field has written a couple of excellent books on writing screenplays: *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* and its companion *The Screenwriter's Workbook*. For screenplays, he has set up a paradigm, or model, of how a screenplay should flow.

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It looks something like this:

A _____ Act I _____ X _____ Act II _____ X _____ Act III _____ Z
_____ setup _____ confrontation _____ resolution ____
____ pp. 1-30 _____ pp. 30-90 _____ pp. 90-120 ____
_____ plot point (X) _____ plot point (X) _____
_____ pp. 25-27 _____ pp. 85-90 _____

A screenplay is about 120 pages long. Syd Field has his three acts divided so that Act I and Act III are 30 pages long and Act II is 60 pages long. A novel would run about twice that length (or more). A novel could be divided, using Field's model, like this:

Beginning _____ Middle _____ End
A _____ Act I _____ X _____ Act II _____ X _____ Act III _____ Z
_____ setup _____ confrontation _____ resolution ____
____ pp. 1-60 _____ pp. 60-180 _____ pp. 180-240 ____
_____ plot point (X) _____ plot point (X) _____
_____ pp. 55-57 _____ pp. 175-180 _____

Plot Points

A plot point is an event that takes the story and swings it around in another direction. It has to be something that forces the protagonist to stop and change direction. For instance, in a mystery, the murder is the setup for the novel. The first plot point could be when the hero discovers that the woman he is in love with has lied to him about her alibi. This forces him to reassess his entire approach, not just to the murder but to life in general.

A complication can be a plot point but they are not necessarily the same. The complication can lead to something which leads to a plot point. Jenny's complication is

Lesson Two

her sister's problem with reality. The plot point is when Jenny decides that she has to stay and help her sister out of the mess she's in. Suddenly the situation changes.

You have your hero before you begin writing your novel. During the beginning part of your novel, you put the protagonist(s) in conflict with either his or her own environment or the environment of others.

Before moving on to the middle part of the novel, something must happen to the hero – a plot point – that moves him into the middle part of the book. After you create the sequences of scenes that comprise the middle of the book you must create another plot point which swings the action out of the middle of the book to the ending.

Of course, these are mere guidelines. Your plot points do not have to actually appear on page 55 and 175. But they must appear. Otherwise, you are writing a long series of vignettes that have no purpose or focus.

If the above-listed purposes are left unfulfilled, fulfilled in a tedious way or fulfilled one by one, you will run into problems. That is, if you decide that the sole purpose of a scene is to reveal an aspect of the heroine's personality, the scene may appear flat. It is better to have several things happening at once. Otherwise you will have a string of scenes that lead into each other but don't relate to each other.

Lesson Three

Lesson Three - Characters and Setting

Part 1 - Characters

Remember, even as you round out your characters, you should be writing, writing, writing to get it all down on paper. Writing generates ideas which generate more writing and so it goes.

Now to the lesson on characters. What I like to do is make notes of people and the odd things they do and use them later. For instance, I have this character I like to use a lot as a minor character. She has the occupation of a woman I once knew, the tongue and temper of another and the looks of a third woman I knew. The one thing these three women had in common in real life is that they were outrageous. We have a tendency to want to write as if we were the main character, perhaps because we're inside them as much as we are inside ourselves. This can limit you if you don't have a lot of self-knowledge or if you are afraid of your self-knowledge.

My characters used to come out quite wussy until I realized that I was trying to force them into my notion of being nice, being the way I wanted to be. So now I like to chuck in a handful of spice from other people I know. You all know them...the people who drive you mad with their illogic, their sheer evil, their addictions, their foibles. Take a pinch of this and use it. It's human nature.

A new character has entered the soap I write. He just appeared. He looks like a neighbor of mine, acts like an uncle of mine and has the flamboyance of my best friend.

One of the leading causes of rejection by a publisher is poorly developed, one-sided characters.

Characters should have four sides:

- general - traits formed by heredity and environment

Lesson Three

- physical - the person's physical traits
- emotional - the mental or psychological traits
- personal - the social or ethical traits

How to reveal character

As I was watching a baseball game, a group of people in the crowd held up a banner that read: The game does not build character, it reveals it. In essence, that is what characterization is all about. You let the novel reveal the person's character.

First of all, a character must be in conflict with some part of his or her environment. The protagonist in conflict with his or her environment is the basis of the novel. This is how you chose to show the story, theme, human nature and meaning in your novel. In your novel, nothing “just happens”. Everything you chose to include in your novel has to relate to the central focus of your story. What does your protagonist want and will he or she get it?

Character is revealed by:

- Action when the emotional responses are also revealed.

