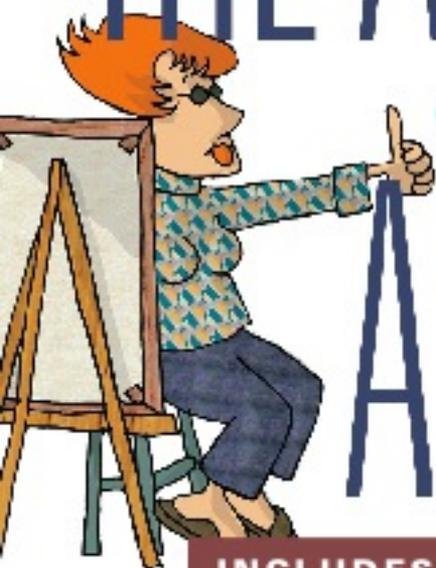




THE ART



AND CRAFT

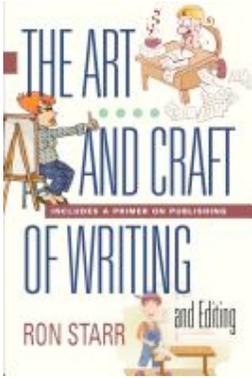
INCLUDES A PRIMER ON PUBLISHING

OF WRITING

RON STARR



and Editing



The craft of writing involves an interchange of emotions between an author and a reader. An author creates a story line, conflict, and characters, gives his characters words to speak, and then hands off these materials to a reader. This process results in a constant dialogue between the mental imagery produced by a reader and that proposed by the author. An author, however, should never try to control the mental images readers discover.

The Art and Craft of Writing And Editing

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THE ART AND CRAFT OF WRITING AND EDITING

Includes a Primer on Publishing

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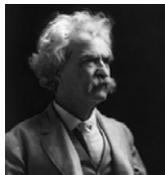
INTRODUCTION

The current effort you hold in your hands is a compendium of nuggets I've discovered and documented during the last two decades as I struggled with my writing, and my education in the art of writing through word crafting and editing. Although I follow the advice I've outlined in this book with each new writing endeavor, I recognize that I am me and you are you. Take from this book any advice that helps you advance your education, and ignore any suggestion that causes you to wonder about my mental state.

In either case, I hope you find my little book informative, and just maybe, helpful as you travel your individual road to success with your chosen craft.

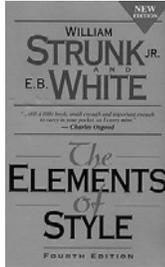
How to follow my bouncing ball

Throughout this book you'll discover helpful hints, all recognizable by one or another of my chosen pictures or graphics. Look for the following and heed the gem I've included.



Famous Quote. This symbol means I'm providing a relevant quote from a famous writer or editor. Consider their words an integral part of your writing bible. If I've discovered a picture of the person I'm quoting, one that is not protected by a copyright, I'll use it.

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Advice from William Strunk JR. and E.B. White. These individuals are the authors of an indispensable bible for all writers. Heed their words carefully.



Stop and consider before moving on! When you see this symbol, I'm noting danger if you ignore the advice offered.



Advice from me. When you see this graphic, a piece of my personal wisdom follows. Abide by my advice or discard it—your choice.

Rattlesnake and owl drawings courtesy of Robert Savannah, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

A few notes before we start

My initial intent had been to separate the subjects of word crafting, editing, and publishing into multiple books. I changed my mind; however, after considering two important facts. Editing occurs as one writes, rewrites, and rewrites, in other words, as one applies the art of word crafting. In addition, any book on writing should never exclude at least a primer on the subject of publishing in the 21st century. With this in mind, I altered my approach and instead organized my book around chapters addressing specific writing subjects.

Some of the items you'll discover apply to all writing; personal correspondence, business correspondence, articles, novels, nonfiction, etc., while other tips are specific to novels. Never fear, loyal reader, read the entire tome and I'm sure you'll discover many ideas and

suggestions you can use to help improve your writing regardless of writing assignment.

I've elected not to use the (he or she) vernacular when referring to an author or reader. Instead, I've used the singular pronoun, he. I'm a male, and proud of it. If I've offended anyone, either accept my apology, or as my wife, the love of my life, often says to me—get over it!

You'll find I've attempted to cover everything from the kitchen sink to the outhouse in this book as it relates to word crafting and editing. In addition I've included (in primer format), a chapter on traditional publishing and self-publishing. After all, "The world she's a changing." In 2009 according to Bowker, self-publishers and microniche publishers produced 764,448 titles, two hundred percent more than 2008. Compare this to traditional publishing houses that produced less than 289,000 titles during the same period. I'm not a seer, but with the advent of Print on Demand (POD), e-books, and now with the introduction of various E-readers, we are entering a world in which self-publishing in all its forms will continue to explode.

