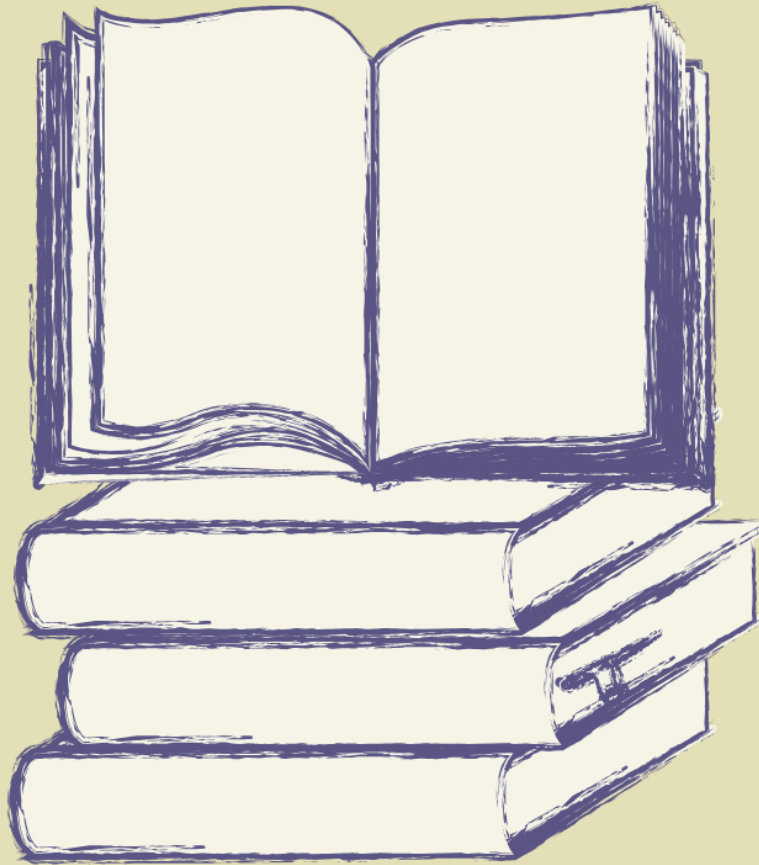


From Award Winning Author
JOANN FASTOFF



How To Write Stuff Better

10 Better Ways To Get You There!!!

www.JoAnnFastoff.com

Hey Fellow writers!

Where do we begin? Usually at the beginning.

You have an idea and you haven't fleshed it out yet. Ok, let's take it one step at a time.

In, *How To Write Stuff Better: 10 Better Ways to Get You There* I give you a list of the most important things you should focus on if you want to write stuff better. From the beginning or planning stage of your book, the oh-so-scary “muddled middle” and then what to do once the book is done! This will help you create a foundation for any writing project that you want to write better.

“**Writing stuff better**” can be an intimidating proposition for any writer, but as a first-time writer, this can be a “make or break” moment for you. Why? Because you're afraid to share your stuff for others to read. In your mind you believe they will modify, comment, remark negatively or maybe even (gulp) like your stuff. If you have a great story your people will tell you. Where's your backbone?

Of course, there's no single road to great writing but as George R.R. Martin, author *Game of Thrones* once said, “Different roads sometimes lead to the same castle”. Consider me a different road.

When you drive this road, you will learn to read the signs that help you to write stuff better. A sign is an indication of something that is up ahead or is going to happen. What I am about to do for you is help you win at writing stuff better. A good sign for you. This list will help keep you on the right track.

When you know stuff, you are able to make better decisions. See you at the next book signing!

JoAnn Fastoff

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1. *Planning Your Story*

Why do you want to tell this story? How to outline your brave idea without getting overwhelmed in the process.

2. *Maintaining Motivation*

Your book is waiting to be finished but you've hit the valley of funk and don't know how to climb out. First, we might have to change your environment. How?

3. *Editing*

If you have to ask why you need an editor - you need an editor.

4. *Costs: Traditional Publishing vs. Self-Publishing*

You vs. the BIG FIVE. Who wins? Depends on your perseverance and your wallet.

5. *Query Letter/Treatments*

Need to get a literary agent on your side? What about a movie producer? A couple of shortcuts just might help.

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6. Choosing a Great Book Cover

Do you understand design? No? Welcome to the club. Why your book cover should send a clear message.

7. Collaboration/Co-Writing

Will you kill each other trying to get that ONE idea across to others.. or will you be on the same page? We'll see.

8. Securing and Recovering from Reviews

Book reviews can open doors to new and bigger audiences. Find out why you shouldn't be afraid of a closed door.

9. Book Awards/Yay or Nay

Certain awards hold more pull than others, but ALL awards can make a difference. Which ones should be valued more?

10. The Library and the Author

You cannot find a better friend than your neighborhood Librarian.

“A professional writer is an amateur who didn’t quit.” - Richard Bach

CHAPTER ONE

PLANNING YOUR STORY

Outlining A Book

A lot of you have asked about outlining a book. First, I want to make sure that you have a *manuscript premise*. Do you know the definition of a premise? What the book is about? Duh.

In my book, *The Standing People*, the premise concerns the illegal logging of precious timber (Rosewood and Ebony) out of Madagascar and human trafficking out of China. That's the premise. So when we talk about the premise, the premise is the book's central theme and why you want to tell the story. Once you've got a general idea of the kind of book you want to write, you need to ask yourself these questions:

1. Are you the best person to write your book?

Well, I felt that I was the best person to write about illegal logging because I'm an environmental activist, and I don't want to see trees destroyed just for somebody's pleasure. Also, I'm not too fond of young women (and men) being sold and distributed like they mean nothing.

2. Can you see yourself working many hours on writing your book?

You have to if you're going to write a book.

3. Once you've finished your manuscript, is there a market for it?

My book genre is "Fiction - Mystery and Intrigue."

After answering questions one and two, you must know how your book begins. Mine begins with death. Then you need to know how your book ends. I recognize that I cannot stop the illegal act of logging tropical woods into the United States *by myself*, but because I'm writing fiction, I can end *somebody's* story. There's a creative license in that.

Again, you need to know how your book begins. You need to understand how that *muddled middle* will kill your juices because you must fill in the middle with conflicts, twists, or scenes you've already thought of in your initial little bubble brain. You want to sort out your characters because there are first, second, or third-person views.

The first person is the person with the point of view.

The narrator is the second person, the person that's telling the story.

The third person can be limited. It's about him, her, or them, but also that third person can be omniscient, all-knowing. That's usually "the author"- setting the book's tone.

Then you sort out your characters, the plot, the tone of your novel, and your writing style. Is it a romance, science fiction, or intrigue? Is it a thriller? This will define your target readership. One of the things I want to be quite adamant about is you have to know your characters in and out. If you don't know your characters, you don't want me as a reader to develop them, do you? You set the stage; you organize the scenes; you start the scenes, and you have to build those scenes.

All these elements must be worked out in complete detail to produce a comprehensive and helpful plan for your novel. I usually write in three acts because I'm from a playwright background. Then you sort out your characters, the plot, the tone of your novel, and your writing style. Is it romance, science fiction, or intrigue? Is it a thriller? This will define your target readership.

INTRODUCE THE "W" PLOT

In *Act One*, I set up my character-led novel, prioritizing character development over the plot's planning, which means I'm trying to establish how others perceive my character.

In *Act Two*, I'm working on that plot. You have to know who your characters are before you start outlining how they got to this point in life and how they think about their desires and their goals. The *main character or protagonist* is the character that your novel is based around - often the hero or the heroine, and that character generates the story's action and gains the reader's interest. These characters faced with a conflict must resolve or come to terms with that conflict.

In *Act Two* - Story A, enter the problem, or we could call it the plot.

It would be best if you constructed the novel's spine, which means the critical plot points, the who, why, and how. The what, when, and where will come later. But who, why, and how are very important. These are dramatic questions posed in the problem.

For example, the history and the setup of illegal logging of tropical hardwoods is the problem in *The Standing People*.

Act Two - Story B is the *subplot*.

I am very character-heavy, sometimes to the point where they become complex. But we're reintroduced to all the correct characters, which means nailing down your characters' fundamental goal, the thing that is truly important to that character, or some internal goal they want to achieve. I won't tell you the rest of the story because then you won't read it.

<http://joannfastoff.com/product-category/books/>

There needs to be an adversary of the hero or protagonist in the novel — someone who is opposed to struggles against or competes with the main character. Then you have a supporting cast with power players or minor characters, and they do whatever you need them to do in the story.

Enter *Act Two* - Story C.

The bad guy closes in on the protagonist and puts them through the wringer. This is where the backstory could become significant. A lot of times, the adversary, the antagonist, the bad guy, if they are believable, will have a backstory for the reader to empathize or sympathize with, not necessarily to condone their action, but to understand who they are, why they are what they are. No one comes out of the womb horrible except for maybe Dr. Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs*. (Maybe he didn't have enough to eat as a kid.) What many readers want to know, especially if you like the bad guy, is something about them that makes you love them because the bad guy can be horrible.

If you think, 'Oh, I kinda liked the bad guy,' then you want to know something about them to reinforce why you are empathetic or sympathetic to this character and maybe even want to see the bad guy again. But remember to make this person believable and credible, with faults. Even your good guy should have flaws. They don't have to have a lot, but you must remember to make them real, believable people.

Act Three, - you must end the tale. It would help if you tied up all the puzzle pieces (A, B, and C) so they all come together to make the whole picture. Many parts of the puzzle are there, so the finale is that you tie up all the stories.

Many stories have *Epilogues*, meaning the strings of the story are tied up and offer a little of what happens afterward. I like to write an epilogue because I write in three parts, like a play. I want to ensure that the bad guys go to prison, the good guys receive awards, and maybe a bad

guy you love will return because you didn't dislike them. Perhaps the character goes to jail even though you liked them; they had to go to jail, which is okay. Or maybe somebody you disliked was killed, and perhaps you even hated that the person died. But this serves a purpose in that some of us writers are not 'Hollywood ending' people but like to ensure that our readers don't leave so unhappy.

Come up with a premise. Make sure that your story follows the premise. The hypothesis can be just about your main character, but still, there has to be a subplot so that there's a bad guy, which makes the story even better. And make the protagonist just a little rung lower on the ladder than we place them on. Don't make the reader say, 'Oh my God, can this person do this?'

When I wrote *The Gordian Knot* about a 10-year-old boy who had to get to Washington DC to see my protagonist Howard Watson, many people said, 'A 10-year-old boy can't do that'. And I said, "Let's see, Scout Finch was critical in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Mark Shay was essential in *The Client*. What about 12-year-old Michael in the movie *Fresh*? And remember, *Huckleberry Finn* was all over the place. Name it, and you'll see some young people do awesome things in books, films, etc. Maybe you were reading *The Gordian Knot* and said to yourself, 'I don't believe they could do that' because perhaps *you* can't. However, when you see some young person doing what you consider a significant adult thing, you have to say that's what courage is all about.

How do you interview a character? Since I have seven books (soon to be eight) in my *Howard Watson Intrigue* series, I ensured my protagonist stays the same way. He has the same kind of personality that he had in book one that he has in book six. The only difference is that he has witnessed more atrocious cases; otherwise, he is the same person who attended West Point Academy and the FBI Academy and served in several wars. Because I'm character-driven, I want to ensure that when I write the antagonist character, you don't hate that antagonist even though you might dislike that antagonist's point of view. I always want you to know that I'm from a social position, so when I mold my characters, they are not one or even two-dimensional. They're not flat. They have some life.

How do you come up with a premise? You have in your mind a story, and you say, 'I'd like to write this story. I have an idea. That idea is the premise. What is the story really about? That's the

premise. Then you build on that.

Where do you go with that premise? A man drives his American car, and the steering wheel comes off. What do you do next? The story could be about the fault of American car making - this is a good start. That's how I would start my account with a guy driving whose steering wheel comes off. He then crashes into a light post on a highway, and that's when your story takes off. You now have an idea. You build on it.