It is important to show whether there is a difference between what the person does and what the person thinks. If someone is being kind, is it because that person is truly kind? Or is she doing something nice in order to get something for herself.

You must record the person's feelings about what he or she is doing. Example: Kathy is a secretary with the boss from hell. On Boss's Day, Kathy gave the boss flowers and a gushy card thanking the boss for all the help and guidance the boss has shown Kathy.

You write a description about Kathy taking the flowers in and arranging them on her boss's desk. Unless you reveal how Kathy feels writing the card and arranging the flowers, you might think she likes her boss. Knowing that she is disgusted

Lesson Three

with herself and thinks about the boss's being run over by a bus on the way to work, changes your view of her character. If you knew that she was feeling smug about fooling the boss into giving her a raise by buying the flowers and card, you'd think about her in yet another way.

- self-discovery

Perhaps the character thinks he is one way but something happens to show him that he is not that way at all. Kathy might think she is genuinely nice and good to be able to overlook the boss's behavior and buy the flowers for the boss. As she is in the boss's office, she might suddenly have a sudden glimpse of herself, face pinched, arranging the flowers and see that she is not nice and caring. In reality, she is doing this to lull the boss into thinking that Kathy is no threat until she can find a way to really make trouble for the boss. The self-discovery would indicate something about Kathy's personality and how she feels about this discovery reveals even more.

- characteristics

Physical

Let's make Kathy very tall. In describing her arranging the flowers, we can have her looking down at the top of the flowers on the desk.

Appearance

This is not how the person looks but how the person appears. Kathy is tall. She is also untidy, hair flying out of control, run in her pantyhose and skirt twisted sideways.

Mannerism

Lesson Three

Kathy may be nervous in general, edgy, willing to take offense where none is meant. She may wrap her hair around her fingers when she is thinking. That's a mannerism.

Habit

A habit is slightly different. Kathy may have a habit of getting to work late because she cannot plan ahead what she is going to wear. Every day, she promises that tonight she will lay out her clothes for the next day. But she doesn't. She has developed a habit.

Favorite expression

Some people have expressions they use frequently. These can reveal character. Kathy might often say, "Gee whiz" but I suspect she might be more apt to say "Damn bitch." You can see a difference in how you might perceive Kathy, depending on which expression she tended to use a lot.

- Contrasting characters

Strengthen the perception of your character's personality by having a contrasting personality type. Kathy may be quite quiet. Perhaps she goes to the lunch room after she arranges the flowers and a noisy secretary is sitting there drinking coffee. The noisy person can talk non-stop, laugh loudly, call out the window to people passing by, whatever. Her purpose in this scene is to show how really quiet Kathy is.

- Names

Names have their own connotations for us all. If Kathy's name were Brandi or Moonglow or Gladys or Brunhilde, you would probably have a different vision of her in your head.

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- Confession

What a person chooses to reveal in a confession and to whom he chooses to reveal himself, tells a great deal about the character. If Kathy confesses to a stranger sitting on the bus next to her that she wants to kill her boss, it reveals something different about Kathy than if she decided, after much soul-searching, to confess the same thing to her sister who lives out of town.

- Exposition

This is – telling. Not a technique that should be used often. We don't know anything about Kathy's boss – not even if it is a man or a woman. We should know. One thing we can do to get this message across is the noisy person in the coffee room tell it for us.

“That boss of yours. Just because she slept with the old coot who owned the place before Kelly's bought it, she got promoted. And they let her stay on. Damn it. She doesn't even have any business training. She doesn't know anything about running a temporary office service. But she's so cute and petite.” Olga took another slug of her coffee.

- Description

Telling again but this time, you do it directly:

Kathy was twenty-one but looked twenty-nine. Her red hair was natural but didn't look natural.

Minor characters

You don't want your minor character to overwhelm your main character so you need only give him or her a single dominant character trait.

Lesson Three

Flashbacks: Experts insist that flashbacks are dangerous. They interrupt the flow of the present problem. But the reader must know about the heroine's background somehow. Slip in bits and pieces along the way...preferably through dialogue. Anything that halts the progression of the story is bad.

Exercise - Character

1. What are the general traits of the protagonist?

2. What are the physical traits of the protagonist?

3. What are the personal traits of the protagonist?

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4. What is source of this character? That is, why is this person the way he or she is?

