

The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Circulation: 31004 writers, each of them creating a
Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.

"Fiction Writing = Organizing + Creating + Marketing"

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

Those of you who have joined in the past month (about 500 of you signed up in April), welcome to my e-zine!

You should be on this list only if you signed up for it on my web site. If you no longer wish to hear from me, don't be shy -- there's a link at the bottom of this e-mail that will put you out of your misery.

If you need to change your e-mail address, there's a different link at the bottom to let you update my system.

If you missed a back issue, remember that all previous issues are archived on my web site at:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>

What's in this issue:

The successful novelist needs good organization, good craft, and good marketing. In this issue, we'll talk about each of these in turn.

* Do you know how to format your manuscript so it looks professional? It's very easy to make one mistake that marks you out as an amateur. Get my short list of recommendations in my organizing column, "Formatting Your Manuscript Like a Pro."

* THE HUNGER GAMES is a major international bestseller. Why? What makes us love these characters? What keeps us flipping the pages? Find out in my craft column, "More Magic in The Hunger Games."

* Do you know how to deal with nasty reviews of your novel? What about mediocre reviews? Tepidly favorable reviews? You hate them but you can't help reading them, can you? The solution is simple and you'll find it in my marketing column, "What To Do With Your Horrible Reviews."

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

2) Organizing: Formatting Your Manuscript Like a Pro

There aren't any ironclad rules on how to format the manuscript of your novel.

However, there are good ideas and bad ideas. Whenever I teach at conferences, I see all kinds of bad ideas. Bad ideas are bad because they make things hard on the editor or the agent. Bad ideas make you look like an amateur.

In this article, I'll explain some of the good ideas on formatting your manuscript.

Before I begin, I need to emphasize how critically important it is that you create and use a set of paragraph styles in your word processing software. To be specific here, I'll assume you're using Microsoft Word, which is the most common software.

To edit the standard set of styles in Microsoft Word, click the Format menu and then the "Style..." menu option. This brings up a dialog that lets you customize all the styles.

Most of the text in your novel should use the style "Normal" defined by Word. However, the default setting for the Normal style in Word is usually wrong for writing fiction, so you need to customize it as described below.

* Use a proportionally spaced font with a serif.

The issue is readability. A good font like Times Roman or Times New Roman is highly readable. Monospaced fonts like Courier feel old-fashioned and aren't as easy to read. Sans serif fonts like Helvetica are even harder to read.

- * Use 12 point type.

Again, it's all about readability. Anything less than 12 point type is going to cause eyestrain for some editors and agents.

- * Double-space the main body of your novel.

You do this by editing the Normal style so that the spacing between lines is 2. When you do this, the spacing between paragraphs is one blank line. You don't want any more than that, so make sure the style doesn't have extra space after paragraphs.

- * Indent the first line of every paragraph half an inch.

You do this by editing the Normal paragraph style to make the first line indent half an inch. The WRONG way to do this is to type five spaces manually or type a tab character. The reason is that eventually a publisher will typeset your manuscript in Quark or InDesign, and if you've inserted spaces or tabs, they'll have to undo that to make it right.

- * Use one-inch margins on both sides and on the top and bottom.

These are standard in the US. If you're using metric, a margin of 2.5 cm is almost the same as one inch.

- * Use a footer on every page, with the page number centered horizontally.

Page numbers are a good idea, but they shouldn't get in the way of reading. The best place to put them is at the bottom of the page, in the center.

You don't need to preface the page number with the word

"page". Editors are pretty quick to figure out why there is a lone number at the bottom of each page.

* Use a header on every page with your last name flush to the right margin.

The usual reason for using a header is the alleged nightmare scenario where two paper manuscripts fall on the floor and the pages get all mixed up.

I've been assured by a world-famous editor that this has never happened in the entire history of the world, but for some reason, just about everybody fears that it will, so you'll often see advice to put your full name and the title of your book in the header.