When do you know if you have too many characters? If you can remove one character from the story and the story doesn't change, you don't need that character in the story. It's just that simple. Sometimes there are supporting characters, and then there are those who do what you need them to do. But if you don't need them to do anything, you don't need them in the story. How many players are on a volleyball team? Six. You don't need seven. Seven would be the supporting character. So if one player drops out in the volleyball game, you must use that seventh person. You only need nine players on the field in baseball. You only need five players in basketball. Get it?

Remember that I set up my story in three parts: WHO - my characters; I want to make sure that they go somewhere and that they need to connect in some way. You need to write more than just characters and end up with 42 stories. Next, WHY are they going to do what they are doing? HOW are they going to do it? Finally, WHAT, WHEN and WHERE did my scene and location occur in the story? Ultimately, I make sure that somebody goes to jail and somebody gets an award, somebody is a hero or heroine, and the bad guy is truly a bad guy.

The premise has to emerge for the conclusion to take place; otherwise, due to those subplots, it might get lost. But in the end, the premise is what comes through. In *The Standing People*, the story starts with death but ends with life.

#

Point of View vs. Perspective

We use the terms "perspective" and "point of view" interchangeably, but there's a big difference.

The point of view is the narrator telling the story.

Perspective is how the character processes that story and what's happening in the story.

In other words, the point of view is who tells the story, and perspective is how they describe it. There are several avenues of point of view. One is the first person, which means *I* am telling the story. Next is the second person, which means the story is being told to me. The third person is limited and all-knowing, and that's usually the author.

I like to write in the third person because I write a lot of characters. So when I have this large cast of characters and complex plots, it's challenging to manage from the first-person point of view. So writing in the third-person allows me to move about my characters as needed. Now, if we want to talk about the point of view, *I'm* telling the story, but if we talk about perspective, it's *everybody else* telling it.

Example – In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy was the point of view, but what about the perspective of the Wicked Witch of the West? What about *Snow White* from one of the seven dwarfs' perspectives? What about the *Last Mohican* from his point of view, and of course, Ramses' perspective, since everyone knows that Moses had a point of view?

Then there's the "naive narration," which usually means the first person. For example, in J.D. Salinger's book, *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield is a young person narrating his life in adult terms. In other words, his point of view is the book.

In his book *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison used an unnamed narrator under the guise of autobiography.

In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout Finch is an adult narrating about her childhood, and her white attorney father representing a black man in a Southern court against a white woman that accused him of rape.

The "unreliable narration" is always a character delivering more than the role should provide. For instance, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's book *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway is unreliable because he says at the beginning that he's "above talking about others." Yet, he talks about *every single person* in the book. Of course, this is from his point of view, but those are perspectives.

Four people go to the same event, yet each one comes back with a unique set of information about how they saw that event and how they dealt with being in that event. I guarantee you that's the perspective. And you know the cliché, "his story, my story, *the* story, and all of us do not believe we're lying."

That's perspective.

To reiterate - the point of view is always the person that saw it. You are telling me what you saw would make me the second person. The third person is he, or she, or him, or her, or the all-knowing person, and that is usually the author. The author can give a perspective for every person. The caution is that if you sound like the same person for all the characters, you're not all-knowing, just all-telling. So it can become challenging when you're writing, and you say, "I want this guy to sound different than this woman," even though it's your voice. So the point of view, as the second person, is *you* telling *me* the story.

Third-person, the limited one is about *them*. You must be very careful because if you're the story's narrator, you must be consistent. The reader has to know the difference in the voices.

In his book *The Christmas Story*, Jean Shepherd is an adult narrating when he was a kid and wanted a Red Rider BB gun. As an adult, he's telling the story about himself as a kid. So you hear his voice, understand the genre, and know that that voice is different than when his father is cussing, and his mom breaks the father's leg lamp. For those who have yet to read or see *The Christmas Story*, you need to run and get it.

Did you know *the Christmas Story* was initially titled *In God, We Trust, All Others Pay Cash*?

Active vs. passive tone:

<https://www.yourdictionary.com/index.php/pdf/articles/326.active-vs-passive-voice2.pdf>

#

Writing Supporting Characters

A set of characters is an essential element in your story. While the plot is necessary, the setting, key point of view, and theme are required. However, none of these story elements rank above character.

There are four distinct types of characters. The first one is the DYNAMIC character, who undergoes a critical inner change, such as a change in personality or attitude. One of the best examples is *Ebenezer Scrooge*. We all know what he went through. He was one kind of character at the beginning of the story, and he became a different kind of character in the end.

The FLAT character is a two-dimensional character who has no inner depth. This character says things because it's probably what's needed, but they don't need to say them. For example, a police officer walks into the police station and says, "Captain, the perps have been caught, and they've been apprehended at State and Madison streets." Flat character, no inner depth.

The third character is the STATIC character. When you meet this character, he's the same as when you leave him. So if we go to the Bible, Pharaoh is one of the best static characters. He's the same when we meet him, and he's the same when we leave him.

The fourth character is the ROUND character, a character that's a mess. This character pulls the story together. If written correctly, this person can seem more real than anybody we see on the street. Prolific author James Baldwin always seems to describe characters that have so much depth that you say, "I know this person; he's writing about my next-door neighbor or the person down the street." That is a round character. All four aspects are needed in your story, but the rounded character is the one we will follow the most.

Another thing to consider when you're writing fiction, and I'm talking fiction, is that writers use themselves as an example for the main character in the work that they're writing. That tends to lead to being too easy on the protagonist. That's different than a formula for an exciting story. Have you ever read a story where the protagonist goes through all kinds of problems and comes out virtually solving all the issues quickly? That story probably didn't captivate your imagination. Think about your life when everything goes well - you seem to roll with the punches. Why mess with a good thing, right? But if the story's foundation is drama, drama spells trouble, and trouble is conflict, then the story leans heavily on the fact that the universe is out of balance, and you are attempting to set it right.

It doesn't matter whether you're successful or not. If the world is out of balance, life has to be wrong, which means your character has to undergo the worst thing possible, then something even worse happens after that. The real story is how the character reacts to it.

One of my literary heroes - Walter Mosley - loves to write a problem, then deepening the issue

before it's resolved. It takes you up and down emotionally, and you're exhausted after reading one of his *Easy Rawlins* mysteries. Right? But you love them. And the writing is fantastic.

Now, sometimes, when I write, I find myself surprised at the actions of one of my characters. That tells me that I'm on the right track. For example, in my book, *The Smoke Ring*, my protagonist FBI Special Agent in Charge, Howard Watson, picks up a baseball bat and is about to pounce on two pieces of trash that did bodily damage to two of his agents. However, one of his supporting characters, FBI Special Agent Janet Forrestal, takes the bat from him. When I was writing this passage, I wanted to beat the hell out of these two guys for what they did to the agents. And then I realized that Howard Watson wanted to do the same thing but couldn't. So I refrained from letting him do that. He surprised me because I would have gone through it. But Howard Watson is still a professional.

I've written for the New York stage on Off-Off-Broadway, so as a playwright, I utilize the techniques of the Stanislavsky Method. He was a great Russian actor and teacher, and advocate of the sense of relaxation, imagination and memory, which is the practice of not acting a scene but living it through the recollection of sensory detail.

For example, you write that your character is upset. Now except for writing that emotion, how will your reader know how upset this person is?

Did she slump on the ground in the corner and place her head in her hands? OR

Could she not stop the flow of tears? OR Did she bang on the table repeatedly with her fists until her tears made her stop?

The Stanislavsky Method has helped me tremendously as a mystery and intrigue writer. So my protagonist, Howard Watson, is always searching for inner motives to justify others' actions, what the characters seek, and what they're trying to achieve. That's very hard, so I deal with a lot of action.

In my book *The Smoke Ring*, my antagonist Onella Katenta feels justified in killing. Howard Watson feels her pain because...

Do you see where I'm going with this? The secondary, or as I like to call it, supporting character, almost always interacts with the protagonist on some level. It could be through dialogue or a

memory that the protagonist has about this character.

In my book *The Standing People*, FBI Special Agent Ahmad Waverly tells another agent about his relationship with Howard Watson, which is how we find out little bits and pieces about Howard Watson because the secondary character or supporting character knows these things.

The best way to broaden your story and increase the conflict is to use more than one antagonist. In my book *The Pact*, three women share the minor antagonist character alongside the primary antagonist character, a drug-dealing cold-blooded killer. So, even though they might not be the primary antagonists, we tend not to dislike them as much as we hate the main antagonist. Supporting characters serve one purpose: to develop the protagonists. They aren't just background noise because each supporting character gets to put up some resistance to the protagonists.

For example, in *The Standing People*, Howard Watson has gotten his butt kicked royally, and his supporting character, CIA Officer Liling Xu saves his hide. I won't tell you how; you have to read the book. <https://joannfastoff.com/the-standing-people/>

Cut down your list of secondary characters so that each is entirely different from any other character in the story. Each figure should be defined uniquely, and by the way, you need to give each secondary character a different name. So forget the names Maria and Mary and Jimmy and Johnny. It won't work. In my first book, *The Gordian Knot*, I couldn't think of any name to use besides George. And that didn't help my editor when figuring out which George is which George. So I had multiple George's in my story. You won't see it because she caught the duplicates.

If you need help with names, there is a great website called www.behindthename.com. The website will state where a name originates and possibly any meaning. You might not think this is important, but it is, especially if you're dealing with a foreign name or word you like and it sounds good. I always thought the first name Howard was solid, and it didn't hurt that I had a massive crush on a guy named Howard in high school. So I looked up the name Howard, the surname of a British noble family. So I was safe.

Another thing is to try not to disrespect people because you like how a name looks and sounds. Look it up before you try it because you might have a Jewish character, and you give that Jewish character a Palestinian name for victory. I don't think that's going to work.

You want your secondary character to be liked or disliked by your reading audience. If they're hated, your audience will read them more, but probably only in that one story. The secondary character is the person that runs with you and has your back. So in my Howard Watson mysteries, it's Tim Yamamoto and Ahmad Waverly.

The protagonist is the character whose story we're following. In Thomas Harris' book *The Silence of the Lambs*, Clarice Starling is the protagonist, and Jack Crawford, her FBI boss, is considered the secondary character. Of course, Dr. Lecter is the primary antagonist, and Buffalo Bill is the secondary antagonist. Does the supporting character always agree with the protagonists? No.

The Silence of the Lambs movie is two hours long, but Dr. Lecter's character is only in it for 16 minutes. Sixteen minutes. He is in one-eighth of the movie but leaves a considerable impression. Despite his brief appearances, he is a solid supporting character for Clarice Starling. Supporting characters are a big deal. Without any supporting characters, our main characters would fall flat because they'd be alone. And as I say, no one is successful on their own, and no one goes down in flames on their own.

The supporting character, whether an antagonist or a positive character, is needed, especially in print. In Callie Khouri's screenplay, *Thelma and Louise*, Thelma is the protagonist, and Louise, although older and wiser, is the supporting character. Thelma is a dynamic character. So in the film, look at how she grows. When we talk about supporting characters, think about your best friend. Think about your supporting character. Do you want people to like your supporting character? Do you want them to like you? Do you want people to like your supporting character more than you? No. But you want them to be enthused about them. The supporting character will help you, and that's the whole point of support. Supporting character is a much better word than secondary character because the secondary character can show up for a few minutes and leave an unbelievable impression on you.

Balancing Humor and Drama

A man walks into a bookstore. "Where is the self-help section?" he asks the clerk. She shrugs and replies, "If I tell you, won't that defeat the purpose?" - Anonymous

Humor is a funny thing. Everyone knows what humor is, but people have yet to learn exactly how it works. Humor is considered by most as something funny, comical, or amusing. When writing, humor is best used only in fiction or satire. Not so. But while we think of comedy as exaggeration or fabrication, effective humor can be just as much about engaging readers by taking them to someplace they don't expect to go, like choosing images or words that make readers smile without even knowing why. And guess what, folks? A smiling reader pays attention and is eager to read on.