5. Write an action scene revealing a side of his or her personality.

6. Write a scene revealing a side of the personality through self-realization.

7. Give your character one of each of the following character tags:

Physical _____

Appearance _____

Mannerism _____

Lesson Three

Habit _____

8. What is the single dominant character trait of a minor character?

9. What is the protagonist's name and does it reveal anything about his or her character?

10. Reveal something about the protagonist by description.

Lesson Three

Part 2 - Setting

Your novel needs a setting. The setting must be strong and suitable for your story. However, it must not overwhelm the story. Sprinkle it in as you go. Do not write travelogues. If you do research, as hard as it might be, don't use it all in the book. I have a manuscript set in France just before the Revolution. It's a great heap of a manuscript with pages and pages and pages of all the fascinating things I found in researching what they ate and drank and wore and said and did. My punishment for not being discerning in choosing what bits to use is that I have to go back and rewrite it, slashing out pages of description. Sigh!

Wisdom holds that we should write what we know. This is especially true in choosing your setting. Blockbuster novels tend to be set in places like New York. I have never been to New York so if I were to set a story there, I'd have to rely on what other writers have said about New York. I believe this would make my story weaker because part of it would be filtered through another writer's view of the big city.

So did I write a novel set in Paris? Well, I wanted to. And it's historical so no one knows for absolute certain what the air smelled like or how life felt then so any writer writing about it would have to rely on research. Still, it took me nearly a year just to do the in depth research on daily life in the 1780s. (Now you know why I wanted to use that research.) And I may point out, that darned novel has set its own record for fast rejections.

Setting should be like good wallpaper. It enhances the story, fits perfectly and does not overwhelm the people in the room.

If your setting does not come naturally out of your story, then you may have a problem. How people are and what they do varies according to their surroundings. I am writing this mystery novel set on Prince Edward Island. I tried writing it set in a city but it didn't work because the whole point of the novel is the insular, isolated, cloying aspect of small

Lesson Three

town/village life. It also helps that I grew up there and know the Island from tip to tip and know the way people are there.

Although this is a skimpy lesson, I spent days thinking about it. The setting of a novel can have nearly as much impact on the story as the main character. Consider Stephen King's *The Shining* and that great big old isolated hotel. Or the setting can be any where or everywhere. Mary Higgins Clark's books tend to have non-specific settings, or so it seems to me. They could be set in New England or just outside Winnipeg. Both work and work very well.

Setting also covers more than geography. When in time is the novel set? What's the weather like. What special problems, if any, does the setting cause the hero?

Lesson Four

Lesson Four - Dialogue

The difficult thing about writing dialogue is making it sound like real people are talking and yet it has to be actually better than real dialogue. Tape yourself talking sometime and then transcribe what you said. How people really talk is often fuzzy, incomplete and round-about.

Three common dialogue mistakes:

1. all characters sound the same
2. the protagonist sounds the same under all circumstances
3. clumsy exposition in dialogue

Six purposes for dialogue:

1. reveal character
2. show emotions
3. move the story forward
4. provide information
5. establish setting
6. break up long passage of prose

Tags, or "Shut Up," he explained.

One of the big problems in writing dialogue is whether to use "said" or some other word. It's all right to write dialogue without any kind of speaker tag so long as the reader can tell who is speaking. A simple "Kathy said" will help keep the reader on track as to who is speaking.

Using "he said" or "she said" every time a character speaks can be disruptive. Even more disruptive is varying the tags so that the characters are always averring, exclaiming, snarling, etc.

Lesson Four

Some writers try to keep the characters straight in the reader's mind by having their names used by the other characters. It doesn't usually work. Think about how you speak to people. Do you use their names a great deal in conversation?

“Tell me, Pam, did you go to Marci's wedding?”

“Why yes, Joanne. I did.”

“Well, Pam. Was it a nice wedding?”

Dialects

Don't write dialect. Let the reader know the character is from the south or Newfoundland or wherever. You can show by their speech patterns and habits that they have a distinctive way of talking. But it's too distracting to read it written out.

Example:

“Lardie Jaysus, by. Put the kittle on to bile. I'm croaking for a cup o' tay.”

or

“Lordie Jesus, boy. Put the kettle on to boil. I'm croaking for a cup of tea,” Reg said, looking out over St. John's Harbor as he spoke.

(NOTE: If you're not Canadian, you may not recognize a Newfoundland accent or the reference to St. John's Harbor as being in Newfoundland. But each geographical area has its own accents and references.)

Indirect Dialogue

Indirect dialogue should not be used a great deal. It has its place, however, and can be used to:

Lesson Four

- summarize a conversation that has already taken place
- supply information that is necessary but is not significant enough to warrant a whole dialogue scene
- break a long dialogue sequence
- compress trivial dialogue

Example:

Karen called me last night and I told her what Eldon was saying about her. She couldn't believe that he'd be so rotten. She swears they never even kissed, never mind having an affair and here he is, telling people about the birthmark next to her navel.

Writing Dialogue

- Give each speaker a new paragraph.
- Use double quotations marks with punctuation inside the quotation marks.