I have seen headers that contain the title, author's name, address, email address, and phone number.

In my opinion, less is more here. When an editor is flipping through the pages, the last thing you want is for her eyes to get distracted by all that info in your header.

There's a second reason I think putting your title in your header is a bad idea. The horrible truth is that your title probably isn't nearly as good as you think it is. About 50% of all working titles get changed before publication. About 10% of all working titles reek like a rat.

The real nightmare scenario is to have a dreadful title in the header of every single page of your fantastic manuscript. Then every time your editor flips a page, she's reminded of just how awful your title really is. Doubts begin to creep in about your sanity.

Don't do that to yourself. Your last name is all you need in the header to identify your manuscript. Really.

That's my opinion, anyway. Plenty of people disagree with me on this one.

* Begin the manuscript with a title page that has the title of the book centered on the page in a large type size. I typically use 36 point type. Use your best judgment on what size looks good. It depends on how long the title is.

Beneath the title, you can put a subtitle centered in normal size. Usually, the subtitle is "A Novel." You probably don't need anything more clever than that. If you think you do, then talk to three writers with more experience than you have.

Beneath the subtitle, put your name centered in normal size. If you use a pseudonym, use that here instead of your real name. If you have multiple authors, put each name on a separate line.

* Begin each piece of front matter on a separate page with a headline that tells what it is (Acknowledgments, Author's Note, and Dedication are some of the most common pieces of front matter). The headline should be in a larger font size than normal and it should be bold.

* Begin each chapter on a new page with a headline that says "Chapter __" and replace the blank with the number of the chapter. I normally use a special style for this that has a few lines of white space above it, so that the chapter headline is a couple of inches down the page. I also add in a little extra white space below the chapter heading.

* At the beginning of each scene, you might optionally include a dateline or other information centered in italics at the top of each scene.

I like to put the name of the viewpoint character here. This is not standard, but I like doing it. It gives the reader an immediate cue on who she is for the next scene.

Editors have sometimes asked me if I really insist on doing this. I do. They've always been OK with that.

* Every time you have a break between scenes within a chapter, add some sort of visual cue. You can add an extra blank line -- that's the minimal amount you should do. Many authors use a line with three asterisks centered horizontally. That works for me.

* You have no business using underlines or boldface anywhere in the text of your story. This marks you out as an amateur.

* Using all-capital letters is also usually frowned on. Yes, I know that J.K. Rowling did this a lot in the Harry Potter series. When you're brilliant, you get a little extra license.

If you're not J.K. Rowling, then I strongly suggest you don't do this.

* Use italics sparingly. The trend these days is to use italics less often. I can justify italics for short sections of interior monologue and for emphasized words and for foreign words.

* I am going to be cruel here and allow you a grand total of one semicolon for your entire working career as a novelist.

This is just my opinion. There are tens of thousands of amateur writers who disagree with me.

There are probably one or two professional editors and agents who also disagree with me, so I won't insist that semicolons are on the same deadly level as underlining and boldface. But I have never seen a semicolon in a novel that couldn't be replaced by a period.

That's pretty much all the important things you need to

know in order to format your novel.

Following these rules won't make bad writing magically good.

Following these rules will protect good writing from what my mother used to call "the appearance of evil."

Appearances matter.

If you don't believe me, try going into that five-star restaurant while ignoring the sign that says, "No shirt, no shoes, no service."

3) Creating: More Magic in The Hunger Games

Every novelist should read THE HUNGER GAMES. It's become one of the standard works of fiction that everybody knows.

When you read a great novel, you should also analyze it to see how it works. To see if you can steal any of its techniques.

Last month I began my analysis of THE HUNGER GAMES by writing a one-sentence summary of the book.

This month, I had intended to analyze the Three-Act Structure of the novel, but I'm thinking that it makes more sense to first talk about the characters.

All great fiction is built on great characters. THE HUNGER GAMES has several superb characters. What makes them work?