Now *Netflix* produces *Orange is the New Black*. It's an uncomfortable program due to its awkward subject - women in prison. Can we laugh at this? Of course, but we should remember that this is a drama. However, the drama makes the story more potent because of the comic moments.

The fact that life in prison can be funny makes the tragedies of these women's lives painful and more haunting. But even if your subject is serious, the subtle use of humor can ease tension and provide a break from difficult moments. My characters use satirical humor a lot. Why? First, they take after my friends, family, and me. I always use satire for comic relief.

In *The Standing People*, a dark tale about illegal logging and human trafficking, FBI Special Agent in Charge Howard Watson has just gotten his butt kicked (again) by Chinese mercenaries, holding 30 young Chinese girls against their will. These girls will be later sold in a human trafficking arrangement. Howard has been anxiously waiting for his Chinese CIA ally to show her face and help him out of the situation. When she finally shows up, Howard asks, "Xu, what took you so long?" She replies, drolly, "Laundry." Let this sink in.

The goal of adding some humor to a writing project is about something other than becoming the next Dave Barry or Wanda Sykes (unless that's your goal). The goal is to improve your writing using all the available tools, including humor. So how do we use it correctly?

We can use it by sharing funny stories we've heard other people tell, whether they're embarrassing, slapstick, or "peeing on yourself" funny. You can use these as scenes to lighten your story and make readers laugh. How? By describing something you witnessed, and that made *you* laugh out loud.

By the way, try using real people as the basis for comedic characters because whether it's a goofy cousin, a bad-tempered coworker, or a friend who seems forever derailed by bad luck, you can draw from their personalities or things that happen to them as material for funny moments. Now, personally speaking, my family members will frequently say, "Don't say too much around JoAnn because you just might find it in a book." What can I say?

A humorous *tone* in writing is similar. Tone and writing are conveyed by both the choices of words and the story's narrator. You know the saying, "Sometimes it's not what you say, but how you say it." Now in *The Smoke Ring*, Howard Watson asks a very smart-alecky CIA officer in a crowded restaurant how he always manages to get a table, and the CIA officer answers, "I don't know, Carmen, I guess."

What about Mark Twain's famous line, "The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated"? And, of course, Police Chief Roy Scheider's character in the movie *Jaws*? "We're going to need a bigger boat." Understanding humor is one way of getting to the core of what it is to be human. The use of satirical humor can make reading more attractive to the audience. Breaking up the tension with awkward comments can be a fun character trait. I want to think so. But you know, as an author, you can use satirical humor to help develop a character. My aim is only to make people smile. It is a gentle reminder to take life less seriously and to evoke a smile.

There are two other types of satire – *Juvenalian* satire and *Menippean* satire. Trust me, these two bad boys deal only with personal attacks, which would be sarcasm, and that's not my style. Humor releases tension for characters and the audience or reader when things get too heavy or overwhelming. Throwing in a little humor releases that tension. A lot of the classics do this. Many films also make great use of this, ranging from *Casablanca* to *Diehard*. *Casablanca* is a dark story draped around a past romance and the current rise of Nazism. The exchange between Police Captain Renault and American Expatriate nightclub owner Rick Blaine goes like this:

Renault: "What in heaven's name brought you to Casablanca?"

Rick: "My health. I came to Casablanca for the waters."

Renault: "The waters. What waters? We're in the desert!"

Rick: "I was misinformed."

Diehard is a dark action story centered on an NYPD Detective John McClain, who arrives in Los Angeles, intending to reconcile with his estranged wife at the Christmas party of her employer. McClain immediately becomes a lone hero fighting overwhelming odds against German terrorists. Who can ever forget McClain's character exclaiming to bad guy Hans Gruber via walkie-talkie after killing one of Grubers' henchmen, "Yippy Kai Yay M-effer!" Remember that? Of course, you do. And then, in the same film, Sergeant Al Powell remarks on seeing Hans Gruber falling to his death from the building, "Oh, I hope that is not a hostage." The point is that both stories are dark, and humor is thrown in to ease the exhaustion that the reader and viewer are filled with up to this point. If you want your characters to ring true to life, you must splash some humor on them. You don't need to sprinkle it for every character, but you do need to do it for at least one but several are better.

Another example is a novella by Mark Twain in which his brother was building a road with other construction workers when a charge of dynamite went off prematurely, blowing him high into the sky. When the poor man came down far from the work site, he was docked half a pay. Why? "For being absent from his place of employment."

What other types of satirical humor are there? Farce. In the movie *Nine to Five*, three female secretaries decide to get revenge on their chauvinist and sexist boss by abducting him for three weeks and running the business themselves.

Weekend at Bernie's shows fun-loving salespeople invited by their boss, Bernie, to stay the weekend at his posh beach house. Little do they know that Bernie is the perpetrator of a fraud they've uncovered, and Bernie has arranged to have them killed, but the plan backfires, and Bernie is killed instead. The colleagues decide not to let a little death spoil their vacation, and they pretend Bernie is still alive, leading to unbelievable hi-jinks.

Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life* is told through multiple sketches and songs and the parts of life covering birth, growing up, middle age, organ transplants, old age, and death.

Another form of humor deals with Romance. In Kevin Kwan's book *Crazy Rich Asians*, a man meets a woman; the man is crazy rich, and the woman must contend with this..and the man's mother.

In co-writer Eddie Murphy's screenplay, *Boomerang*, a ladies' man meets a woman who is just like him and gets a taste of his medicine.

In Kevin Bisch's screenplay, *Hitch*, a dating coach faces romantic setbacks when his proven romantic techniques fail to work on a tabloid reporter.

In Nora Ephron's screenplay, *When Harry Met Sally*, college graduates share a contentious car ride from Chicago to New York, arguing whether men or women can still be friends without sex. So they attempt to be friends without having sex, becoming an issue between them.

Another variety of humor is called Black or Dark Comedy. These stories take a heavy, controversial, disturbing, or generally off-limits subject matter and treat it humorously. For instance, writers Joel and Ethan Coen's *Fargo* is the story of a car salesman in Minneapolis who gets into massive debt and is so desperate for money that he hires two thugs to kidnap his wife. This is only the beginning.

Martin McDonagh's Oscar-winning script, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, is a dark story of a traumatized mother seeking justice for her murdered daughter. After seven months and no arrests, she puts up three roadside signs to provoke the Ebbing Police Chief into action.

And then there's Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds*. In the first year of Germany's occupation of France, an Allied Officer assembles a team of Jewish soldiers to commit violent acts of retribution against the Nazis, including taking their scalps.

Dark comedies.

Humor is necessary because as dark as you can get, even in a horror flick, you can see all kinds of funny things.

Griffin Dunne, Director of *Practical Magic* said. "When I did *American Werewolf in London*, people were really upset that there were laughs in a horror movie. Now you can't make a horror movie without getting laughs."

Mel Brooks' *Frankenstein* - that's a dark story. Add some humor: two people outside a door; one is a woman. Cut to the visual of two giant knockers on the door. The man knocks on the door and

says simultaneously, looking at the woman, "Wow, large knockers." Of course, she thinks he's talking about her, and she smiles. That visual releases a lot of tension, but always be mindful that what some people consider humor, some people do not.

#

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

1. Once you've got a general idea of the kind of book you want to write, you need to ask yourself this question first...
2. "Point of View" is who telling the story?
3. What are the four types of characters?
4. Even if your subject is a serious one, the subtle use of humor can both ease tension and provide what?

CHAPTER TWO

MAINTAINING MOTIVATION

Your book is waiting to be finished, but you've hit the valley of funk and don't know how to climb out.

Here are two words you don't want to hear - writer's block.

You don't want to hear it because writer's block might result from a lack of inspiration, time, or ideas. So the question is, how do we maintain motivation?

You've heard it all before. *Seven tips to stay motivated when writing a book. Five Bulletproof Strategies for Writers. Nine tips for getting started and staying motivated.* The universe wants to help you out. That's why there are so many books on motivation. You just got to pick up one, and if you read the manual entirely, you'll probably get motivated by the end.

Motivation is derived from the word *motive* in the English language. It means a need that requires satisfaction. The highest order of needs is for self-fulfillment, including recognition of one's full potential and the opportunity for creativity.

A motive is a reason for other people's emotions, actions, willingness, and goals.

Make sure that the goal is your own. There's nothing like working on someone else's goal; it ain't gonna work no matter how hard you try. It's already hard to accomplish your goal; why would you want to work on somebody else's? C'mon.

Maintaining motivation can become an unbelievable obstacle in your writing career. You should be thrilled that you can reduce to writing your thoughts, ideas, and challenges, even if they sound corny or illogical to others. But as a writer, you must be realistic and recognize that you are swimming against the tide. And what makes up the tide? Family, most with good intentions. Friends, most with good intentions. Other writers; maybe not. And *you* because *you* don't know how to get out of your way.

As Red said in Stephen King's novella, *Shawshank Redemption*, "Either you get busy living, or you get busy dying." So let's talk about living and how to stay motivated. I always tell people, let's start by creating something small, like small writing goals. Like, write 100 words a day.

That's only one page. And you can set goals like that because, after 365 days, you have a 365-page *something*. You don't have to know what it is, but it's something, all right? You'll set your mind to it by taking small steps consistently, and you can do anything you want. You're going to achieve your goal.

First, stop listening to the naysayers because you can achieve anything you set your mind to attain. No matter the challenge, the tough get going — plan on falling again and again and again. However, plan on getting up. Make friends with people who encourage and challenge you to achieve your goals. Listen to soothing music. On *YouTube*, listen to Mozart, Brahms, Ravel, and Bach. They offer endless hours of motivational music just for people who are reading and writing.

It would help if you spent some time outdoors. Remember out..doors? Another thing is to read books by authors you admire. Another way to generate involvement is by giving your full attention to your actions. This is called focus. This is my definition of focus: "Act like you're motivated. Pretty soon, you will be. Step away from the light. Drink a glass of water. Take a walk, shower, bath, take some time away from the computer, work in a different location, or try a different writing method."

When I started feeling pitiful about my writing funk, I felt incredibly blessed that my fingers worked. I feel especially blessed that I have access to the internet, which allows me to find the information I need quickly. And I feel incredibly blessed to have access to the stories of people who have already achieved what I'm trying to accomplish. Get busy living. Consider your writing mentors or role models and if you'll ever meet or speak to them. I've never met William Shakespeare (even though my kids think I'm old enough to have met him), nor have I met James Baldwin or Alice Walker, but I have met Walter Mosley and Sara Paretsky, who were very encouraging.

Try to read encouraging things by some of the authors you admire or who are your role models. Ask a friend or spouse to read the first chapter of your novel and discuss it with you. And if they don't feel up to it, try to get them to train for the Avon 39 Walk with you and see if they don't jump at discussing a little thing like your novel. Whatever the reason..begin. You can delegate the minutia to any and everybody, but begin.

You have to expect obstacles; we Christians call them Satan. Say to the obstacle, "What took you so long?" Overcoming obstacles is part of the process of reaching your goals. If you didn't have any challenges and just went through literary life like a breeze, you couldn't possibly understand how blessed you are to know that you've created and produced something so terrific that obstacles got in your way to stop you from being successful.

Dreams are a funny thing. Find someone else with a goal they're trying to achieve and motivate them to keep going. If you have a few coins, take a weekend off, and go to a warm climate with a beach. Sit under a beach umbrella with your favorite author, JoAnn Fastoff (smile).

Another thing, stop editing as you're writing. Save the editing for the end; otherwise, you'll lose steam. When you're feeling blocked, make sure you specify the time that you'll come back to writing. Please give yourself a deadline and cling to it. Steal other people's writing ideas *only for a while*, but that's to help you find your way. (I try not to do it because literary heroes have shown me what it's like to go your way). Change in your environment might be all you need to jumpstart your motivation. Again, try writing in a different room, go outside, or take a cold shower. You'd be surprised what a cold shower can do to your creativity gene. Set the bar low and write what you can, but don't stay low too long.