According to Crawford Kilian:

“Action as well as speech is a part of dialogue. We expect to know when the speakers pause, where they're looking, what they're doing with their hands, how they respond to one another. The characters' speech becomes just one aspect of their interactions; sometimes their words are all we need, but sometimes we definitely need more. This is especially true when you're trying to convey a conflict between what your characters say and what they feel: their nonverbal messages are going to be far more reliable than their spoken words.”

Lesson Four

Exercise - Dialogue

1. Tape and transcribe two or three minutes of an actual conversation from real life.
2. Tape and transcribe two or three minutes of a conversation from a television show.
3. Compare the transcriptions from 1 and 2 with each other and with your own writing.
4. Tape your reading of dialogue from your own writing.

Lesson Five

Lesson Five - Middles

Here we are already at the midway mark. Therefore, I think it's appropriate that this lesson is about middles.

As I mentioned in the first lesson, this novel writing thing has two parts. The first part involves the techniques which I try to present in these lessons. The other is the actual writing. Last week I got together with a person who had taken this course from me two years ago in a classroom setting. She writes gracious evocative prose. She had an excellent story to tell. It was timely, interesting and well-executed and set in a specific time and place.

When I saw her, she was upset. Over the summer a novel with a story very similar to hers had been published to great local fanfare. The woman whose novel was published set her story in the same time and place. The actual events were different but the story idea was the same – a woman coming of age in a certain social milieu and coming to terms with her life within that milieu.

The person who had been my student had written faithfully during the first part of the course but faltered as the writing got harder, as it got into those deep recesses of her mind, and she let it slip away from her.

I didn't know what to say to her other than express sympathy.

However, I am using (with her permission) this tragic tale of the unwritten novel to make a point. Write your story now!

Here is a paragraph from Hallie Burnett's excellent book, *On Writing the Short Story*:

“Does one wait for inspiration before starting to write? For lightning to strike one with an idea? 'No,' says Katherine Anne Porter, a sensible analyst of the writer's habits and impulses and achievements. She says that a writer does not wait for inspiration: 'He works at it!' Because, she goes on to say, 'Writing isn't an elegant

Lesson Five

pastime.' It isn't just something that happens, painlessly. 'It is a sober and hard-worked trade.'

It is a sober and hard-worked trade. Many people call themselves writers when in reality they don't want to write, they want to have written.

I cannot stress enough that you have to take this seriously if you truly want to write your novel. Writing is not a hobby. Well, it can be. But if it is, don't expect to have anything but a pile of first chapters scattered around you at the end of the day. If you want to write a novel, you have to get into the rhythm of it, of working at it daily, of thinking about it and writing, writing, writing. You may have to make choices – social life or writing. The choice you make will reveal what is most important to you.

Anyway, on to thoughts on the middle.

Three Stages of the Middle

Early

In the early middle, the protagonist is confronted with the event in the first plot point and begins to get involved in the plot problem. The beginning of the middle will have exciting events as the hero or heroine deals with obstacle created by the plot point. His or her reactions to this obstacle will show how he or she grows or changes, or if he or she will grow or change.

Do not use this section to bore the reader with interesting diatribes based on your research. At this stage, the reader should have begun to really care about the protagonist and the focus should be on the main characters. Begin contrasting and comparing the lead characters and show hints of how they will deal with the major conflict of the novel.

At the early middle stage, your secondary characters should be introduced and their relationships with the protagonist developed. Are they friend or enemy?

Lesson Five

The subplots should be underway by this time. Begin to show how the subplots relate to the main plot and the development of the problem.

Middle

By the middle of the middle, you have all the characters introduced and a problem for the hero to overcome. Give the reader a break from the fast pace. Have a quiet scene or two, allowing the characters to get to know each other more intimately.

This is a good place for internal conflict. Just like real life, the protagonist begins with a number of choices she can make. However by the end of the novel, the ideal situation is to have the protagonist faced with only two options. Her choice of one of those will lead to the climax. But in the middle of the middle, the heroine may have a number of choices. Start taking away her options, either by her own choice or because of actions of the other characters.

End

At the end of the middle, the heroine or hero should be under some time pressure. Make the need to choose one option urgent.

She (I use 'she' because saying he or she gets cumbersome) will have to consider her situation and the conflicts she has to deal with. She is forced to re-evaluate what she is doing. This calls for internal conflict to meet external conflict. The protagonist has to overcome the internal to address the external, or perhaps she overcomes the external, which gives her the strength to address the internal.

Resolve a sub-plot or two, so that the resolution contributes to the final climactic events. By the end of the middle, the heroine will have to face another plot point. Whatever it is, it must force the protagonist to make a choice between two options. Make it intense and dramatic here. This moves you into the ending of the novel.