We'll begin with Katniss Everdeen, the lead character. Katniss is not a completely likable character. She is sometimes self-centered and occasionally acts without

thinking. Katniss has a tough outer shell and she really only loves one other person on the planet.

What makes us love Katniss? Why do we root for her?

We love Katniss because she loves her little sister Prim, one of the very few characters in the novel who is genuinely good. Katniss will do anything to make sure Prim doesn't go hungry and that she lives in some sort of safety.

Katniss hunts in the woods illegally so she can put food on the table for Prim. Katniss won't let Prim put her name in the Hunger Games lottery extra times, which would get her free food from the corrupt government. Katniss even puts up with Prim's surly cat.

So it's a massive disaster for Katniss at the end of chapter one when Prim's name is drawn to represent District 12 in the Hunger Games.

This is a death sentence and the reader knows it. How could this happen? Lots of other kids have their name on dozens of lottery tickets. Katniss has her name on 20. Prim's name is there only once. Yet her name is drawn. It's not fair!

Anyone would be in shock if their sister's name were drawn in the lottery. Anyone would take a few seconds to freak out. But most people wouldn't do anything about it.

Katniss isn't most people. Almost instantly, she goes into action, moving to intercept Prim. Before Prim can go up on the stage, Katniss has reached her. The reader doesn't know it yet, but there's one thing Katniss can do to save Prim.

Katniss can volunteer to go in her place.

You have to love somebody a lot to do that. Katniss loves Prim more than anything. She doesn't even think about it. She just acts.

That's why we love her. That's why we'll forgive her

later for her harshness and self-centered behavior.

Now would be a good time to talk about values. Values are important because they drive a character's actions, and therefore they drive the story.

"Values" is a word that gets used in many different ways by different people.

Let me define what I mean by "values."

Values are "core truths" for a character that take this form: "Nothing is more important than _____."

For example, most characters in most novels would agree that, "Nothing is more important than survival."

The survival instinct runs strong. Katniss certainly agrees with this one. Yet she's just taken on her sister's death sentence. Why?

Because Katniss has another value: "Nothing is more important than protecting my sister Prim."

Two values in conflict with each other. They can't both be true. Which of them is "more true?"

If you asked Katniss at the beginning of the story, she'd probably say that they're equally true. Of course survival has the highest priority. And of course Prim has the highest priority. There's no way to know which is a stronger value for Katniss.

Until you put her back to the wall and force her to choose.

Katniss can't have both.

She chooses Prim. Prim is more important to Katniss than survival.

But Katniss has a third value that she believes in, and it's a value that's going to dictate many of her choices throughout the novel. This value is implicit.

Katniss never says it anywhere, but she does believe it:

"Nothing is more important than avoiding love, because the more people you love, the more people you have to lose, and losing them is intolerable."

Katniss once loved her father, but she lost him in the mine explosion.

She once loved her mother, but her mother went into a stuporous depression after the death of her husband and Katniss has lost the ability to love her.

The only person Katniss loves now is Prim, and the government has used that to put Katniss in the arena. That is the hazard of love. Katniss is terrified of love.

There's another person Katniss is tempted to love in the novel -- the other tribute from District 12, Peeta Mellark.

Peeta is a decent guy. Honest, hard-working, kind. Peeta once saved Katniss's life, years ago when she was starving to death. He got a beating for it, but he did it anyway, knowing he'd be punished.

Peeta is a wonderful guy, and he's been in love with Katniss ever since he can remember.

If Katniss were free to love him back, maybe she would. But she's not free. Peeta is going to the Hunger Games right along with Katniss, and they can't both survive.

Whether she likes Peeta or not, Katniss doesn't dare love him, because it'll hurt too much to lose him.

So there we have it. Katniss has three core values. Two of those are put in conflict very early in the story, forcing Katniss to make a horrible choice.

Once the choice is made, she has to live with it. What's going to guide her through the rest of the story?

Two things: her ambition and her goal.