The late, gifted, creative writer Maya Angelou once said she was in a writing funk. "What I try to do is write, then write for two weeks, 'the cat sat on the mat.' Now that might be the most boring and awful stuff, but I try. When I'm writing, I just write".

Mark Twain said, "The secret of getting started is breaking your overwhelming tasks into small, manageable tasks and then starting on the first one."

Ernest Hemingway said, "The best way is always to stop when you are going good and when you know what will happen next. That way, your subconscious will work on it all the time. But if you think about it consciously and worry about it, you will kill it, and your brain will be tired before you start."

Some argue that writer's block isn't real and is just an excuse to use when we'd procrastinate rather than work on our writing projects. However, I am from the camp that writer's block is real; otherwise, they wouldn't have a name for it, would they? But you can't let it stop you. If you say you want to write, you can't let it stop you.

Franz Kafka wrote in his journal, "How time flies; another ten days and I have achieved nothing." He didn't succumb to it.

John Steinbeck, one of my literary favorites, wrote to one of his friends experiencing writer's block. "Forget your generalized audience in writing; your audience is one single reader. I have found that sometimes it helps to pick out one person, whether it's a real or imagined person and write to that one person."

And lastly, Toni Morrison wrote, "When I talk to students, I tell them one of the most important things they need to know is when they are at their best creatively, they need to ask themselves, what does the ideal room look like? Is there music? Is there silence? Is there chaos outside, or is there serenity outside? What do I need to release my imagination?"

You have two possible endings in your book. How do you stay motivated to finish the novel?
You're the one involved in the dance. Which end makes better sense to your story?

How long is too long to be in a writer's funk?

Two months. After that, you believe your naysayers. Write something, anything, write, right? Sometimes you need to learn how to proceed because what you've written thus far doesn't make complete sense. And then you have to stop, which is very logical. Or, you know, when you get to a point at which you know exactly how it's supposed to end (that muddled middle), and the story becomes something else. Take a break, walk, get a cup of coffee, turn your computer off, return to it the next day, dream about it, and do whatever you must. But if you say, "I want to be a writer," write.

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Five Reasons NOT to Quit

Writing is a lot of work. It isn't impossible, but it takes time and God; it needs a lot of focus. So you know, if you have a family, if you have a full-time job, if you have children, if you have elderly parents, if you have an ill spouse or a partner, writing at this time might not be the right

time for you. You won't be able to capture all your focus because all your focus is on all those other things. Okay, but in case you say this is your time, let me tell you, these are my five reasons not to quit.

Number 5 -

You are the race. Refrain from comparing yourself to others who have already succeeded in writing. I am not James Baldwin or Alice Walker, or Shakespeare. And you know what? That's okay because I am JoAnn Fastoff, and I, too, have something to say. I have a lot of information to impart. Do I care that more than 50,000 people don't know my name? Yep. But I'm still plugging along. That won't stop me from writing and helping you out. Some authors you know very well were discovered, and I say we discovered, in their fifth or 10th book. However, they continued and fought for their success. If you expect to be the best seller a week after publishing your book, don't start writing. It won't happen. And that's when the authors quit.

Number 4 - Patience and Resilience as two biggies.

There is a process for my writing. I love to write. When my house is empty, I sit at my computer with a cup of coffee or a cup of tea or a glass of wine, and I always read again, the last chapter I wrote. I always look at my outline, and then I attempt to write the next section. I try not to edit as I go along. You know, sometimes I get in a funk, I get up, I take a cold shower. Remember that shower gene? Everybody's got one. Okay, it's something about a cold shower that, I don't know, brings it to the surface.

The myth of the starving artist is a dangerous one and should not be romanticized, even a little. Do I want to quit writing because I haven't made money I envisioned myself making in my so-called second career? Hell yes. But it hasn't stopped me from writing. The reality is that most authors have to work hard for years before they see any success. And success takes a lot of work. A lot of writers sweated to get where they are so that you know their name, but many times they faced the decision to quit or not. I know you don't believe that because they're so famous, but they didn't start big. You also have to consider why are you writing? Because you enjoy it or because you want to be rich? Money ain't gonna appear overnight and not ever without a lot of work, no matter how your book gets published.

Please note: you need marketing. It is vital. You will quickly discover that it takes more time to market your book than it does to write it or edit it, and that is why many authors would rather quit writing than spend time arguing, okay?

Number 3 - Accept what you believe is a failure and move on. Remember, I told you I received 44 "No" letters from literary agents? You have to persevere. You have got to say to yourself, "If this is a failure, okay, then I've hit bottom."

Hey, I hit bottom starting. Now let's move on.

Too often, authors think the reviewers know best, and then they quit. Just because some reviewers didn't like your work doesn't mean you should stop writing unless you want to. Remember, we're talking about writing, not performing heart surgery. It's not that serious. And stepping away does not mean that you're quitting. It merely says you're fashioning a more meaningful and honest assessment of your work. Think about it this way: who else in your household is paying the rent or mortgage or making the car payments and insurance? If it's only you, you should check other outlets around writing that can be deemed more financially beneficial. Here is a list of the ten most popular types of writing jobs without being a novelist: Blogging, copywriting, medical journalist, technical, freelance, content, resume, grant, and proposal writing. They're all writing jobs. Consider a career as a communications director, speechwriter, screenwriter, columnist, book editor, and public relations specialist. A good friend of mine is a translator. That might sound boring to some of you, but guess what? This side hustle of hers pays her mortgage.

Author and Nobel prize winner T. S. Elliott kept his bank clerk job after publishing *The Wasteland*. He subsequently found another day job at a publishing house to bring stability into his life. The famous cartoonist and author Scott Adams kept his job at Pacific Bell for seven years after his comic strip was published and syndicated, meaning all the newspapers carry his strip. Margaret Atwood, Franz Kafka, Harper Lee, Toni Morrison, John Steinbeck, and Kurt Vonnegut kept their day jobs until they hit gold with their literary success. These big names show that when you don't quit your day job right away, you can often achieve a balance of stability and risk that pays off.

Number 2 - You have to be remarkable and not mediocre. Only some reviewers are going to like your writing. You can only please some of them. And unfortunately, the negative reviews are the ones that stick in our brain. I believe some of my "bad reviews" have helped me tremendously. I don't like them, but I keep them because bad reviews come with the territory. When I wrote my first novel, *The Gordian Knot*, I didn't know that seven books would follow. And when *The Gordian Knot* was sitting on my bookcase staring at me, I thought one book might be considered a fluke. Then my character talked to me and made me realize I had other stories to tell. I took the chance. So now it's a series. Imagine that. Later I was granted the opportunity to meet one of my literary heroes, Walter Mosley, who told me, "Work your character until he's tired."

You are the race. You are your competition — nobody else. If you've ever golfed, or if you've ever shot pool, you know that you're playing against the course or the table, not the other player. You are the race. You have to have patience because if you think your book is going somewhere tomorrow and published today, think again. Stick with your job; stick with what you do best. The money will come, okay? The product is what's needed.

Accept what you believe is a failure and move on. Some can't move on. That's probably part of your life. Be remarkable and not mediocre. Don't do anything half-ass. It's not so much about the content you're writing about; it's about being half-ass telling that story. Be remarkable. Not mediocre. Look at your manuscript twice; cross the T's; dot the I's.

Number 1 - This is the hardest thing for new writers to absorb thoroughly, and I can't be more straightforward. Believe in you. Now. Maybe you should ask yourself, "Do I have something to say?" This makes writing easier. It isn't easy when you have buckled under the naysayers around you telling you it can't be done. It can't work. It's not a good idea. Too much dialogue, too little story, too little book, not enough long words, not enough big words, blah, blah, blah. But if you're persevering, you finally show up, and you, the you you know, the courageous, the persevering, the blessed you, will finish the book, the play, the mini-series, or the film, okay? It's beneficial to start with something real. Shakespeare said, "If you write what you know, you could write forever."

How to deal with rejection? If you quit writing because your work was "rejected," you're just looking for an excuse to stop writing. Everybody gets rejected in some form daily (ask any man).

Now, if most of the reviewers come up with the same critiques about your work, you might want to tweak your stuff a bit but continue believing in yourself. If you believe in yourself, you don't have to worry about anybody else believing in you because they will believe in you because you believe in yourself.

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WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

1. What are the two words you don't want to hear?
2. Who said “How time flies; another 10 days and I have achieved nothing?”
3. Overcoming what is part of the process of reaching your goals?
4. Five reasons not to quit – what is #1?
5. Why do you need marketing?

CHAPTER THREE

EDITING

If you have to ask why you need an editor...you need an editor.

DONALD EVANS is the author of the novels *Good Money After Bad* and *Off-White Christmas* and editor of *Cubby Blues: 100 Years of Waiting until next year*. He has been listed four times as a New City Lit - 50 Who Really Book in Chicago.

Don founded the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame in 2010. As the Executive Director provides:

- Educational programming.
- Mounting literary exhibits and events.
- Collaborating with other literary and arts groups, and most notably.
- Leading the planning and production of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame.

He also plans the annual induction at the Fuller Award ceremonies. Don lives outside Chicago with his son, Dusty, and wife, Margaret.

JoAnn Fastoff: What are we talking about when we say editing?

Donald Evans: What we're talking about is making a book better in the different categories of proofreading, editing, critiquing, revising... they've really become part of the same thing in the computer age. There used to be a time when people were typing on typewriters and when you would create a manuscript and then after the manuscript was done, you would start to use your red pen, cross out words, make changes, notes in the margin, etcetera. Now there are all different ways you can do that, but in general that's what an editor does. If you're talking about an outside editor for your work, an editor will carefully read the manuscript and they will, line by line, page by page, evaluate how well it's working.

So the real advantage of an editor is somebody who will try to see inside the author's vision and then on the author's terms, try to figure out and identify areas that the author may not have thought of or perhaps the author already thought of it, but it's another stage in the process of trying to make it better.

JF: Why is professional editing important?

DE: Well, it's important because as an author there's a tendency for people to think and want to think about being the singular artist of a creation of a book or a story. There are lots of people

that will support that in the end. The reason why there are other people to read a story, to give input on a story, to edit a story, to proofread it is because an author lives with the story in their head. Whatever their process is, they might read it aloud to themselves. They might read it over and over to themselves, but whichever it is, they've been living with that story for a very long time or for however long it took them to write it. When you live with something and get that close to it, you don't have the most objective perspective. So your perspective on your own writing on your own book, on your own vision, on your own talent, is probably the least objective.

The most important thing is for you to be able to have confidence in your own ability and in your own work and to know what's working and what's not. Because if you can't do that you're not gonna ever be a great writer. However, you're also the least qualified to judge that in the end because you're too close to it. And so an editor's really important because part of the editor's job is that the editor becomes a teammate. In essence, they're invested in making sure this is the best book possible. Now, if it's an editor at a publishing house they're invested in making sure this book is ready for the public and will sell books and be a success. If it's an editor like me, I'm invested in making sure that you get to the final finish line and make this the best book possible. But as your editor, as your team mate, I'm investing in making sure this is the best quality that you can do as the author. And I'm going to feel like it's my duty then to try to lead you through the process with direct, honest advice and criticism. And it's hard to get that. It's hard to get that if you don't have an editor who's invested in the project.

JF: How often do you know a client prior to editing his or her work?

DE: People come to me because either they know me or know of me, or, they've been referred to me by somebody else. I've done a lot of different kinds of editing. I've edited for newspapers and I've edited print, literary journals. I do a lot of private editing. I'm frankly better at critiquing and giving some very specific and direct advice and overviews on the way the manuscript's working and not working and identifying opportunities. But when people come to me as an editor I would say probably half the time I know them and sometimes I know them very well.

JF: What are the major mistakes a writers make?