Lesson Five

Middle Exercise:

Well, kind of a middle exercise. What I want is you to write a journal entry or a free flowing letter to yourself describing how you feel now that you are at the midway mark of getting through your first draft. Write yourself a letter about where you are in your novel and what specific concerns you are having. Some of you may not have taken the straight through approach so you may not be literally at the middle. But no matter which approach you have taken, you must have some sort of feeling whether you're progressing at a good pace or not.

Lesson Six

Lesson Six - Time Management

This is a compilation of some things I have already said to you. But it's about this time when some people realize that time management may be a problem. It's also about this time that you need a break from more input on what should go into a novel. So here is what I know about time management.

NOTE: You should manage your time on a daily basis as well as within each writing session.

Daily

If you decide every day when or if you will write, you will have problems. You will waste time and energy debating with yourself whether to write this morning, or leave it until the evening or whether you should watch Oprah instead and write after her show is over. You become wearied by the debate and put off writing for yet another day. Do that enough times and you'll never finish your novel.

Establish a regular writing time. Once the decision is made for you, you can use your time creatively – writing.

Treat your writing time as an appointment with yourself. A side benefit of this is that your family and friends will begin to respect your writing time. Be careful not to blame other people for distracting you from your writing. It is up to you to place value on your writing and the time it takes and make it clear to others that you have a commitment to yourself which you must keep.

There are the distractions you cannot ignore. Most of us have a household to deal with and obligations to other people. Chose a time that works for you – a time when other people don't absolutely have to have your attention.

I'm a morning person and when the children were at home, that is when I wrote. I got up at 4:30 and wrote until about 7:00. All my children liked to sleep in and for years, this

Lesson Six

was a guaranteed time for peace and quiet. It is still my favorite time to write. I usually write all morning and make the afternoons a time to enjoy life. In the evenings, I plan. It's a good time to think things through because sometimes the subconscious takes over and gives you insights while you sleep.

Within each session

It is essential that you not try to write a novel in a day. When I began, I suffered from this syndrome. I'd have the entire novel in my head. Needless to say, it is impossible to write a novel all at once. Like any journey, it has to be done one step at a time.

I like to break the job down into manageable bits. I figure that my novel will have 300 pages, 100 scenes, 20 chapters. Of course, this is just a guideline – the end result can be quite different. But I need a starting place.

I write a description of a scene on an index card and when I begin, I like to write the first chapter and the last chapter. I pick out the scenes that belong in these chapters. So when I sit down to write, I take one of the 10 scenes for those chapters and begin. All I have to do that day is write that scene.

Of course, in writing a scene, other thoughts come to mind and over time, the book does grow. The original plan is necessary to keep you writing. Otherwise, you're staring at the blank page wondering what to do next.

You don't need to make a list of 100 scenes. But you do need an outline.

If you don't have time to write, take a look at how you are spending your time now.

How to Stop Procrastinating in Two Weeks

- Set a target date of two weeks from today.

Lesson Six

- Start with step one and work toward your goal, or start with the last step and work backward, or break down the larger components of your goal and begin with step one of it.

Lesson Six

Tips on Breaking Procrastination

- Don't plan to start on Sunday morning
- Don't do the hardest part first
- Set a short time limit for each day
- Use a timer

It is more important to feel a sense of accomplishment rather than plug away for three hours. If it is particularly hard to get going, set a time limit of five minutes.

When the time is up, QUIT.

If you think you're on a roll and stay with it, you won't ever go back to it because the task will remain in your mind as something that should have taken five minutes but took two hours.

- Reward yourself.
After the allotted time for working on your goal for the day, do something nice for yourself. Don't try to kill the pain by doing something nice first, thinking it'll make your task easier after.
- Slow steady progress will finish the job. Lengthy bursts often end in failure.
- Do not make excuses—promising yourself to work twice as long at the task tomorrow. (Chances are, you already know where that leads.)

Lesson Six

Exercise - Time Management

Determine your normal time commitments. Keep a time log for a week. Take a sheet of lined paper and have each line represent an hour, a half-hour or whatever block of time suits you best to measure. For instance, if you work you can block out the hours at work as unusable for writing and measure the rest of the day in quarter-hour blocks. At the end of each time block, make a note of what you did in that time. By the end of the week, you will see where your time goes.

Lesson Seven

Lesson Seven - Pacing

We've done Story Idea and Theme, Plotting, Characters, Dialogue, Handling the Middle, Time Management. What is next? Pacing...keeping the story moving, getting rid of the saggy bits and moving the characters forward.