"Oh, but," you say. "I prefer to use a traditional publisher. They won't charge me to publish my books."

And you believe such drivel? Have you never encountered commercial publishers who agree to publish a book only if you, the author, agree to purchase at least (insert a number large enough to gag a full-grown bull alligator) copies to cover basic costs? If you believe that's not charging you, I know of a Nigerian import and export business looking for investors.

"Yes, but, traditional publishers assume all responsibility and costs for the administrative tasks as well as all marketing," you say.

Did you just arrive from Mars? Unless your name is recognizable to readers in forty-two countries, similar to POD or other self-publishing avenues, traditional publishers will expect you to carry the marketing load.



It's imperative that a writer advance from neophyte to beginner to journeyman and beyond in his chosen craft before he tackles publishing. See CHAPTER 18: A PRIMER ON PUBLISHING.

As you absorb this book, I realize you may feel that you are entering a world inhabited by aliens who resemble humans but who speak an ancient and dead language, aliens who propose you undertake challenges reserved for the likes of 'Ned The Nerd,' the editor of your high school newspaper. To this I offer a slight variation of FDR's famous quote after Pearl Harbor, "The only thing an author should fear is fear itself."

Or as a famous American said,



"Writing is easy: all you do is sit staring at the blank sheet of paper until the drops of blood form on your forehead."

Gene Fowler - American author and playwright

I also realize that you may discover many subjects you believe require a separate volume to explain. If so, my personal advice is to;

- Study, study, study.
- Attend classes, writers groups, writer's conferences, readings, and lectures.
- Devour papers, books, Internet sites, and newsletters on writing.
- And for goodness sake, read, read, read. I mean read every author you admire—and a few you think are literary vermin. This latter group of writers will reinforce your burning desire to always use the right word and to once in a great while—turn a perfect phrase.

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- My last piece of advice is to write, write, and write, every day if possible. Practice may not always make perfect—but it sure can't hurt.



"I work every day - or at least I force myself into office or room. I may get nothing done, but you don't earn bonuses without putting in time. Nothing may come for three months, but you don't earn the fourth without it."

Mordecai Richler - Canadian author

A few additional words of advice

Don't get so caught up in the details that you inhibit your creativity and your skill as a storyteller. Word crafting and editing skills will always be secondary to an author's ability to tell a good story, a story that maintains a reader's interest from the first page until the last.



"A good writer is basically a story-teller, not a scholar or a redeemer of mankind."

Isaac Bashevis Singer - Polish born American author and Nobel Prize winner.

Or as I always admonish myself,



"Without an intriguing story, you're crafting crap."

**PART I: TAKE A DEEP BREATH – AND
PLUNGE**

CHAPTER ONE: MY PLUNGE – OKAY HUMOR ME

The dream to see my novels published began in college after I recognized—at least when I wasn't handicapped by a beer induced stupor, that I had a brain I could use to create readable fictional accounts of ordinary people facing internal and external demons. Until approaching two decades ago; however, my dream of achieving literary fame remained hidden, unfulfilled, and gathering dust—much like many of my dreams.

My First Halting Step

In the early nineties, after my third wine in the back of a flying cattle car, a thought crept into my head—*You're not getting any younger, Is that what's troubling you, Bunky?*

"That's a weak impersonation of Eddie Lawrence's, The Old Philosopher," I said in a vapid attempt to put my cynical mind in its place. *"But forget that. I'm not getting older. I'm like a fine wine. I..."*

Fine wine, yeah right! You, of course, are referring to fine jug-o-wine. Rot gut to those of us with a delicate palate. It's time for you to get serious.

"Serious?" I said to the carcinogenic air hanging over the smoking section. *"Serious about what?"*

Your dream—the one you said you'd never forget, the one about writing, being the next Michener? Surely you remember. Or is that what's troubling you, Bunky?

I fumbled for another cigarette before saying, *"Oh, that dream. Of course I remember. It's just..."*

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Just what? What's your latest excuse?

"Cut me some slack, here. Between my career, family, responsibilities..."

Lousy excuses, all. Surely you can do better.

"I...I...I'm..."

You're what, afraid you might fail? Is that what's troubling you, Bunky?

"Stop with the damn, Bunky! No! It's not that. It's just...well...well maybe I am a little afraid of failure. Besides, I'm too old to be switching professions."

Old? You're not too old – at least not yet. Don't wait until you need your adult diapers changed hourly by Nurse Ratchet. Grab the proverbial goat by the horns – now!

"It's not a goat. It's a bull. That's a mixed metaphor."