DE: It depends on the kind of writer you're talking about. I often get work from younger writers, not necessarily younger in age, but writers who don't have as much experience. They might be

working on their first full length book. One of them is false starts, meaning that when I start to read the manuscript nothing in those first sequences is doing much for me as a reader. This is what I'm going through the first time and I'm just reading it for my own edification and enjoyment. And often there'll be a paragraph, two paragraphs, a page, or 10 pages which include a lot of backstory that wander here and there. And then finally I'll reach a moment in the manuscript where I think, okay, this is where it starts. This is where the actions to character and so forth start to really interest me. And I think the reason for that big mistake is that, again, this comes back to where we now work. Nearly all writers now work on a computer. I know a few that still don't, but, very few.

You want the rhythm, the tone, the voice and everything to be clicking because of the reader. You don't want to labor over a lot of digressions. So that's another big mistake that writers make, especially younger writers, is they're trying to just get everything in there because it's their first book or second book. And they're like, Oh, here's something I want to put in there. Save that and put it in another book. You know, it doesn't belong on this story.

JF: How do you price your work?

DE: Most of the people that I work with come to me because somebody referred them to me. Or I know them. And so I'll look at the manuscript and generally I can either give a per page price or what works most better for most writers there. Most writers don't have much of a budget for this. You know, that's what makes it a hard business for somebody like me is that, you know, there's not very many writers that have a big pile of money to invest in this. I want to do it right so what I wind up doing is giving a whole project and then spreading the payments out over the course of our work together.

So let's say it's a 150 page manuscript of JoAnn's and for me to do this, I'm going to read it three times and we're going to communicate. We usually meet in person if possible. There's lots of times I might say, all right, so for this manuscript I'll critique it and edit it and we'll meet and all the other things for let's say \$1,000. And then I'll say, why don't we try to finish this up in two months and you can give me \$300 a month for the next three months. And a lot of it is based on the fact that I know, because I'm a writer, that this is a big investment and one that only occasionally pays off in terms of financial return. Still, the objective is to make a better book or a better story.

JF: Is there a way that you keep a writer's voice intact? How'd you do that?

DE: As an editor it's up to the author to make all of the changes. The author can see exactly what I did and then I'll usually have a comment about why I did it. And that way they can either accept or reject those changes. The reason why I read someone's manuscript so many times is because I have to hear the author's voice as well as the author does. If I can't do that, then I'm not going to be able to do a very good job editing, because I might have an issue with the voice. That's one of the decisions that an author makes is how to shape their voice and how to define the tone and point of view. But if I have issues with the voice, that's a conversation I'm going to have with the author and I'm going to try to articulate why the voice is a problem.

JF: Can you explain why book editing takes much more of your time than anything else?

DE: Many magazine articles will be a thousand words, maybe 5,000 for a really long feature. When you start to get into a manuscript that's 50,000, 100,000 words, then everything's connected. And sometimes in journalism, the story or the articles, well, it's connected, but there's different parts to it and things can be removed and put back and chopped and so forth. And you still get generally what you're after with a book.

Kurt Vonnegut once said that “every sentence should be doing not just one thing, but it should be doing three or four or five things.” And this is difficult.

Donald Evans - Chicago Literary Hall of Fame - www.aim.org

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WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

1. Don Evans founded the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame in what year?
2. What does Don mean when he says “false start?”
3. You want the rhythm, the tone, and what else to be clicking because of the reader?
4. Why does Don read someone's manuscript many times?
5. Besides false starts, name another mistake writers make.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

The five traditional publishing houses in the US are Hachette, Harper Collins, Harcourt Brace, Penguin/Random House, and Simon&Schuster. Those are called the Big Five. You need a literary agent to get into one of those houses today. You didn't need an agent in the 20th Century, but now you do. So many different people are writing today (read: people of color, women, LGBTQ) that the traditional publishing houses want to make sure that they get the *right kind* of writers, not people of color or anyone else that has something positive to say that's beyond the traditional white male diatribe.

First, you need a literary agent to get into a traditional publishing house, and to woo a literary agent you will need to write a query letter. And that query letter is to seduce the agent into buying you.

Secondly, the query letter gives the literary agent an idea of what you're writing about and whether or not you can write, whether or not they want to take you on as a client, whether or not they think that this book can sell. And whether or not they like you and this book can sell. And do you have a great story? You don't have to be topical because, you know, period pieces are not topical. You always have to have a great story. You may want to sell yourself as much as possible in that query letter, but you want to sell quickly. That means you don't want to go ad nauseam about yourself. What about your manuscript? What about what it is that you're selling? The agent will buy you because your first few paragraphs tell them everything about you and why you're passionate about your project.

You want to ensure that you find the right agent when you write this query letter to a literary agent. You want to avoid going to an agent that only takes technical writers if you're not a technical writer. That's not the agent for you, and it will result in you getting this little note.

"Thank you so much for submitting your manuscript at this time. This is not the type of product we're representing." You're going to embarrass yourself, and you're going to piss off the literary agent because now they're going to take time to tell you if you had done your homework, you would know that you shouldn't be writing to them.

If you're a romance novelist, you want to look up literary agents that represent romance writers. Or if you're a woman and you want to talk to literary agents that only take women as clients, or a guy and the literary agent only deals with men and sports, and you're writing about sports, and you're a man, that's you. That's the kind of agent you want to get - someone who's relevant and pertinent to what you are writing.

A traditional publishing house pays you in advance. It can be anywhere from \$5,000 to 500,000 or if you're a Michelle Obama or Barack Obama, \$1 million in advance. But the traditional house also pays for your marketing, editing, proofreading, formatting, picking the cover, and publicity. They significantly influence your book into various avenues of exposure, e.g., bookstores, magazines, radio, television, etc.

When you get a little quarterly check that might be \$22.19, remember you got a \$5,000 advance. In the next quarter, you might get \$2.19 again, but the traditional publishing houses will send you on little tours. And those tours could include the Barnes and Noble stores or even Amazon stores, and you can make your money at those stores too. Also, you can buy your inventory, and 100% of any profit is yours. Plus you'll get a discount on the house. The traditional publishing house also pays for your ISBN and barcode on the back of your book.

The ISBN (International Standard Book Number) is 10 to 13 digits with a bar code and is always on your book's back. It says your book is unique, and the number is like having a social security number because nobody else has this book number. If your book comes in hardcover or paperback or it's an Ebook, they have three different ISBNs, and the publisher pays for that too.

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WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

1. Name the Big Five traditional publishing houses
2. To woo a literary agent, what do you need?
- 3.** What does ISBN mean?

SELF-PUBLISHING

Self-publishing is an avenue of exposure geared toward people who traditional publishers say they don't have time for "now." So I was one of them, you know, not famous. But self-publishing says, "You are JoAnn Fastoff, and you are a unique writer."

With a good story, you must know how to get it out there in front of people. You still have to know the kinds of exposure that you need, and you cannot take it personally when someone tells you no. I want to avoid taking stuff personally when no one knows me. Somebody can't do anything personally to you if they don't know you. So I received 44 "no" letters from literary agents. They said no; for whatever reasons, they said no. At first, I took it personally. It was dangerous to my system, and then I realized it wasn't a rejection. I wasn't being rejected. I was just being told no. Where there's a "no," if you stick with it and persevere, there will be a yes.

I stuck with it. I persevered, and Vantage Press came through and got me into all of the Border stores in the United States. I was so thrilled. I was jumping for joy because I felt like I had made it. And then nine months later, Borders Stores went bankrupt, packed up, and closed. I thought I was going to die. That was my meal ticket. That was my road to the Pulitzers. After Borders Stores closed, Vantage Press said, "We don't know if we're going to be able to sell the rest of your inventory that we have in our warehouse. So we're going to send the balance of the books to you, and we're going to say good luck."

That meant that I was on my own. So Vantage Press sent me 400 books in their warehouse that they said they couldn't sell. I did take that personally.

Guess what happened? I suddenly realized that those 400 books were mine to sell at 100% profit. Do you hear me? Lemonade, and I love lemonade.

For a price, Self-publishing will publish your book and help you pick the cover, or you could choose your cover, and they will format it and they will pay for your ISBN. Everything else is ala carte, meaning that marketing, formatting, proofreading, editing, and publicity come out of

your wallet. That's what self-publishing is – YOURSELF publishing your book. The publishing house is just printing the book, formatting it, and picking your cover. If you know someone in marketing, a professional editor, and someone that knows art and can help you pick out a cover, hire them because they'll be much cheaper than any self-publishing house rate.

That's where self-publishing houses make their money - with all those ala carte prices. But, self-publishing houses are becoming unbelievable competition for traditional publishing because they have scooted in where traditional publishing has blocked out women, people of color, and LGBTQ writers. Those are niche writers. Some of these writers are award-winning, some are bestsellers, and some have throngs of fans.

I hired a professional editor before going through BookBaby, who formatted my manuscript. I sent them various ideas about the cover for my book, and they sent me back, based on what my story was about and what I said, and came up with my 99 percent approval. It would be best to think about all these people you need in your literary life. Otherwise, you will be spending around \$8,000 to get your book published, and it might go nowhere, even with a marketing person, even with it being formatted, and even with editing. But if you have a good story, you at least have a chance.

Once you get an International Standard Book Number, you have a legacy for 99 years. So in your Will, I hope you guys are making a Will - in your Will, put down your ISBN. Whoever you leave your legacy to - your children, grandchildren, spouse, partner, whoever is in your Will, and whatever monies come out of these books forever, you are leaving it to those people.

#

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

1. What does ISBN mean?
2. For a price, what does self-publishing pay for?
3. How long is a book's legacy?

CHAPTER FIVE

QUERY LETTERS/TREATMENTS

Purpose of the Treatment

Similar to a short story, treatments are written to become a screenplay eventually. Told in the present tense, it describes events as they are happening. The Treatment can be created by adapting a novel, a play, or other pre-existing works into a screenplay. Treatment is a short story in the present tense written to become a screenplay with the goal that it will become a film. Controversy surrounds the length of Treatment; some say up to 60 pages, and some say way less. The point of the Treatment is to communicate your story as quickly as possible.

So length without sacrificing the juicy parts is the key here. Remember, the goal is to see your Treatment made into a screenplay, which will eventually be made into a film. A treatment can jumpstart your writing career because it allows you to communicate a screenplay idea in a brief but compelling way. It can also be a powerful creative tool. Remember that a screenplay, unlike a novel, is not a complete form, but it's one of the steps to making a film. There are three ways that producers ask to submit a treatment.

The first way is a **one-page pitch**. How can you do it on one page? You can, okay?

The second way is a **two to five-page document that tells the whole story focusing on the highlights**. So you read this two to five-page document like a short story, and you must remember, it's written in the present tense. It should present the entire story, including the ending. And remember that you need to use some key scenes and dialogue from the screenplay that it's based on.

Another way is a **lengthy document with a script's scene-by-scene breakdown**. Some in the industry consider this an outline and a waste of time because if you're writing a two to five-page document that tells the whole story, focusing on the highlights, you don't need a scene-by-scene breakdown.

What should be in the Treatment? Number one, a working title, and titles are hard to come up with because you can write whatever your title will be, and if somebody buys your script, they will likely change the name. So don't take it personally. Whether creating a new story or writing a treatment based on an existing script, the first step is ensuring your screenplay has a good title.

For example, Jean Shepherd wrote a book and then the screenplay based on the book called *In God, We Trust, all others pay cash*. When the screenplay was bought, the title became *A Christmas Story*.

Another example. The screenplay was initially called *3000*, about the amount paid for a week's worth of personal company. The title was changed to *Pretty Woman* when the script became a film.

Another example. The book was initially written as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, but when Hollywood bought the Treatment it became, of course, *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*.

When you submit the Treatment, you need your name, contact information, and WGA registration number. That's the Writers Guild of America number. Now the Writers Guild of America is two labor unions. One is on the west coast in LA. The other is on the east coast, in New York, and these unions represent TV and film writers as well as employees of television and radio.

The next thing you need is a short Log line. You have to be creative when you do a log line because it's a technique for boiling down the plot line to its core. Whenever you read what you think is a synopsis of a film or television show like, for instance, in a *TV Guide*, those are log lines, and it's usually in one sentence because it's the description of the basic idea of your script. So how many words are in a logline? Usually 25 words or less, but sometimes it's simply impossible to boil down your idea of what you want to show people into 25 words or less because the first draft of a logline can be 40 to 50 words, but remember, it's the first draft.

Here are a few examples of some log lines in movies:

Remember the spaghetti westerns? *A Few Dollars More*

A man with no name and a man with a mission hunt a Mexican bandit for different reasons - **18 words.**

Lean on Me

*A tough principal takes revolutionary measures to clean up a notoriously dangerous inner-city New Jersey high school - **18 words.***

The Godfather

*The aging patriarch of an organized crime dynasty transfers control of his clandestine empire to his reluctant son - **18 words.***

Down to a science, right?

The Help

*An aspiring author during the civil rights movement of the 1960s decides to write a book detailing the African American maid's point of view on the white families for which they work and the hardships they go through daily - **42 words.***

Taxi Driver

*A mentally unstable Vietnam war veteran works as a nighttime taxi driver in New York City, where the perceived decadence and sleaze feeds his urge for violent action while attempting to save a pre-adolescent prostitute in the process - **38 words.***

Sometimes you can't get it down to 25 words, but those are log lines. Another thing in the Treatment is an introduction to your key characters. Putting in the *who*, *why*, *how*, *what*, and *where* would be best. These are all the things that are going to go in the Treatment.

Act One should be one to three paragraphs. This is where you set the scene and you dramatize the main conflicts.

Act Two should be two to six paragraphs, dramatizing how the conflicts introduced in Act One lead to a crisis. So if you remember the "W process in writing," the problem is the top. You go down; you recognize the problem; you go up; you deepen the crisis.

Act Three is one to three paragraphs, and this dramatizes the final conflict and resolution. We're talking about the W Theory. Recognize the problem. Deepen the problem — final conflict resolution.

A SYNOPSIS is a brief description of all the events in your screenplay. We first begin by expanding the logline into a three-chapter story. Here's a logline:

A young FBI cadet must confide in an incarcerated and manipulative killer to receive his help in catching a serial killer who skins his victims.

Yes, Thomas Harris' *The Silence of the Lambs*. When creating a synopsis, you need to start at the end.

Act Three: Clarice Starling catches the killer and saves the senator's daughter. Yeah, how do we work that?

Act One - while still a student in the FBI Academy, Clarice is asked to help on a case. She interviews Doctor Hannibal Lecter, who provides her with clues, but he only provides those once she tells him her backstory. That's how Dr. Lecter's brain works. That's how he becomes manipulative.

Act Two: with Dr. Lecter's help, Clarice can overcome many obstacles and finds the killer's identity.

Act Three: Clarice confronts the killer, saves the senator's daughter, and atones for the lamb's death.

After following this breakdown, you can expand this into a synopsis. So start with act three, then go to act one.

What is a Step Outline or a Beat Sheet?

Same thing – a detailed telling of a story to turn that story into a screenplay for a film. Now the beat sheet, or step outline, briefly details each screenplay scene, often numbered for convenience.

The National Writer's Union is the trade union in the United States for freelance and contract writers. So we're talking journalists, book authors, business and technical writers, poets and web content providers. The Writers Guild of America is a labor union for television, film and radio writers.

Sample movie treatment

<http://www.movieoutline.com/articles/sample-movie-treatment-example-story-synopsis-for-a-film-script.html>

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

1. A Treatment describes what told in the present tense?
2. The first step is to make sure that your screenplay has what?
3. How many words in a logline?
4. A synopsis is a brief description of what?
- 5.** What is another word for a Step Outline?

CHAPTER SIX

CHOOSING A GREAT BOOK COVER

Do you understand design? No? Welcome to the club. You're mistaken if you think a book cover is not essential. They say you can't judge a book by looking at its cover. Well, literarily speaking, you can. The book cover communicates the theme or purpose of your story in an identifiable or distinctive manner.

If twenty authors are writing about trees, each cover must be different. A book cover design is one of the most critical aspects of marketing a book. A successful book must make a reader "feel" things rather than "tell" them something. If the book has maximum impact, then word of mouth is created. And word of mouth is what sells your book. We're talking book covers for self-published authors because, in traditional publishing, the traditional publisher will creatively and financially take care of book covers. Now, of course, you have to agree to what they design because just because they create it and they're paying for it doesn't mean you have to like it.

Now that many writers are taking seriously the need to package and market their books professionally, professional covers are no longer considered beautiful to have; they are necessary because we're talking about the evermore competitive world of bookselling. Once you determine your title, you should move on to designing your book cover. When we talk about creating your book cover, we're talking about you only if you have a design background. We're talking about you working with a designer. Your book cover should send a clear message. You and your designer will work together through revisions to ensure it's 100% suitable for you. Depending on your pickiness, these revisions can take a month, a week, or a year.

Picky is a good word for saying you can't be pleased. The average time frame is three to six weeks for cover and paperback. Not long ago, there was a general theory that book covers were less critical for eBooks because the item isn't a physical book. The rules have changed to apply to bookshops. And they're the same for online retailers. When a person is buying an eBook, that cover is still necessary. Why? Because that's what the buyer sees.

Do I understand design? No, but I do understand what my books are about. And on some level,

hiring a professional with a design background will guarantee better covers composed of elements like fonts and graphics that are pleasing and tell your story in a way that will hook your readers.

Within my *Howard Watson Intrigue* series, there are aspects of design with which I trust my publishing house. It's only sometimes right the first time. And, when you're dealing with a self-publishing house, you have only a couple of times to get it right, especially since you can describe to the designer what your book is about. If you have written a great synopsis, the designer will believe that they know what your book is about even if they have yet to read it, and in many self-publishing houses, they have yet to read it.

One of the reasons is if you already had outside editing, they won't read it, but they will understand your synopsis and what you think that book should look like. Don't compromise on your cover. What's the point of having a great story if your cover is not working for you? You know how they say, "She's just not that into you?" You want your designer to be into you. Your cover is an extension of the hard work you put into writing your manuscript, so think of the cover as art in and of itself.

Sometimes you have to step back if it's necessary. How will the designer get it right if you can't describe your story? If you're talking about romance and the cover comes back with horses running across the plains, I'm not going to believe that it's about romance (unless, of course, you and the horse are standing together, and you have your arm around his neck, and that's a little freaky too). But you have to make sure that your cover is what your book is about. You want to keep that cover from telling everything your book is about, but you want to offer a teaser glimpse. One of the best gifts you can give yourself as you enter the world of self-publishing is the time to find a cover designer who understands design. You want a designer who allows you to weigh in on the images and their composition, who gets your story and the message you want to present to your readers.

Although many books are hitting the market, mainly due to self-publishing, an impressive cover can distinguish between a hit and a flop. When your book is a hit, you elevate a book cover designer in this field. A book design must communicate that the pages within are worth a buyer's time and attention.

Example: Carolyn Keene's *Nancy Drew and The Secret of the Old Clock*. This cover captured your attention and communicated the story.

<https://www.amazon.com/Secret-Clock-Mystery-Nancy-Drew/dp/B00005WSA6>

The spine of the book is also essential. That's because the spine is all a reader can see when placed on a bookshelf. So if you go to some of these self-publishing outlets and your binding looks like it was made in an eighth-grade art class, run. Authors sometimes ruin their stories by adding too much information on the cover of books. The cover must have a hook to keep the reader interested.

The cover of your book should deliver the layout of your story. Great designers will treat your writing like a living thing. Don't laugh. They will. Not only will they treat it like a living thing, but they're also going to allow it to speak for itself. The best book covers have one incredible piece of information that attracts buyers.

Another example: Akimitsu Takagi's *The Tattoo Murder Case* is a beautiful book cover. One incredible piece of information is that this woman has a tattoo on her back, the length of her torso. It's gorgeous, pulls you in, and gives you information that should attract you.

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/211105/the-tattoo-murder-case-by-akimitsu-takagi/>

Another example: Tony Hillerman's *The Shape Shifter*. The cover images are more than just decoration. They should draw your attention by telling the book's story without you needing to turn the first page. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shape_Shifter#/media/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shape_Shifter#/media/File:TheShapeShifter.jpg)

[File:TheShapeShifter.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shape_Shifter#/media/File:TheShapeShifter.jpg)

Let's talk typography. Typography has to do with the fonts, the text, and the lettering. It is merely the art of working with documents to make written language legible, readable, and appealing when it's displayed. How about street signs? Bumper stickers? The type is what pulls you in..right? Here's an industry no-no: a cover should not use more than two fonts.

Go to a bookstore or library and look at the different fonts on the covers of books. Does the cover have anything to do with the story? It should. Another thing, let's talk about the layout. It doesn't matter that you don't know how to layout. You don't know how to paint a house either.

That's why you hire a professional. But you do know if that professional still needs to do the work of a professional. If you're uncertain about your book's design, you need to refer to books already in the market and see the standard for layout.

The font is different; it can be enormous, italicized, and colorful. When you browse some bestsellers in your genre, you'll notice vivid patterns in color schemes, fonts, layouts, and images. But if you go up against what your readers expect in your genre, your book is not going to be able to catch the reader's attention. Hence you'll lose sales. You should get huge sales once the cover is in front of the right targeted readers with a great cover, title, and reader reviews. I can't guarantee that. I can only ensure what I'm saying.

The colors you choose for your cover help create the mood and convey the message you're trying to send. Complimentary colors opposite each other on a color wheel work great together. These colors combine dark and light tints next to each other on the color wheel. They are probably the bestselling books because those colors are psychologically drawing you in. So many bestselling book covers feature a blue and orange design or black, white, and red. Because these colors work well together, and according to the psychological aspect, colors are stimulating, which means energy and cool colors better represent calmness.

Do you know what's the best cover for your book? You wrote the story, right? If you're writing about romance, and you see horses running across a plain, does it have anything to do with your writing? Is it pertinent? Is it irrelevant? My first book, *The Gordian Knot*, is about government intrigue. People have been murdered. The designer and I agreed that there's a bloody hand in this mess, and who's bloody hand is responsible?https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0533148766/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i3

What's the best cover for your book is all about the story. You put so much energy and time into writing the story, and you know precisely the answer. And don't let a designer bamboozle you. If you say no, that's not exactly what you want, tell them what you're looking for.

What is a reasonable price if you pay someone to design a cover for you? What's reasonable is what somebody is willing to take and you're willing to pay. Isn't that what negotiation is all about?

The 75 best book covers of 2018, according to book cover designers <https://lithub.com/tag/nakim/>

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

1. A successful book needs to make a reader "feel" things rather than what?
2. Think of the cover as what?
3. You as an author need a cover designer who ...?
4. Typography has to do with what?

CHAPTER SEVEN

COLLABORATION/CO-WRITING

Writing is a solitary art, but collaborative writing can lighten the load on everybody involved. According to Penn and Parent website, "Collaboration requires thoughtful, regular communication, conflict resolution skills, and a healthy dose of self-awareness. But the benefits can be immense".

You're probably asking me how? Well, you don't have to write all the words. Somebody else can write the words. And you don't even have to write what's next. Somebody else can do that too. So working as a team can ignite your writing spark. Some groups have one person write the first draft, and the next person on the team writes the second draft. Or one person on the team can write the first two drafts, and the second person can do the revisions. It's how you guys work it out—got to have a plan, though. Sometimes, one person can write all the steamy parts of the story, and the other person writes everything around the story.

Many writers enjoy fashioning the first draft, but then it's time for the revisions and bye, bye fun. Another important tip on collaborating is having a partner who keeps you accountable. So on the days you don't feel like writing, perhaps your partner has written some stuff.

I will give you a heads-up on what to dread about collaborating or co-writing. You have got to talk about beforehand who will be in charge of social media, like blogging or Facebook, etc. Who will be in charge of submitting the reviews? Who will be in charge of ordering the champagne when the good reviews start pouring in?

Everybody's not going to like your book. And a collaborator will have different kinds of ideas than you have. That's how you vet somebody. You don't just say hey, JoAnn, I've read your books. Can you and I write about microbiology together? No, because I don't know anything about microbiology. I know everything about the Chicago White Sox, and I certainly know about photography, but microbiology. Nope.

One can be creative, while the other can be revisionist. That's a collaboration. Here are some examples of authors who chose to use a collaborator. Bestselling author James Patterson has been open about hiring writers, but usually someone with some published credits, and he gives them a lengthy Treatment. Remember, Treatments are typically detailed. They're about 60 to 80 pages, and Patterson gives that to a particular writer, and then the intense back and forth begins. Stephen King and Peter Straub collaborated on *The Talisman*. Both of these men were already bestselling authors before they connected.

Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child wrote the *Pendergast Series*. One was a former book editor, and the other was a historian. They combined their interests to create an FBI agent, a modern-day Sherlock Holmes.

Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett collaborated on *Good Omens*, and both are masters of a particular type of cock-eyed British fantasy.

And then, of course, with some help from Deep Throat, one of the most famous collaborations of all time is between Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who penned *All the President's Men*. This book depicted the Watergate Scandal, which compelled President Nixon to resign.

Collaboration is beautiful and beneficial for two like-minded people with the same kind of bent, but they don't have to be twins. One can have a more editing type of background, while the other may have a more creative kind of knowledge. Trust has to be a component.

You will be up against these events as a collaborator, and number one is undoubtedly personality. You got to have personalities that connect. They might say that opposites attract, but for how long? Other problems will occur: competition between partners (read: egos), lack of information and experience, and lack of resources (read: money), especially at the decision-making stage. One or both parties might be resistant to change. A cultural mismatch could occur between writers, including needing more consistency and clarity on roles and responsibilities. Remember, you have to have a plan.

The collaboration will always take longer than you think it will. Because two or three writers are writing together, you'd think it will be quick. You're mistaken. Because of all these things I just mentioned, if you only pay attention to one thing I just listed, pay attention to trust. You have to trust your fellow writers, and you have to believe in yourself. I can't get any clearer.

Whether you call it an outline, a rough idea, or a rough draft, having a plan will be instrumental in ensuring all the collaborators are on the same page. Having a plan will reduce confusion and will overcome egomaniac tendencies. When we talk about outlining a book, outlining a book has a plan, it's setting up your characters; it has the muddled middle filtered out, and it has an ending that makes sense to the beginning of the story.

And then talk about those royalties. Sometimes, when I write, I have a person that writes uncomfortable passages that I cannot write, like love or romance (yuck); it's just not me. But that person does it, and I say, okay, what's the stipend? Sometimes he'll say, "Just put me in the acknowledgments." Are you sure? And he'll say yes. Or he'll say, "I'll take 100 bucks". But it's out front because money is a defining factor in our relationship. And when people say it is not the money, it's the point. The point is the money. Don't be fooled.

Will royalties be split 50/50, 70/30, or 60/40? Go in talking about it. One person, one of the writers, and one of the collaborators could write three or four chapters. The next writer could write two sections. The first writer could come back and write seven episodes, but the other could do the revisions. If you go into that partnership knowing all these things, remember you vetted this collaborator, and you vetted the collaborator because you saw some things in that writer that would go well with your writing.

How Not to Kill Each Other: A Writer's Guide to Collaboration

<https://www.writersdigest.com/online-editor/not-kill-writers-guide-collaboration>

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WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

1. Who did Peter Straub collaborate with on *The Talisman*?
2. What book compelled President Nixon to resign?
3. Having a plan will be instrumental in making sure of what?
4. One can be the creative one while the other can be what?

CHAPTER EIGHT

SECURING AND RECOVERING FROM REVIEWS

Book Reviews

How important are they? Very important to the writer. Let's say you just finished that book you picked up from the bookstore, the library, or online, and you loved it because the story was gripping, the language was terrific, and the characters were well-developed. What's the first thing you do? You go back to the store, the library, or online to see if the author has written anything else. If you're lucky, the author has written something else. If you are fortunate, the author has written a series.

But even though the author has written a book, you forget one crucial thing: if you want to continue to delve into this author or you want to continue to read about this author, you have to do one thing. Do you know what that one thing is?

You have to leave a book review.

How many times have you picked up a newspaper or magazine just to read what the professional reviewers have to say about the best sellers? How often have you listened to or read movie critics' reviews about movies that you should see or stay away from?

Many times you do it all the time.

Why do you read about or listen to these people? You want to ensure that you don't waste your time, especially your money, on a book with little to no plot or depth or the actors sucked. For an author, book reviews can open doors to new and bigger audiences, decreasing the risk to readers that a particular book may be different from what you thought it would be. Book reviews help potential fans become familiar with what a book is about, giving you an idea of whether or not you want to read it. Book reviews give books greater visibility and a higher chance of getting found by new readers.

On some websites, books with more book reviews are more likely to be picked up by potential readers and buyers than books without or with very few book reviews. Books with many book reviews appear to be popular, so it makes sense to be curious about a book that is perceived as

popular. A good number of book reviews can translate into book sales; however, some book reviews can validate the writer's worthiness and establish a writer's reputation. Once validated, people are more likely to want it by joining their peers and buying that book. Books with more book reviews are more likely to be shown to possible readers and buyers than books with very few book reviews.

There are two distinct book review channels. One is Reader Reviewers.

These are reviewers that have already read your book and have no affiliation with any third-party reviewers. Most readers that are book reviewers are considered essential and authentic because they have a specific personal investment. They could be your family, your friends or family of friends, or friends of the family, but they're on the personal side. This works if a person has read your book. Remember, you want them to read your book and not just put a review in just because they like you. You want them to like your product and then like you. Another thing word of mouth is unbelievable marketing for an author. I like a book - then I tell somebody else. That's called an impression. That person tells somebody else, and then there are a lot of book reviews out there that may translate into sales.

The next kind of review is called a Third Party Review.

These reviews are pretty helpful for authors in terms of getting publicity for books. They emanate from various sources like podcasts, blogs, websites, printed or online periodicals, news outfits, magazines, online and printed, and professional publications on book reviews. You need to understand this part. Book reviews provided before publication give the librarians and booksellers a clue as to which upcoming book they should include in their inventory. When you're done with your manuscript, you want to get as many reviews as possible before the book is published. When your manuscript is published, those reviews are in the book already.

Booksellers and librarians will review those reviews and say, "Hmm, pretty good; I think I want this in my inventory." It works because you took the time before publication to get as many kinds of reviewers to look at your manuscript and say, "I like it, or I don't like it."

Most readers trust third-party reviewers because they come with more credibility. This is something that you, as an author, should place high in your book sales process. So when you're

going after a book reviewer, you do the same thing as you did in a query letter. As an author, you want to present your book or manuscript and yourself and do it like you're doing it directly with your audience. Some of the things that you should include in your package are flyers, bookmarks, business cards, press releases, and a bio. And make it brief because all you want is for the reviewer to review your book.

It will be nerve-racking for you to wait for that review, especially when the reviewer says it will take four to six weeks. If it takes four to six weeks, it only means that the reviewer has maybe four to six other books they are reviewing simultaneously. So they try to lend one whole week to your book. Most of these reviewers have a job that pays their rent. So understand that they are reading your book on the way to work, at lunchtime, and in the evening. If they say four to six weeks, trust me, it's seven. And don't sit on your hands waiting. It'll come out all right. Okay?

When you submit your book for review, you will ask for an honest review. This person doesn't know you, so not all book reviews are entirely positive because the reviewer has an obligation to the reader and not to you. This is why authors need to think practically because positive reviews are not always a given. However, positive reviews for your book can increase social media engagement, enhance your author's newsletter, boost visibility, and encourage sales.

Here's how to find the reviewers to help you get the word out.

Only contact reviewers interested in reviewing the type of book you have written. So you want to avoid contacting a reviewer who reviews technical books, and you are a romance author. Does that make sense to you? No? Then don't do it.

Now you have to ask, do they only want an eBook or a printed book? Most reviewers don't like a manuscript. They want either an eBook or a printed book. And then, you must ask them what genre they are currently interested in reading. Just because somebody is a technical writer, that person might say, "I'm going to take a break for a couple of months, and I think that I'm going to review only mystery and intrigue books." That's who you want if you're a mystery and intrigue writer.

This person might typically be a technical writer, but this time this person has taken a break and read mystery and intrigue. Another question to ask, is this reviewer currently accepting new books for review? You have to check out their rules and follow them because they could be taking a break. Write a personalized email to the reviewer that includes all those things I told you above. Your bio will prove vital because it'll come across when you're passionate about your writing. If you say, "I wrote this because I didn't have anything else to do." It'll come across.

Be clear on this. Never, ever offer payment for a review. The book is payment enough, and if you provide compensation for a review, you could not only get the reviewer in trouble but also sully your reputation. If somebody says we charge \$35, forget it. Forget it. There are enough reviewers out there that don't accept the dime.

When you receive the review back, don't comment on the review. If it's terrific, thank you to the reviewer. But usually, you don't need to do that. So if that review is fantastic, that's what they know about you. If the book sucks, that's what they know about you. I will give you some websites at the end of this chapter that might help you get started.

Don't scrap your work based on one person's opinion. You need to check several other views as well. Send your book to three different reviewers, and if they come back with the same review and if it's terrific - you're in. If all three come back with something you need to work on, work on it. But don't base it on one person's review.

www.chicagowrites.org www.librarything.com www.goodreads.com/group
www.authormarketingclub.com www.bookrevieweryellowpages.com

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WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

1. Book reviews give books greater visibility and a higher chance of what?
2. There are two distinct book review channels. One is Reader Reviewers. What is the other?
3. Only contact reviewers who are interested in what?
4. Never, ever, offer what for a review?

CHAPTER NINE

BOOK AWARDS: Yay/Nay

Are Book Awards Necessary?

Some say they are. Some say they're not. Sometimes I say they're not, especially when I'm not winning one. Specific awards hold more pull than others. Still, *all* awards can make a difference to a writer, and winning awards bestows upon an author's credibility. It's an external validation of the quality of our work. Does winning a contest or an award make a difference in a writer's career? Yes, as someone who has won several literary awards, it has made a difference in my career. And becoming a finalist or winning a prize sets my book one notch above everybody else's book that didn't win.

Winning an Excellence in Literature Award or winning Honorable Mentions made me feel comfortable and confident that my work was recognized by those who can elevate my standing as a writer. There's so much competition out there that the very idea that my story was well received was worth the many hours I spent writing it. When you can say you're an award-winning writer, doesn't that sound great? And you get to smile wonderfully because the word comes from an authority that means your work is worthy. And that's priceless.

Publishers know how to weigh the various awards and which ones carry the most significant weight. The recognition that holds the most value to publishers, retailers, and book buyers is often displayed with a sticker or an award logo on the copies of the book. When you go to the store, are you more likely to purchase an award-winning book? Probably. Book awards count in marketing and positioning as a "recognized go-to expert."

And many times, these books with award stickers are displayed facing outward. You've been to bookstores and libraries where you see a book facing outward and ask yourself, "Why is this book facing outward?" Because it won an award. It was recognized as something worthy of reading. And you might have even bought a book or two because you've heard of it and said it must be good.

The real value of these awards is more than the monetary value but of the prize itself and the boost, visibility, and longevity of a writer's career. The difference in my literary life has made it possible for my high school alma mater in Chicago (Harlan) and the Chicago Public Library system to carry my books. This has led to a flurry of media interest in me. I have been on numerous radio programs, the subject of many magazine and print articles, and yes, I feel incredibly blessed. And because of awards, my status as a writer has been elevated, which has led to many strangers picking up my books and reading them. I'm not saying that I write to receive an award, but having received awards makes me try even harder to write better for you, my readers.