You have to capture the reader's interest in the first few paragraphs of your novel and you have to provide a satisfying ending. The difficult part is making the whole novel move from one point to the next in a smooth, entertaining and compelling manner.

ACTION is the single most compelling page-turner there is in fiction. However, there is a fine line between adding exciting scenes and deadening the reader's emotions by having endless big events rain down on the characters.

Action does not have to be a big event. Movement and dialogue provide action enough and there should be some of either on nearly every page. Otherwise, you may have your characters sitting in one place and mulling over their thoughts or, worse, having their thoughts explained to the reader. People tend to skip parts like this.

In genre and mainstream novels, it is a good idea to have a big event every three chapters or so. Something must happen to propel the characters forward.

SUBPLOTS are necessary in order to provide contrast and backdrop for the main action. At least twice, the subplot and the main plot should cross each other's path. In my *Queen of Diamonds*, the subplot of Fersen and the Queen touches the main plot when Fersen takes Gilbert to Sweden because Fersen needs to be away from the Queen to avoid rumors about her having an affair and again when Fersen intercedes with the Queen on Nicole's behalf.

MINOR CHARACTERS help provide background and relief from the main plot. Again, in the *Queen of Diamonds*, Cecile Vergennes appears from time to time and causes problems for Nicole. As well as complicating Nicole's life, she represents a certain segment of Paris society at the time.

Lesson Seven

Layering the Plot

As you write, it helps if you keep a notebook near to jot down ideas that come to you. It's also a good idea to keep the notebook with you at all times because you never know when your subconscious will yield something about your novel.

Because you began with a plot, you know generally where you are going. After the first plot point, I like to take my plot and layer it.

By this I mean that I take a look at some of the ideas that have come up while writing and see where they might fit in. I add on the layer of a subplot or the impact of a minor character or the repercussions of a new turn of events.

I stop about every fifty pages or so and take another look at the plot. Have I used the scenes I had originally planned? If not, can they be moved elsewhere? And I layer the plot a little more.

There should be a rhythm to the novel – an ebb and flow of action and emotion.

Lesson Seven

Exercise - Pacing

1. Now that you have begun writing your novel, explain in a sentence or two:

(a) Your protagonist's conflict with the environment:

(b). What is his or her chief motivating force?

(c). What is his or her tangible objective?

(d) Does he or she achieve the objective?

2. Have any of these above-mentioned aspects changed or grown since you first wrote them down?

3. What is the primary subplot?

Lesson Seven

4. Where does it touch the main plot?

Lesson Eight

Lesson Eight - Endings

Yes...this is about ending because about this time, you should be getting near the end of your first draft. If by chance, you are not, there is a bit at the end of this lesson about making a contract with yourself. It does help.

There are two aspects to ending your novel. One is the resolution of the problem presented in the novel. The other is the actual physical act of getting to the end of the novel.

Ending Your Novel

Because you have an outline, your blueprint for your novel, you know from the beginning how the novel ends. Sometimes it helps to write the last chapter first – it focuses you on where your novel is heading. Of course, sometimes things change as you progress and you may have to revise your final chapter. But you have to edit and rewrite the entire book anyway.

Avoid easy solutions with the hero solving the problem by doing something improbable. One manuscript that came across my desk had the hero turn into a tree at the very end to avoid facing the crisis before him. Yes. A tree. Don't include tricks in the problem that make it easy to solve it – like making the hero suddenly supernatural.

When you solve the main problem, you don't have to solve every problem in the novel. There will be incidents that appear in the book that have no happy solution. It is not necessary to provide one.

How do you know when to end your novel?

Story Line

The point of recognition is when the reader realizes that the protagonist is going to succeed or fail to reach his tangible objective.

Lesson Eight

If your novel has a story line, the emphasis is on character and the protagonist emerges changed, either for the better or the worse. In a story line, the point of recognition may occur any time in the novel after the major complication has been explained. The character-driven story line depends on the character to also come to the point of recognition although this may happen long after the reader sees whether or not the character is going to succeed in reaching his objective.

It is when the protagonist realizes that he is going to succeed (or fail) that his character changes. When the struggle between the character and the obstacle between him and his chief objective is over, the novel should end shortly afterwards.

Plot

With a plot, the emphasis is on events and the protagonist comes through relatively unchanged. However, there is a struggle between the protagonist and the obstacles he must overcome. The point of the whole novel is whether or not the protagonist's objective will succeed. Once that point of recognition is revealed, the novel is near its end.

How to Finish Your Novel

This may sound the same as how to end your novel, but it is not the same thing at all. I am talking here about the act of getting through that first draft...finishing what you started.

