
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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- 1) Welcome to the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine!

Those of you who have joined in the past couple of months (more than 430 of you are new since my last issue), welcome to my e-zine! You can find all the previous issues on my web site at:
<http://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/html/afwezine.html>

I survived my killer deadline! I had a book due November 1, so I was up till 2 AM on Halloween night, desperately putting the last polish on it. My work is done--which means I officially hate the thing. My literary assistant says it's the best work I've ever done. Right now I never want to see it again and I'm in the middle of a serious post-partum depression. But I emailed the beast in on deadline! That's all that matters. I know I'll love this child someday.

In this issue, I've got some exciting news. I've been laid off from my day job! That's good for me and I hope it'll be even better for you.

In previous issues, I've talked a lot about various techniques writers use to create a great reader experience. If you're not careful, those techniques

(rules) can tie you up in knots. I want to address that danger and give you my take on how to avoid it.

I'll also do another practical article on Tiger Marketing, applying the principles I talked about last month to do another "Tiger Marketing Makeover" on a friend of mine who I met this morning.

Everybody loves gadgets, and I've got a couple of software gadgets you might like. Or not. I'll talk about those in this issue.

2) Hooray! I've been laid off!

That's right, the wretched ingrates who employed me at my day job for the last two years have decided that the project I was working on need reorging. Personally, I thought it had a bit too much org and not enough worker bees right from the get-go, but whatever. Let's not cry over spilled sour grapes.

The bottom line is that my whole team has been laid off. But don't cry for me! No, put that kleenex away. You don't see me crying, so buck up and be brave. I'll be fine, financially. I didn't have a golden parachute--it was more like stainless steel--but it'll see me through for a bit. Anyway, I've got some advance money still coming to me for the last two books I've written. So I'll be fine.

And the GREAT news is that I can finally spend a bit more time on making AdvancedFictionWriting.com what I've always wanted it to be. You won't recognize the place in a month or two. There'll be some cool new things for you. I can't say more just yet, but watch this space for details.

3) About Those Pesky Writing Rules

If you've been reading this e-zine for awhile, you'll remember that I spent several months over the summer talking about specific techniques you can use to make your fiction better.

"Better" means "it creates a more powerful emotional experience for your reader." You can reduce those techniques down to a set of rules.

I've heard lately from several people about just how difficult those rules make life.

Well, no kidding! Of course they do. The good news is

that you can just ignore the rules.

At least when you're creating, you can ignore them. Eventually, the piper gets paid. Remember, there are two kinds of writing--Creating and Editing.

When you're in Creating mode, you DO NOT WANT TO BE BURDENED WITH RULES! If you get all hog-tied with rules in Creating mode, you are going to die in a rule-based writer's-block angst, and you'll deserve it. When you are Creating, just write the darn story. Blast that story out, baby!

Some people have trouble with that blasting thing. Some people are just a wee bit retentive and can't bear to let a mistake go without fixing it. I heard from a friend today on how she learned to let go. She scrunched up the window of her word processor so she couldn't see what she was typing! Then she just whacked out a scene. Hey, whatever works. I guess the only thing I'd caution about with that method is to make sure your fingers are on the home base keys, or you're going to have one ugly mess of letters when you get done.

When you're in Editing mode, you definitely want to think about rules. Ask yourself two questions with every doggone paragraph: 1) Did I violate any of those pesky rules here? 2) If so, DID IT MAKE THE WRITING BETTER?

Sometimes, breaking a rule does make it better, by the way. This is more likely to be the case in the hands of a master craftsman than in the hands of a novice, but anyone can get lucky once in a while. But a whole lot of times, breaking the rule makes it worse. That, of course, is GOOD NEWS! Think about it: If breaking the rule made it worse, then following the rule will make it BETTER! So fix the varmint and move on. It doesn't hurt much, and you get a better product.

If you do it this way, then you get the best of all worlds: You get a happy-go-lucky fun-time first draft where you just Create and Create and Create your happy little head off. Then you get a round of Editing where you make it even better. Life is Good!

4) A Tiger Marketing Makeover

Last month, I did a Tiger Marketing makeover for my friend and literary assistant, Meredith Efken. She's given my suggestions to her webmistress, and I'm hoping we'll see in a month or two whether my suggestions have increased traffic to her site.

In the meantime, I've found another site to do a makeover on. My former employer did something really nice for me. They're paying for me to use an outplacement service. I went to the orientation meeting this morning and met a guy like me who does artsy stuff. His name is Michael Langford, and he's a musician who performs under the name Michael Gi. He's the CEO of his own record label, Family Affair Entertainment. OK, so it's a small label, but he's doing a deal with a big company, and he's on his way.

Anyway, I started telling him about Tiger Marketing and he got interested, so I offered to do a free Tiger Marketing makeover for him. He gave me his card and I checked out his web site, which you'll find right here: <http://www.familyaffairfae.com/>

If you click on the link, the first thing you'll notice is that there's some R&B music loaded on the page. It's Michael's own music, and it sounds really good--on my headphones. On my laptop speakers, it doesn't sound so good, because laptop speakers are tinny and wretched.

Finding sound on a web site can be a problem if your speakers are lousy. Also, if you happen to be browsing from some place where the sound would disturb people, like at Starbucks or in your office. (If your miserable Bossbert thinks you should actually be working at work, then you definitely don't want any kind of sound blasting out, even if you've got great speakers.)

On Michael Gi's site, you get the sound without any warning, and you can't turn it off unless you mute the sound on your computer. This can send away visitors if they really DON'T want that sound. So my first recommendation is that the sound be made an OPTION, and that it be turned off when the user hits the page. Better to have a button that the user can click to turn on the sound.