Then there's the flip side of the coin. When it comes to top literary prizes in English books about women, whether men or women write them, these books rarely win awards. So let's take the prestigious Pulitzer Prize between 2000 - 2015 (we're talking 15 years), there were no prize-winning books written from a woman's point of view from either a male or female author, and women have won the Pulitzer prize only 28 times out of 114 times. Grim.

As far as gender equality is concerned, *not one woman* won a Pulitzer in the whole decade of the 1950s. The Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to 114 men and 14 women. There are many awards for authors, but I will tell you about some of them that are the most coveted literary prizes in the world.

The national book award for popular nonfiction is the Nobel Prize in Literature. This prize is based on an author's body of work as a whole. Although individual works are sometimes cited as being noteworthy, it's usually on a body of work. Toni Morrison was the first black woman to win this prize in 1993. It only took a hundred years.

The Mann Booker Prize for Fiction is a literary prize awarded each year for the best original novel written in English and published in the United Kingdom.

The Pulitzer Prize is an award for achievements in journalism, newspaper magazine, online journalism, and musical compositions in the United States. Kendrick Lamar, if you recall, is the first rapper to take home this prize in 2019, and only four other black writers have taken home the Nobel prize in its 124-year history.

The Hugo Award is given for the best science fiction or fantasy work of the previous year.

The National Book Award for Fiction celebrates the best literature in America and this is to ensure that books have a prominent place in American culture.

The Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction is one of the United Kingdom's most prestigious literary prizes annually awarded to a female author of any nationality for the best original full-length novel written in English.

The overwhelming majority of the coveted book awards do not represent any black people or people of color of any significant percentage. In 1969 the American Library Association decided that the ALA was not serving the needs of black library professionals. And these professionals can get black writers' books into libraries. So the Black Caucus was formed to address those concerns, and what came out of it was the Black Caucus of the American Library Association Literary Awards. In addition to those awards, other literary awards are included: the Carter G. Woodson Book Award, Coretta Scott King Book Award, and Phillis Wheatley Book Review and Award. You have a better chance of failure if you write to receive an award. On the other hand, Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon, says, "...you win awards, you sell more products".

One school of thought is that many people of color haven't won these awards because they have historically been given to white men. They haven't even traditionally been given to white women. So when we talk about women and people of color, we start by saying, okay, you know what, JoAnn Fastoff's books are outstanding. And yes, they have not been picked up by Harcourt Brace..so that's Harcourt Brace's problem. That's how I look at it. I'm writing the best I can and have a great story to tell you guys.

I've been nominated several times for book awards and haven't won, but that hasn't stopped me from saying I should do this better. Or I could do this differently. Or there's always a maybe.

The book alone is a reward in itself. Winning an award has made me strive even harder to work better at my craft so that you, my readers, and my fans say, "This is your best book." When people ask me, what's your best book? I always say it's my next one because I think that I keep learning something about writing, or I keep learning something about people asking me, "When is Howard Watson going to do this or that?"

After I wrote my first book, *The Gordian Knot*, I liked my protagonist Howard Watson. And then I

wrote book two, then book three came to me, Howard Watson came to me in the fourth book, and Howard Watson came to me in a fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth book. And as I have told many people, the great writer Walter Mosley told me, "Run with him until he's tired."

As a writer, I can now leave a legacy that I existed on this great planet, and my imprint on my children and my children's children allows them to know my writing was deemed worthy.

<http://thrillerwriters.org/about-itw/recognized-publishers/>

List of literary agents looking for new writers:

<https://www.writersdigest.com/publishing-insights/20-literary-agents-actively-seeking-writers-and-their-writing>

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CHAPTER TEN

The Library and the Author

The late great newscaster Walter Cronkite once said, "Whatever the cost of libraries, the price is cheap compared to that of an ignorant nation." Ray Bradbury, the author of *Fahrenheit 451*, expressed similar feelings saying, "I don't believe in colleges and universities; I believe in libraries because most students don't have any money and the library is free."

I felt freedom the first time I stepped into a library without adult supervision. To be by myself, to choose my kind of books, and even be gluttonous. I loved the quiet. I loved researching the information. I loved staying as long as I could before heading home, and the library became the break I needed from any work waiting for me at home.

But that first time I used my brand spanking new library card, I thought I was in heaven because I could check out five *Nancy Drew Mystery* books, and the only reason I checked out only five was that that was the limit.

Libraries began blossoming under the watch of President Franklin Roosevelt in part as a tool to differentiate the United States from book-burning Nazis. This increased interest in building a perfect liberal society culminated in 1956 with the Library Services Act, which also introduced the first federal funding. Today there are tens of thousands of public libraries across the United States. Authors practice one of the few professions directly protected in the Constitution, which instructs Congress "...to promote the progress of science and the useful arts by securing for limited times to authors and inventors, the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries".

What does this mean? It means "a diverse literary culture created by authors whose livelihoods and independence can't be threatened is essential to democracy." The existence of libraries ensures that knowledge and technology are available to everyone, not just to those few who can afford it. And that means the libraries allow people of any income level or background to access high-quality information, use computers, or borrow what they want.

Scott Turow is not only an author but also a lawyer. He's one of my favorite writers too. He wrote an

OpEd called "The Slow Death of the American Author," where he says that everybody's taking a piece of the author, and the author is not getting enough of the pie, and the authors are the ones making the pie. He also said libraries were part of this problem. The librarians jumped on him quickly and wrote a rebuttal opinion.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/11/opinion/libraries-and-authors.html>

Libraries and librarians are irreplaceable for many reasons, despite their perceived obsolescence in the digital age.

Number one, their business is knowledge of building and imagination. And writers formed the backbone of this nonprofit exercise in supporting impression, emoting, and lifelong learning.

Number two, only some things are available on the Internet.

Number three, the Internet complements libraries but doesn't replace them.

Number four, mobile devices are not the end of books or libraries. Just remember, radio lives on despite TV; the film is still in high demand despite the video. People still talk on the telephone despite email. And people who like to read physical books will continue to read physical books. A lot of information is online, but a lot is still on paper.

According to industry heavyweights, society is not ready to abandon the library. And it probably won't ever because libraries can adapt to social and technological changes but can't be replaced. There's nothing like going to the library, sitting there by yourself, and hoping everybody else is quiet too.

Libraries offer authors two things: they can buy your books, which nets you some royalties, and they can provide exposure, allowing you to gain a new audience who might buy your books instead of borrowing them.

Now for libraries to survive, authors must keep writing books. You must be creating books now. To borrow from King Lear's advice to Cordelia, "Writers who get nothing for their writing will eventually write nothing."

You must be as professional as possible to get your book into the library. It would help to get an ISBN and a barcode for your book. The ISBN is an international standard book number. Those 13 numbers on

the back of your book mean your book has been published.

Ask the library if they will allow you to host a book reading or signing to help promote your book, and whether or not a person purchases a book in an event, merely attending may boost word of mouth about your message or your storytelling. I love libraries. I love to do book readings and signings in libraries because I have a relationship with the librarians. Once they get to know you, once they get to know your product, your book, and your storytelling ability, they're going to ask for you to come back and back and back. Sometimes librarians get so busy they might need to remember to ask you to return. However, several of the libraries I deal with in Chicago always have an Author Week or Author Month, usually in April.

What better way to host an author talk or a presentation than at a library? Author talks are an excellent way to generate interest in visiting the library for all users: children, young adults, and adults. Now, if you have a book out and want to see which library carries your book because you need to know that several libraries might be carrying your book, you need to check out www.worldcat.org.

This is a public library catalog, and it'll let you see which libraries have your book. Another route that many librarians have taken to discuss books is by hosting podcasts, sometimes about specific topic types like mystery books, and periodically broadcasting live events, making them accessible far beyond a single city or town.

These kinds of podcasts, if shared, especially by you, the author, and your publisher, widen the potential market for your book. According to publishing expert Amy Collins, "Once one library has your book and the checkout rates start showing up on reports, other librarians will start ordering your book."

Self-published authors, of which I am one, have several options for getting their books into libraries. Many books are donated, in which case, no royalty is paid to the author or publisher, and libraries only pay for the copies they own.

Like any other purchaser of physical books, libraries do not pay royalties based on average use. This is because of a feature of copyright law called The First Sale Doctrine. For example, I purchased *The Chicago Tribune Newspaper* and let my husband read it. *The Chicago Tribune* can't charge him for

reading it; they can only charge me. That's the first sale doctrine. If you want your book physically on library shelves, you have to have it printed by a distribution that feeds to companies like "Ingram" and "Baker and Taylor."

Libraries that buy direct from publishers for any format are few and far between, so you need to access this overdrive. When discussing approaching libraries, be reasonable about what you're promoting to libraries. They want to work with you, but they're also trying to serve thousands in their neighborhood with desirable and appropriate books for their patrons. If patrons ask for your book on several occasions, the librarian will look it up, and then they might pick it up. To market to librarians, you must learn what they're looking for and how to contact them.

Librarians are looking to purchase materials in all available formats according to their patron preferences. And as an author, you need to know what these preferences are and some marketing solutions for outreach. So if you write your book in English, and if you know Spanish, write it in Spanish too. You have a 90-95% chance that the libraries will acquire them. And if you're a young adult or a children's author, librarians love active participation, and writing a series is your friend. Find out what you can do with your local library and through national organizations like Romance Writers of America, Science Fiction, Fantasy Writers of America, etc.

These are just a few of the ways libraries are directly helping to increase book sales for authors and assisting readers in discovering new titles. It's not merely that libraries connect us to books; it's that they connect us.

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WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

1. Book awards count in marketing and in positioning as what?
2. Nobel Prize in Literature is based on what?
3. The Nobel Prize for Literature has been awarded how many times to women?
4. Ray Bradbury is the author of what book about book burning?
5. What author wrote an OpEd called "The Slow Death of the American Author?"
6. What is the libraries number one business? What does the acronym ISBN stand for?
7. Libraries do not pay royalties based on average use; what is this copyright law called?

ANSWERS

Chapter One - Planning Your Story

1. Are you the best person to write your book? (Page 1)
2. The Narrator (6)
3. Dynamic, Flat, Static and Round (8)
4. A break from difficult moments (13)

Chapter Two - Maintaining Motivation

1. Writers Block (22)
2. Franz Kafka (25)
3. Obstacles (23)
4. Believe in You (29)
5. It is vital (27)

Chapter Three – Editing

1. 2010 (22)
2. Nothing in those first sequences is doing much for me (23)
3. The voice (24)
4. He has to hear that voice as well as the author (24)
5. They're trying to just get everything in there because it's their first book or second book (24)

Chapter Four – Traditional Publishing & Self-Publishing

1. Hachette, Harper Collins, Harcourt Brace, Penguin/Random House, Simon&Schuster (26)
2. Need to write a Query Letter (26)
3. International Standard Book Number (27)
4. Publish your book, help you pick the cover, format it and they will pay for your ISBN (28)
5. Ala carte prices (29)
6. 99 years (29)

Chapter Five – Query Letter/Treatments

1. Events as they are happening (30)
2. A good title (31)
3. A logline is 25 words or less (31)
4. Of all the events in your screenplay (33)
5. A Beat Sheet (33)

Chapter Six – Choosing a Great Book Cover

1. Rather than "tell" them something (34)
2. Art in and of itself (35)
3. Understands design (35)
4. The fonts, the text, the lettering (36)

Chapter Seven – Collaboration

1. Stephen King (38)
2. *All The Presidents Men* (39)
3. That all the collaborators are on the same page (39)
4. The Revisionist (38)

Chapter Eight – Securing and Recovering from Reviews

1. Getting found by new readers (31)
2. Third Party Reviews (32)
3. Reviewing the type of book you have written (33)
4. Payment for review (33)

Chapter Nine – Book Awards

1. "Recognized go-to expert" (35)
2. An author's body of work as a whole (36)
3. 14 women (36)
4. *Fahrenheit 451* (37)
5. *Scott Turow* (37)
6. *Knowledge of building an imagination* (38)
7. *International Standard Book Number* (39)
8. *The First Sale Doctrine* (40)



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