It's easy to confuse these two things. By the word "ambition" I mean the abstract thing Katniss wants most. That thing is "to stay alive."

The problem is that "staying alive" can take many forms. Katniss needs a specific, concrete strategy -- a "goal."

Katniss has a simple goal: When the Games begin, she will avoid fighting. She'll run and hide while the others kill each other. If somebody finds her, she'll run if possible. She'll fight as a last resort.

This strategy might keep her alive or it might fail, but it's in line with Katniss's values and it tells her clearly how to behave. It's a good goal going into the Games.

If Katniss were the only character we cared about in the faceless mob, then the story would be a simple survival tale.

But Peeta makes it a lot more complicated. Peeta is a genuinely good person and we care about him because he once saved Katniss from starving.

Peeta has three values:

- * Nothing is more important than survival.
- * Nothing is more important than keeping Katniss alive.
- * Nothing is more important than being true to who you are.

We never get inside Peeta's head, so it's not so easy to know how he handles the conflicts between these values. Eventually, we realize that he values the survival of Katniss more than his own survival.

So Peeta's ambition is identical to Katniss's. The

abstract thing he wants most is to keep her alive.

He translates this into a specific and concrete goal. When the Games begin, he will join forces with the brutal "Career Tributes." He'll help them hunt down the weak. He'll be there when they corner Katniss. And when they swoop in for the kill, he'll take them out -- as many as he can, giving Katniss her best chance against the rest.

This is a hard choice. To execute this plan, Peeta has to violate his principles and kill the weak. He has to sacrifice himself. He has no guarantee that Katniss will survive, but it's the best he can see to do.

Going into the Games, Katniss and Peeta have clear goals. Things ought to go simply, but they never do in combat. The rest of the story shows us Katniss and Peeta shifting their goals a bit as things go horribly wrong.

But always, their goals are guided by their shared ambition -- keeping Katniss alive.

And always, their actions are guided by the best balance they can find between their conflicting values.

What makes THE HUNGER GAMES WORK? At its core, it's the tectonic conflict in values for both Katniss and Peeta.

To survive, Katniss has to pretend to be in love with Peeta. But actions have consequences, and once you've kissed a guy, you've opened the door for that deadly thing called love.

To help Katniss survive, Peeta has to sacrifice his own safety. But his self-sacrifice arouses love in her, and love will get Katniss killed if she isn't careful.

There's more to say about THE HUNGER GAMES, and we'll say more of it next month in this column.

4) Marketing: What To Do With Your Horrible Reviews

Every few weeks, I hear from one or another of my author friends who's in tears over horrifying news:

Somebody out there hates her writing. Somebody out there hates her writing violently. Somebody out there has written a vicious review.

Yes, that hurts. It stings, in fact. It makes you want to retaliate.

Don't.

Just ignore it.

Get on with your writing.

Look, bad reviews are a fact of life. Even if you write your heart out, somebody somewhere is going to think your writing sucks. Somebody somewhere is going to say so right out in public.

There's just no way around that.

I think every writer on the planet secretly fears that her writing really isn't any good.

Almost every writer on the planet, anyway. I've met a very few writers who honestly thought they were brilliant, amazing, inspired by God, and due for millions of dollars as soon as the publishers could quit tripping over each other to write the advance check.

Roughly half of the writers who believe that are stupendously awful. The other half are stupendously brilliant.

The rest of us all privately fear that we're frauds. When we read a horrible, biting, savage review, we believe it.

So don't read your reviews.

Oh, all right, if you really must have an ego boost, go ahead and read your 5-star reviews. You are allowed to believe the least-flattering ten percent of whatever sweet fibs they say about you.

But don't read the other reviews.

A nasty review can leave you fuming all day.

A nasty review can paralyze you.

A nasty review can make you try to change yourself -- to be somebody else. That's the worst thing you can do.

If you go changing yourself willy-nilly, just to please some slimeball who trashed you in public, then you're an idiot.