There's a really cool feature on the site that I'm going to steal: Wherever the cursor moves, a little stream of letters follows it with a short message. On one of the pages, the message is "Album in stores soon". This is probably a very clever Javascript, and I want it.

Michael's site is new, and if you search on Google for some of the obvious keywords on the site, you don't find them. Here are some keywords I checked for:
"Michael Langford"
"Michael Gi"
"Family Affair Entertainment"

When a user searches for these keywords, Google ought to return at least one page on Michael's site in the top ten results. (Otherwise, Google isn't helping Michael, and that would be tragic.)

Now how could Google be arm-twisted into giving a high

ranking to Michael's site when users search for these keywords? Here are some things Michael could do right now to twist Google's arm:

1) Change the title of the home page of the site to "Family Affair Entertainment Home Page". Right now, the title is "Home". Google believes that the title of a page is a strong indicator of what's on that page. In a search for "Family Affair Entertainment", Google gives a lot of points to a page that has those exact words in the title.

2) Likewise, add a page about Michael himself to the site. (There isn't one right now.) The page should be titled "About Michael Langford (Michael Gi)".

3) Michael should make a list of all the important keywords that he would like Google to associate strongly with his site. (Strong enough to send people there.) Some examples of these keywords are those I listed above, along with:

"Jaybird" (Michael's son, also a musician)
"Jay-O-Felony" (Michael's brother, a rap artist)
"m3z" (Michael's seven-year-old son, also a musician)

4) Every page on the site should have a title that tells what that page is about. The title should use one of the important keywords that Michael would like Google to associate with his site. (Right now, most of the pages have the fascinating title "Page Title".)

5) Every page should have a DESCRIPTION metatag and a KEYWORD metatag. (I discussed these metatags in my Tiger Marketing article in October.) The DESCRIPTION metatag should be a one or two sentence description of the page, and it should include one or more of the important keywords for Michael's site. The KEYWORD metatag should contain exactly one of these important keywords.

6) Every page should use headers that include the important keywords. (Right now, there are no headers on the site. All text is in paragraphs.)

7) Once these changes are made, Michael should register the site with Google (it's free).

8) Then comes the hard part--getting other sites to link to Michael's. It is imperative that the text of the links should include one of the important keywords for Michael's site.

Point number (8) is very important. Here's an experiment you can do. Go to Google's site and do a search for "French military victories" and click the button "I'm feeling lucky". See what happens? You get taken to a page that looks like a Google page telling you that there were no results! It asks if you meant "French military defeats"! It's a joke by somebody.

How did this happen? The answer is that the keyword "French military victories" has been "Google-bombed". A large number of web site owners have been persuaded to include a link containing the words "French military victories" which point to this page:
<http://www.albinoblacksheep.com/text/victories.html>

Google sees all those links all over the web and believes that this page must be very important when searching for "French military victories". And this page has been designed to look like a page from Google itself! But take a look at that link. It's not on Google. It just contains a page that looks like Google.

In the same way, the keywords "miserable failure" have been Google-bombed to lead to George Bush's biography on the White House web site.

For more info on Google-bombing, check out the wikipedia page:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_bomb

Obviously, it's going to take some time for a new site like Michael's to start drawing hits from Google. It might take several months. But time has a way of passing, whether you do anything to improve your lot in life or not. So Michael might as well do the hard work now and then let time and Google carry him to fame.

Thanks to Michael Gi for giving permission to do this makeover of his site. Hope some of you will thank him by dropping by his site and seeing what he's got!

5) Two Cool Tools For You

There are a couple of tools you may find interesting and useful, although they will not make you a better writer. They may make you a better researcher, and that could be just as important.

One of these is a Google toolbar for your web browser. This has been available for Internet Explorer for awhile, but only on Windows machines. A similar toolbar has been available on Safari for a long time, but only on Macs. There's now a Google toolbar for Firefox, and it runs on Windows, Mac, and Linux versions of Firefox. You can download this free Google toolbar here:
<http://toolbar.google.com/firefox/index.html>

The other tool you may like is the Alexa toolbar, which gives you information about whatever site you're on, including its traffic ranking and user rating and a menu of related sites. It also has a popup blocker. Tragically, this toolbar is only available for Internet Explorer on Windows. You can download this toolbar here:

6) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

This past month has been insane. I went to a fiction writers' retreat early in the month (all expenses paid by my publisher Zondervan) and enjoyed four days of hanging out with some of the coolest people on the planet--novelists. It was great!

When I got back, I had to face the ugly reality that I had a deadline looming. Plus, I was teaching my famous "Fiction 101" course at a writing conference in mid-October. So I spent the month writing hard in between flying across the country and teaching and getting laid off. Thanks to quick turnaround from my literary assistant, I got the book done on time.

This issue of the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine has been a little light because, frankly, I'm exhausted. But I'm getting some rest now and relearning the names of my kids (good heavens, I'd forgotten I've got THREE of them!) and I hope to be back to normal soon.

Now that I've got no deadlines and no day job, I intend to do a whole bunch of fun stuff this month. At the moment, I'm learning more about web site development. I hope to spiff up my web sites soon (they need it!). I also have plans to do a Special Project I think you'll like, but I can't say more until it's done. Which should be soon.

See ya next month!

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth 3.14 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, 2005. Yuck, that tasted awful.

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. That way, they'll know where to go to get their own free subscription, if they want one.

If you email it to them, remind them tactfully that

they should name YOU as the person who referred them, if they sign up. When my subscriber count reaches 5000, I'll hold a drawing for a brand-new iPod Nano. Your name will be entered once for each subscriber you referred. Subscribers who name themselves as referrers unfortunately don't get credit, so they might as well be honest and admit it was you!

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My personal web site: <http://www.RSIngermanson.com>
My new web site: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

Randy Ingermanson
Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine
