

Learn tips, tricks and more to become an established author.

How to Become an Established Author

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*How To Become
An Established Author*

By Martha Jette



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Chapter 1



THE CREATIVE FORCE

The desire to write is a force to be reckoned with. You can't create it, if it isn't in you and you can't get rid of it, if you've got the bug to write. But turning our vivid thoughts and imagination into solid form can be both challenging and inspiring. Often, as writers, we learn a great deal about ourselves by the works that we create. The bottom line is this: if you do not have the passion to write or the desire to know yourself, don't waste your time. If you do, then this course is for you.

You will learn everything from how to get your personal creativity flowing, to announcing your book to the world and everything in between. Find out what other authors already know about such things as dealing with writer's block, preparing your manuscript, writing press releases, networking, radio interviews and much more!

First of all, don't set out believing that you will produce the biggest bestseller of all time. You have, after all, chosen a particular format, style and subject to write about. It is not the history of everything or the biggest breakthrough since sliced bread. That is not said to belittle anything you intend to write about, but rather to be realistic. You will have a specific, targeted audience depending on the genre of your book and you should decide on that at the start. Are you writing fiction or non-fiction? Is it a comedy, mystery, drama, sci-fi, romance, self-help, historical or a children's book? Once you know your audience, you must write for it with all of the creative force you can muster.

PREPARING AN ACTION PLAN

Before you even think of writing, you need to establish a plan for success. First of all, it is important to do what you love and love what you do. If you love writing, then the entire process of creating a book will not seem like work to you. Rather, it will be a labor of love. Then you must ask yourself: What do I want to achieve by writing my book? If your answer is fame and fortune, turn back now! If it is simply a desire you cannot suppress, then you're on the right track.



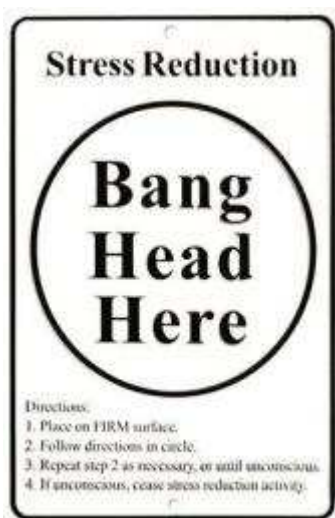
First of all, you need to write down your goals bearing in mind what you can realistically achieve. Next, you need to write out a schedule so you can practice good 'time management.' How many hours are you prepared to dedicate to your writing each day? How many days a week will you write? If you are writing non-fiction or an historical book, how many hours will you devote to research? Then decide how long you will take to write your book and set a date for completion. When will you begin searching for suitable publishers, write your query letters, copyright your work and do all the other things that we'll be talking about? Write these things on your calendar or in your date book.

This process is more important than it seems. First of all, writing to a deadline is motivating for most people. Once you tell family and friends that your book should be completed by say, September, you will want to ensure that it is. On that note, be wary of who you tell your plan to. You might not get the reaction or the support you were hoping for and that can be discouraging.



Overall, having a schedule helps you make the best use of your time. Remember to leave some contingency time to deal with unexpected events that could get in the way of your writing. Don't over-commit yourself. Also, ensure that your goal of writing a book does not conflict with other goals you might already have, such as spending more time with family, putting in more time at work, tending to health issues and so on.

In establishing your goals, you also need to consider 'stress management.' Writing requires a certain degree of privacy and a quiet atmosphere. How will you accomplish this? You might need to call upon your problem solving skills as well, to ensure that 'your space' is conducive to productive writing. It might help to keep a Stress Diary. By writing down all those short-term stresses you experience during the day, you will begin to get a bigger picture of what is causing it, which is the first step to finding a solution.



When writing down your goals, be realistic. If you don't, you will never manage to follow them. By considering all of the things I've talked about, you should be able to follow your action plan and monitor your progress as you go along.

You will be making decisions and taking steps toward becoming a successful author. Writing and publishing a book can be a frustrating process at times. It is vital that you maintain a good attitude and stay positive. On a final note, each morning when you get up and every night before you go to bed, review your goals. Doing so will reinforce them in your subconscious.

BEFORE YOU WRITE

Before you even start writing your book, it is wise to do some research. Do you know if the topic you have in mind is hot right now? Are there similar books on the market and are they selling well? A good way to find out is by reading newspapers, magazines, newsletter and e-zines that cater to writers. Join writer's groups and forums as well to talk to other people in the writing and publishing field. I will be giving you more information on these later, however for now, just be sure you have a potential seller with your book idea.

FICTION WRITING

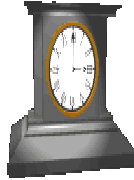


Fiction writing is base on imagination and if you have a good one, your story will be good. It can also be plot-driven, or based on an idea or concept. The thing to remember as we go through each aspect of fiction writing is that although your story is fantasy, it must still make sense.