Strong words, yes, but true. Be yourself. Don't be an idiot.

As a writer, all you have is yourself. If that's not good enough, then it's not good enough, and maybe you ought to go into a less risky career.

Blind-folded lion-taming, for instance.

Real life is about taking reasonable risks to do what you love.

If you have fans whom you're pleasing with your writing, then your task is to please them with more of your writing.

Trying to change yourself to please people who hate you

is likely to ruin the very thing that your fans love about you.

Don't do that.

Yes, it's fine to always try to improve your writing. Everybody can improve. Everybody should try to improve.

Improvement means making your strengths more amazing and your weaknesses more acceptable.

To improve on your weaknesses, ask a professional editor to point out things you need to work on and ask her to show you techniques that might help you improve.

To improve on your strengths, ask your fans what they love about your writing. Then try to do that better.

It's possible that a professional editor might be able to help you with your strengths, but it's not a sure thing. After all, you're the one with the strength.

Unless the editor also has that same strength, she might only be able to show you how to dilute your strength to be like everybody else. That's not what you want.

Protect the flame that powers your writing. Don't read negative reviews. They won't help you and they might harm you.

What about when somebody helps you out by sending you a nasty e-mail?

That's a toughie. You have to read your e-mail, right?

Do you? When you get an unsolicited commercial e-mail, how long does it take to realize that this is something you don't want, sent by somebody you don't know?

Once you see that, do you read the whole thing?

When somebody sends you a poison e-mail, you'll get the

flavor pretty fast. But no law requires you to read the whole thing.

If it helps you, make an e-mail folder just for these folks and label it "Nasty People."

That makes it clear that they're the one with the problem, not you.

When you get a hate-spewing e-mail, take your revenge by throwing it in with all the other Nasty People.

Leave them to spew bile on each other until the end of time. That's your revenge. Your whole revenge. Nothing could be worse for them.

Then forget about them and get on with your writing.

You have true fans who love your writing. Write for them and only for them.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My coauthor, John Olson, and I are preparing our next novel for release as an e-book. THE FIFTH MAN will include three bonus appendices with more than 16,000 words on how to write fiction better.

You'll hear from me soon with a special offer. Stay tuned.

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping more than two years ago. For the last year, it's been the hottest selling fiction-writing book in the Kindle store. You can find out all about WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES here:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info/wffd>

If you've already bought the book and like it, I'd be delighted if you wrote an Amazon review. Thanks to those of you who already have! I appreciate you!

I've also been gratified at the response to my flagship software product, "Snowflake Pro," which makes it fast, easy, and fun to work through the steps of my well-known Snowflake method for designing a novel. You can find out more about Snowflake Pro at:
<http://www.SnowflakeProSoftware.com>

I normally teach at 4 to 6 writing conferences per year. I am currently booked up for 2012 (unless you want to make me a truly amazing offer or you have some incredible blackmail info on me).

If you simply MUST hear me speak in 2012, you have already missed two conferences where I taught in February and March/April. I will be speaking only twice more this year, at these locations:

August 13-16, Oregon Christian Writers Conference, northern Oregon:
<http://oregonchristianwriters.org/category/summerconference/>

August 24-26, Romance Writers of New Zealand, Auckland
<http://www.romancewriters.co.nz/conference/>

I expect to also attend the ACFW conference in Dallas in September (where I will take a few 15-minute mentoring appointments) and the Novelists, Inc. conference in New York in October (where I will just be enjoying the workshops and hanging out with writers).

Why don't I teach at more conferences? Because teaching is an incredibly demanding blood sport and it sucks a huge amount of energy out of my tiny brain. I prefer to put my absolute best into a few locations than to muddle through at many.

If you'd like me to teach at your conference in 2013 or

beyond, email me to find out how outrageously expensive I am.

If you'd just like to hear me teach, I have a number of recordings and e-books that are outrageously cheap.