Writing a novel is simple—there are no tricks, formulas, gimmicks or easy ways to tackle the task successfully. However, there are two simple actions that virtually guarantee that you will finish your book:

- detailing a plan of attack
- taking daily action upon that plan.

Lesson Eight

The plan of attack can be a simple outline, file folders full of notes or a binder with tabbed sections containing all details. What it must include are:

1. A one sentence description of your novel. If you cannot get it into one sentence, then you do not have a clear notion of the story you are trying to tell. Without a distinct premise, your novel will grind to a halt before page 50. Or worse, it will run off in tangents and lead you forever away from that delightful and soul-satisfying experience of typing “The End.”
2. A sketch of the plot. This can be a one-page breakdown noting that your novel will be 75,000 words long broken into 15 chapters of 5,000 words. The main characters' names and brief descriptions may be scribbled in the corner of this sheet of paper. Or it may include detailed scene by scene file cards color coded with reference to books and articles containing appropriate background on geography, professions, and personality.

How you handle the plan of attack depends on your rhythms and methods of working. To some extent, the execution of the plan also depends on your personal patterns. You know yourself better than anyone else does, so be careful about setting your goals. But set them. Even if the goal is 100 words a day, make a deal with yourself that you will meet that goal. Daily action is essential. Treat yourself professionally and draw up a contract with yourself. The contract should include the following:

1. Your daily quota of words or time. It is up to you whether or not you wish to work a five-day week or a seven-day week. Decide how many words or pages you will write or specify the time you will spend at writing, even if it means sitting and looking at a blank piece of paper for an hour. If you know that from six a.m. until seven a.m. you are going to sit there with that blank piece of paper, eventually your subconscious will kick in and you will begin to put down words.

Lesson Eight

2. The completion of the first draft. Rewriting is the secret of success. Just put down the words, one after the other until you have the main framework of your novel. Then you may go back and make all the fine changes that you thought of on the way through.

Respect your contract. Don't take short cuts in your writing. If you begin skipping one day, planning to do twice as much the next day, you are cheating yourself. Time and opportunity lost are never regained. Stick to your plan and your daily schedule and you will succeed.

There are no exercises this week.

Lesson Nine

Lesson Nine - Review

By now you are either motoring along just fine or you have come to a crashing halt. Okay, there's that in between spot where you have come to terms with your daily life and realize that you maybe don't have the time to devote to writing that you'd like but you still write as much as you can. This is good.

This is our penultimate lesson. Next week, I'll talk about marketing your novel. But for today, I want to you review the experience of the past few weeks. Think about how excited about the project you were when you began working out the story idea and the theme and thinking about plot. Think about how tired you got as you tried to work through your five hours a week. I know life is particularly hectic in this day and age so finding that five hours may not have been easy.

Hard home truth – writing novels is not a hobby. Not if you want to sell the darned things. If you seriously, truly, honestly want to write, you will find the time. The sticking point for most people seems to be finding the time. The fact of the matter is this – writing your novel may call for a change in your life, in the way you do things.

I'm not talking about major huge changes. I'm talking about little changes. What we do with our time is often a matter of choice. You really want to write a novel. Think about that. Think about what writing a novel means to you. I mean THINK about it. Lie down and shut your eyes and imagine yourself having finished and sold that novel. Go with the feeling.

Try doing this at least once a day. Before you go to sleep is a good time. Before you jump out of bed in the morning is also a good time. Get that feeling into your brain. Make it part of your being.

Then when you are faced with the choice of socializing or writing, watching television or writing, whatever or writing, you will at least be able to factor in your urgent desire to write a novel. It will have a chance.

Lesson Nine

I'm not saying have no social life at all. But, and be honest with yourself, are there social things you do that you do out of rote rather than out of sincere interest? Are there habits that you could break without losing any quality of life?

Lesson Nine

Exercise:

Take time every day this week to visualize yourself as a writer.

Optional:

List 10 obstacles that are in the way of you writing a novel.

Lesson Ten

Lesson Ten - Marketing

Oh no. This is the end of it. It's over. So how did you do getting that first draft out there? I'm going to tell you something that surprised me. A few years back, I started writing [eTanglements](#), an online soap. It appeared five days a week and each episode is 500-600 words. It averages about 2,800 words a week and I had to deliver the episodes on a Monday. At first, I thought I'd write one a weekday and then read them over the weekend and send them in on Monday. But, you know how it goes...Monday is a tough day. So I'd leave it until Tuesday. And then Wednesday. And so on. And there I ended up on Friday, pounding out all five episodes.