The next thing to consider is the physical setting of your story. It must be authentic enough to be believed and include everything from scenery, to atmosphere and perhaps even weather. These elements might have a profound affect on the actions or moods of your characters.

For instance, does your story take place in a run down factory, a dance hall or spaceship? All of these evoke extremely different images. Then you need to ask yourself, do I want my setting to be simply a background or something more powerful?

Choosing the right 'point of view' and 'narrative voice' for your story is also very important. Writing in the first person, gives the reader the impression that you are personally invested in your story. A third person 'point of view' is more detached.



Time is another element that must be established. First of all, what time of day is it? Although you don't need to specifically state that it's 2 p.m., your story must indicate through other details that it is mid-afternoon. Different time periods immediately create pictures in the minds of readers. For instance, there is a world of difference between Washington in 2006 and Boston in the 1800s.

Next, the characters in your story must be considered. Are they the primary focus, rather than the plot? Who is the main character and how will you write your book to show that this person is the most important? A good way to answer these questions is to write down character outlines. Describe not only how they look, but also their character traits (strengths and weaknesses), personality, views and moods.

Your main character will be the one who is most affected in the story and/or plays the biggest role. He or she will be the one with the most force of action, the biggest problem, the most painful hurt or seeking to accomplish the most tantamount goal. This is the character that you want your readers to know best, to perhaps identify with and to care about.

Then unless you are placing yourself in the story, decide which character will tell the tale. This is the 'viewpoint character' and the reader will experience the story through this character's eyes. It is also possible to have more than one 'viewpoint character.'

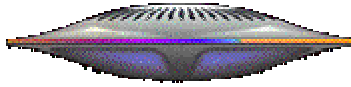
Next, consider the plot or story line. How will you let the plot unfold in a natural way and follow it through to the end? Where and at what point will the climax occur? Will there be semi-climaxes as the story moves along and at what points? If you are writing a plot-based story, the intricacies of the plot will be what create the most interesting tale. This, of course, will take some planning. In this case, it helps to write out your game plan ahead of time.

Dialogue is a vital aspect of any written work, as it can really bring out the personalities of your characters. It can also serve to fill in necessary information, without just stating it, it can be used to establish the time and place, and also to develop conflicts between characters. Whatever its purpose, writing dialogue is something that can be difficult to create, if you haven't done it before. Don't try to recreate actual conversations, as they'll likely be very boring and annoying. For instance, most people repeat certain phrases and non-words like 'um,' 'aha' or 'you see.'

I'm sure you've heard the term "double speak" at some point. In dialogue, it means that what your characters say and what they really mean are two different things. What are your characters saying "between the lines" or "subtext?" This can happen when one or more of your characters don't really understand themselves or their own motivation. Showing a different side to a character through dialogue will tell the reader more about him or her than if you just outright said it. Knowing how to write this kind of dialogue can set you apart from other writers.

Also if your character has a slang or accent, don't overdo it. Dialogue should also flow, without a lot of 'he said,' 'she said.' Also try to intersperse your conversations with associated actions. Finally, always remember to begin a new sentence each time another person speaks and put their words in quotations.

Assuming that you know what genre or category your writing falls into, there are a few things to consider when writing your story. You need to be aware that there are certain conventions of structure, character and conversation that automatically come with specific genres.



For instance, writers of science fiction often use the term “faster-than-light travel” or “warp speed.” The sci-fi writer needs to know how and where such terms are used, if he or she intends to use them. In mystery writing, the plot generally begins with a discovery, such as a dead body and ends when the mystery is solved. A great way to become familiar with the conventions of your particular genre is to read similar stories by other writers.

NON-FICTION WRITING



Non-fiction writing is based on reality, but is not necessarily factual. This genre includes recreations of true stories, biographies and autobiographies found in such things as books, magazines, newspapers, advertisements and reference books. You might also want to write a how-to book. There are many of them out there on everything from how to lose weight, dance, find the right mate and build a birdhouse, how to improve your golf game, learn to dance, read sheet music or improve your Internet marketing skills, start a business and even how to write.



Non-fiction also includes medical, travel, space books and whole host of other texts. Obviously, the most important aspect of non-fiction writing is to write about what you know best. You must do your homework and become an authority on your subject matter.

You must also have an angle or purpose. Why are you writing it? In answering that question, you must answer the questions: who, what, why, when and how. For instance, if you are writing on how to balance your budget, your purpose is to help people gain control over their finances. You must decide whether you are aiming at the poor, middle class or wealthy. What do they need to know and why? When should they begin their financial planning and how?



For general non-fiction writing, you must decide on the right ‘point of view’ and ‘narrative voice.’ For instance, if you are writing about a personal and painful experience of your own, you might want to present it in the first person. However, if you are not ready to tell the world it was ‘your’ experience, you will need to write it in the third person. If you’re writing an academic book, you might want to write in the third person in a ‘professor’s’ voice. If it is a book about a conspiracy, you might want to adopt a ‘suspicious’ tone.

Next, choose your setting, which for non-fiction writing should be an actual place. If this is not possible, you will need to recreate the setting as closely as possible. Then establish the time element and your character outlines. Again, these must be factual or as close to it as possible. You must then decide on your characters and who is the primary character. What is the plot and how important is it? Will there be actual dialogue in your non-fiction book? If so, make sure that all words, expressions and accents are authentic in relation to the time element. What genre does your book fall into and are you being true to form for that genre?

Finally, although your non-fiction book should be based on facts, you can be just as creative as a fiction writer to keep your writing from being too dry and boring. Don’t be afraid to spice it up a bit, but at the same time stick to the facts.

WRITING FOR CHILDREN

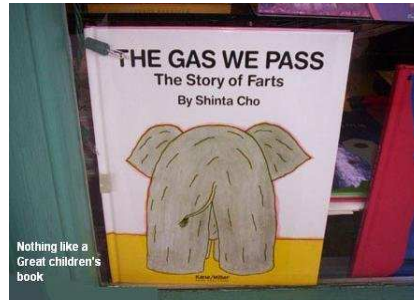


When writing for children, the most important thing to consider is the age group you are targeting. For children up to 7 years old, you can be as imaginative and fanciful as you like. First, decide on the ‘voice’ of your story or poem. You must choose a character (or two, or three) and simply let them speak just like a child would speak. If the character speaks with honesty, little readers will listen. Another trick of the trade is to imagine that you are telling the story to a child that you know. Imagine how they react as you relate the magical tale about to unfold. Of course, you should dig into your own childhood to remember how the world appeared to you.

Remember lying back on the grass and watching those furry creatures float across the sky? How about dreams of pirates and buried treasure beneath far away azure seas? Children’s books are written to delight children with tales of wonderment. There is no need to work hard at educating them about something here, as they will more easily learn to read, if they are caught up in the story. Maintain a rhythm and momentum throughout your tale and make your story like the best carnival ride a child has ever been on. Also, remember that small children have short attention spans, so you want to keep them rapt throughout.

When we are talking about children’s books, we are also talking pictures. Children react to pictures, before they ever learn the words. It is important to create pictures that reflect the words written on the page, that they are colorful, lively and age appropriate.

Children also love to laugh, so you can be as silly and creative as you please. In fact, take a look at this little book:



If you are not an artist yourself, you will need to find someone with whom you can collaborate. Later on, I will talk about networking and how it can be invaluable to you for finding the help that you need when you need it. If you're smart, which I am assuming you are, you can get the graphics for an entire children's book and cover for \$500 or less.

When I was preparing my children's book, "Talking To My Angel," I began collaborating with a female artist in Texas. Although I am in Canada, we had no problem getting the work done. It was simply a matter of e-mailing her each page, along with a note describing exactly what I wanted. I might have just gotten lucky, but this can be done, no matter the distance.

The end result was that I offered her a percentage of my royalties as well, though my publisher felt this was too generous. It is up to you to decide what type of arrangement you wish to have. Either way, it will be necessary to write up a short contract, which is signed by both of you for legal purposes.



It is also important to consider whether your market will be boys, girls or both. There are some things boys like that little girls have no interest in and vice versa.

For just little boys, you can feel free to write about sports, insects, dinosaurs and so on, while little girls seem to be happier reading about fairies, dancing and dolls. I in no way want to sound like I'm labeling either sex here, but there are subjects that appeal to both, such as school, family, friends and animals.

Though young children love color, you may have to use it sparingly if you want to get your first children's book published. Color is expensive and many publishers don't want to take on a costly project. Try something like drawings, with just hints of color here and there to liven it up. Also, make sure you use a big font, so the story is easy for little eyes to learn to read.



For children 8 and up, you can break your children's book into chapters. Be original, but for these youngsters, keep it real. Children are smarter than you think and will know if your story is too far out there. They can be the harshest critics. Create lively characters and an imaginative plot. Don't moralize, but rather get the message across in your story. Note that editors particularly like stories that touch on multicultural issues and/or have ethnic characters. Also, consider a story that is not seasonal, as you don't want your book to become outdated too quickly. As well, go for an idea that will have a wide appeal.

For children ages 12 and up, you should aim for stories that cover such topics as school, friends and family.

HISTORICAL WRITING



First and foremost, historical writing must be accurate. Otherwise, do not claim that your book is based on facts. This means that the historical writer must read and uncover every conceivable source of information to ensure accuracy.