Details here:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info>

6) Randy Recommends . . .

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

I'm a huge fan of Margie Lawson's courses, both the ones she teaches in person and the ones she sells on her web site at

<http://www.MargieLawson.com>

Margie is a psychologist who applies what she knows about human psychology to writing fiction. I believe her material is brilliant. Check her out on her web site!

I've also become a fan of Thomas Umstattd's terrific uncommon-sense thoughts on internet marketing. You can read Thomas's blog at:

<http://www.AuthorMedia.com/blog>

Thomas and his team are especially skilled at helping authors create a powerful web site using WordPress blogs. I am a huge fan of this approach, since it gives the most bang for the buck in an author site. Find out more about this at:

<http://www.AuthorMedia.com>

Please be aware that in this section I ONLY recommend folks who have never asked me to do so. Tragically, this means that if you ask me to list you here, I will be forced to say no.

7) Jim Bell's Weekend Seminars

My good friend Jim Bell is doing a series of weekend seminars this summer in Austin, Nashville, and Cincinnati.

You may recognize him as the author of the best-selling book PLOT & STRUCTURE, one of the very best books on how to write fiction. Or you may remember that Jim is the former fiction columnist for Writer's Digest.

I have known Jim for many years and I have a high level of trust in his ability to deliver the goods.

Jim is the guy who first taught me Three-Act Structure years ago, and he's a terrific speaker and teacher. I've learned a lot from him.

Jim asked if he could buy an ad in my e-zine for his seminars. I don't accept paid ads, but Jim is a great guy who contributes a lot to the writing community.

So I offered to give Jim a free mention here on one condition:

I asked Jim to give readers of my e-zine a discount.

He agreed to give you all a \$30 discount. The normal price of one of these 2-day seminars is \$399. You can get it for \$369 with the discount code ADVEZ.

What do you get for that \$369? Here's the writeup Jim sent me:

Two power packed days to take your fiction writing to the next level . . . and beyond. For both traditional and self-published writers. Lunch is included both days.

Among the things you'll learn:

- * The Most Important Thing Every Successful Novel Must Do . . . and How to Do It
- * Mastering the Seven Critical Success Factors of Fiction
- * The Emotion Quotient for Grabbing Readers and Not Letting them Go
- * Plotting With Perfect Structure, Every Time -- Never Write a Weak Story Again
- * Thematic Unity, What Most Writers Want But Can't Figure Out. We'll Figure.
- * Creating Characters That "Jump Off the Page"
- * How to Write Scenes With No Dull Parts
- * The 8 Essentials and 12 Tools of Great Dialogue
- * The Secrets of Making Readers Turn the Pages
- * Creating a Compelling Voice and Style

Plus: interactive exercises that will add depth and appeal to your current project.

You can get more info and sign up for one of these weekend seminars at the following web pages. (If you sign up, use the promo code ADVEZ to get the \$30 discount.)

Austin, June 16 & 17

<http://jsbaustin.eventbrite.com/>

Nashville, August 11 & 12

<http://jsbnashville.eventbrite.com/>

Cincinnati, September 15 & 16
<http://jsbcincinnati.eventbrite.com/>

Have fun!

8) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 202 times the price. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2012.

Extremely tasteful postscript: I encourage you to e-mail this E-zine to any fiction writer friends of yours who might benefit from it. I only ask that you e-mail the whole thing, not bits and pieces. Otherwise, you'll be getting desperate calls at midnight from your friends asking where they can get their own free subscription.

Of course you should not forward this e-mail to people who don't write fiction. They won't care about it.

At the moment, there is one place to subscribe:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

9) Reprint Rights

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Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the free monthly Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 31,000 readers. If you want to learn the craft and marketing of fiction, AND make your writing more valuable to editors, AND have FUN doing it, visit <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>.

Download your free Special Report on Tiger Marketing and get a free 5-Day Course in How To Publish a Novel.

Randy Ingermanson
Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>