After three Fridays like that, stiff neck, tense and tired, I decided to try a new approach. I started writing them out of order but in sequence for the particular subplot. That is, if I am writing about Thomas, I will write three or four episodes with him carrying out some sequence of actions. Then on to the next person. Then it's a matter of putting them in sequence and numbering the episodes. Much much easier. I'm not saying that writing need be done like this, but what I am saying is that if the way you are writing is causing you discomfort, experiment. Find what works for you. As a side note, I will add that to date I have written 42,000 words of eTanglements and aside from those tense and tiresome Fridays, I was not aware of churning out great chunks of it.

Well, no matter how you have been progressing, you need to be thinking about where you are going to sell this book. Now there are some great places on the net to find out about markets for articles and short fiction. Some individual publishers have their web pages up and that's helpful. There is the venerable Writers' Market. The 1998 version is apparently just out. However, and to me this is the best way to find your ideal market, look in your own back yard. Or more precisely, in your own living room or den or wherever you keep your books. (In my case, under the bed, on the dresser, in the kitchen, in the hall, on the sofa, under the cat – did I mention I made a whole lot more writing time by eschewing housework altogether?)

Lesson Ten

Seriously, take a look at what you read and it will guide you to your best markets. For instance, many of the fiction books I read are by St. Martin's Press. I was frankly surprised at how many of them were published by St. Martin's.

Another way, and this works well if you don't buy a lot of the latest books when they come out, is to check out the bookstores. Actually, this is essential even if you do buy a lot of books because it is that old familiar business tactic of checking the competition. Walk around the bookstore as if you are going to buy all the books that appeal to you. What I do is pick up a book that appeals to me, go to the reading area and study the book – publisher, opening paragraph, number of pages, jacket blurb. And I make notes about the kind of book it was and who the publisher was.

Marketing is nearly as important as writing the book. I have worked as an editor and I have talked to other editors. And you would be amazed at what people send in. Totally wrong subject, approach, length, everything.

Guidelines, Preparation and Presentation

Recently, a number of my friends were on job hunts and perhaps this stirred up those old memories of interviews and getting to the short list and waiting beside the phone for the call. There were many long evening discussions of job-hunting strategies and interview techniques. With these thoughts on my mind, I noticed rows of books in the bookstores and at the library that told you everything you needed to know about writing the perfect resume, responding to interview questions with the right answer and dressing for success.

As I browsed the book racks, I realized that the effort one puts into marketing oneself in the job market was no less than the effort one should put into marketing their writing. Somehow, for some writers, once they get past the effort of getting those words on paper, all that matters is getting the manuscript into the mail. How the words might appear when they reach the editor's desk isn't an issue.

Lesson Ten

I searched the web for information on manuscript presentation and discovered hundreds of writer's guidelines detailing the preferred font (courier, Time Roman), justification (ragged right), spacing (double spaced) and margins (at least one inch all around).

The guidelines for a particular line asked for 200 pages or about 50,000 words. There was a lengthy discussion about how long a manuscript of 50,000 words really is. Some writers were using their word processor's word count feature to make sure they had the right word count although the manuscript printed out at 225 pages. Did it make a difference? Yes indeed. Words are not equal in length. Dialogue takes up more space than description but uses fewer words. For this particular line, when the editor said 200 pages, she meant 200 pages. One of the writers who sells to this line told about sending in a manuscript that was just over the 50,000 words mark by her word processor's count and over 200 pages printed length. When the book was set it came out nearly 40 pages too long (she used a lot of dialogue). She was faced with the unenviable task of editing out a large portion of her novel.

In other words, give editors what they want, not what you think they want. When they say, "200 pages," they mean 200 pages. When they say, "do not send illustrations with the manuscript for a children's book," do not send illustrations. Editors know, from long experience, what works and what doesn't.

Editors are not impressed with obsessively wrapped manuscripts. The preferred choice for a large manuscript is to have it protected by cardboard back and front, held in place with elastic bands, and mailed in a Tyvek envelope. Tyvek is nearly indestructible and the editor does not have to fight with boxes taped shut inside of other boxes taped shut.

While there are nearly as many books on writing as there are on job hunting, there is nothing like a writing group for answers to all the little questions a writer has. Just as you would call up your best friends and ask for advice on dressing for an interview, you can ask the mailing list writing group for advice on presenting your manuscript. If possible, join one on the net. If not possible, see about joining one locally.

Lesson Ten

Exercise:

List your top ten choices of a publisher for your novel and in a sentence or two, explain why you chose those publishers. Yes, you need to have ten – so that if your novel comes back you can immediately pop it into the mail to the next one on the list.

Resources

- Nick Daws - *How to Write ANY Book in 28 Days... Or Less* – Click here for more information - <http://www.writequickly.com/?afl=16423>