This might include everything from history books and newspapers, to magazines, encyclopedias, maps, television shows, search engines, films, microfilms, videos and CDs.

If you are writing about an historical place, visit the site to get the feel of it. If you are able, also acquire knowledge from experts. If you need to send away for information, do that first, as it will likely take some time to get the response. You will need to keep files and or cards with pertinent information.

Just because you have decided to write about a historical person, place or event that does not mean you cannot use some of the tips and tricks used by fiction writers. Instead of just presenting the facts (which are, of course, very necessary), bring your story alive.

Finally, having written non-fiction myself, I found it most useful to keep separate files on the various aspects of my book. It proved to be a real time-saver, so you might want to consider doing this too.

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES



Writing an autobiography is perhaps the most difficult of all writing styles. This is because people who write autobiographies usually have painful and compelling stories to tell. In the process of writing this kind of book, you might be dredging up memories and opening old doors to your past. You must be prepared for this emotional experience.

When writing an autobiography, it is also vital that you portray people and past events as accurately as possible. This can be difficult, if preconceived notions are clouding your mind. If possible, talk to those about whom you write and also discuss past events to be sure that you remember things accurately. Be aware that the other people you describe or talk about in your book won't take what you write lightly. Before including them in your book, get their permission if you can. . If you cannot do these things, you might be at risk of offending others and possibly being sued for defamation of character.

DRAMA



When writing dramatic stories you will have a primary character that the story will center around. Make sure you write so that the reader will come to know this person well. That means not only through physical description, but also how this person acts, things and feels. Don't just write paragraphs to describe the person. Incorporate this information in less obvious ways. For instance, it could be through conversation when another character talks about him or through something the main character does that shows how he thinks or feels about something. This may seem difficult at first, but it can be done with practice.

You truly want the reader to care about what happens to your primary character, so it is vital to endear him somehow. Then when something terrible happens, your readers will empathize with him as well.

COMEDY



Obviously, writing comedy is not for everyone. Either you're funny or your not. It seems to be a gift that some people come by naturally. If you're not sure if you're one of those special people, you should test your comedic skills on family and friends first. I have picked up books in the past that were supposed to be funny but really weren't, which can be quite the let down. Of course, if you are a professional comedian you shouldn't have much trouble translating your talent into words on paper. Even so, it might be a good idea to have a couple of people read what you've written to ensure that you will get the right reaction from your readers.

ROMANCE



Romance writing can fall under either fiction or non-fiction, but primarily fiction. Some romance writers say this style of writing is very free form as they can take the story any way they want.

For romance writing, you will have two main characters and again, you must let your reader know enough about them to care what happens both with and between the two. Set out a plot line first, so you at least have a general idea as to where your story is going and make it as sincere as possible.

HORROR/THRILLER/MURDER MYSTERY



I must confess that I am not very familiar with horror writing, but it seems quite obvious that the goal is to shock and frighten the reader. This will take much creativity on your part and a plot line that is weaving and in the end, unexpected. You want your reader to sit on the edge of his seat and feel the hairs stand up on the back of his neck.

For this type of writing, you will have to spend more time on your plot than with most other types of writing. You will have to decide when the plot will take a different twist and what the outcome will be. You will also have to develop your characters and in some cases, don't tell all so to speak. Unlike other forms of writing, keep at least one or some of the characters under a veil of mystery as the story unfolds.

SPY/ADVENTURE



Spy novels generally involve a lot of intrigue and adventure. There should be plenty of action to keep the reader engrossed from beginning to end.

Develop your main characters and plan your plot line before you begin. There should be twists and turns in a spy novel, but you can also throw in other elements, such as a love story. Also, if you want your spy novel to seem authentic, you need to bear in mind the world political situation for the time in which your story takes place.

RELIGIOUS



This type of writing is a genre on its own and should only be undertaken by those with a good knowledge of religious matters. Even so, religion and politics are both hotly debated topics and you can expect that there may be some negative feedback from those of alternate views. Make sure you know what you're talking about. That means doing your homework and referencing sources throughout to back up your views.

TRUE CRIME

I wanted to include this genre, as there are some specific guidelines you must follow when writing about a true crime. First of all, know the facts of the case and make sure that you can reference all of your sources. You will lay yourself wide open for a lawsuit if you don't. When writing true crime you **MUST** stick strictly to the facts and only the facts.

Sometimes, a good story comes along and you'd love to write about it but fear there could be serious repercussions. My book, "Playing With The Devil" is a very good example. If I had simply repeated everything as told to me by the primary character (the victim) I would have been dragged into court by now. Since I truly felt this story needed to be told, I decided to veil it under the guise of fiction "based on a true story." As well, I did not use anyone's real names – not the victims or the perpetrators are named outright.

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