Whatever, Bunky. Just do it!

"I'll think about it. Maybe you're right. Maybe it is time."

My seatmate turned and glowered at me before saying, "I sincerely hope so. Because, until you shut up – I won't get any sleep."

Two months later I set out on my personal literary journey, a journey I knew would lead to instant publishing success.

And?

Was I wrong?

Let's just say that if I had been the chief rocket scientist on the Apollo moon missions, the astronauts would still be sailing towards Alpha Centauri, longingly staring back at a diminishing moon – and cussing the doctor who allowed me to survive birth.

Was I surprised?

Disappointed maybe, but not surprised. For much like all such adventures undertaken by uninitiated and naïve humans, my journey proved more difficult than I expected, which is a nice way of saying, 'Are you frig'n kidding me?' If Mohammed Ali had been knocked to the canvas as many times as I've received nasty rejection letters, he would have discarded his goal of claiming the world heavyweight title and instead entered a monastery.

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Among my other failings, the adventure forced me to confront my primary weakness. That is, I had always been a decent writer with an above average grasp of the English language, but I knew nothing about writing or crafting a short story, much less a novel. I also discovered that each step along my path to even minor literary success demanded that I either detour around more roadblocks than one finds in Florida after a hurricane, or drive through more potholes than one discovers in Boston after a spring thaw. I will say; however, that my journey provided me with many moments I will never forget, moments that alternated between exhilarating, exhausting, heartbreaking, and at times – hilarious.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Early one evening after my latest mental harangue at 36,000 feet, I arranged a legal pad on my dining room table, poured my second glass of merlot, picked up my favorite pen, gritted my teeth, and agitated my gray matter for an hour.

Much to my amazement – nothing happened. The pen remained quivering above the untouched paper, my brain ached, and the bottle of wine lay on its side, empty except for a final drop hanging on the bottle's lip in a heroic attempt to avoid suicide through absorption by a virgin yellow pad.

The drop died.

Did I quit?

Hell no!

I ripped off the violated sheet, opened another bottle of merlot, and kept trying. Through the next few years and more bottles of wine than I care to remember, I filled my blank pages with narrative and dialogue I now classify as amateurish.

Did I throw my hands up in despair after this devastating beginning?

Although at times I considered it, I persevered without fail. Through this undisciplined effort I eventually developed a rudimentary understanding of my craft that allowed me to produce mediocre writing. I swept through this period as if a madman inhabited my body and soul until one day I awoke, read what I had

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written the night before, and realized—my writing had matured to a readable stage.

Was I satisfied?

Never.

I'm still learning. But I'm confident that before the worms take ownership of my body—I'll be able to say, "I'm a decent writer."



"If a man means his writing seriously, he must mean to write well. But how can he write well until he learns to see what he has written badly. His progress toward good writing and his recognition of bad writing are bound to unfold at something like the same rate."

John Ciardi - American Poet

As I look back over the years, I suppose the ego-crushing experiences I encountered while learning my craft were not unique in a writer's world. I say, suppose, since I would rather believe in my individuality, and most of all, my ability to succeed in any undertaking. But then, after more than sixty years of life proving me wrong about many of my beliefs, I guess I can live with one more.

There I go again, jumping ahead of myself. God how I wish my fingers could keep up with my mind, even when thoughts flow like scalding molasses.

My First Novel

During my initial years as a novice writer, I consumed gallons of wine, and wrote, rewrote, and re-rewrote my first Great American Novel. The rewrites grew so numerous I could recite most pages word for word.

After composing the last line of the last paragraph of my first masterpiece, I sat back, grinned with self-satisfaction, and contemplated what I had accomplished. I felt proud to have achieved my goal, but within moments, oh, oh, I also experienced another sensation, one I couldn't identify until I felt tears welling up inside me.

Why am I sad? I wondered. I should feel joyous. But I didn't. Immediate and deep depression buried my elation with a ton of boulders produced by a mental landslide of unknown source.

I sat at my desk until I composed myself. A few moments later, and with a forced smile plastered on my face, I arose and walked into the living room. My bride's omniscient expression informed me my ruse had failed.

"You've finished I see," she said.

"How...how did you...?"

"Typical dumb male question."

Exasperated but refusing to bow before her, I spoke in a forced monotone. "I'll ignore your snide comment. But humor me. How did you know?"

"Postpartum blues."

"I beg your pardon. I didn't birth no baby."

"Your southern accent belongs on the stage—the first one out of town, but forget your weak thespian skills. You gave birth, not to a living, breathing, bouncing, bundle of mustard-yellow and putrid... Anyway, you birthed a story that would have remained lifeless except for your efforts."

I pondered her comments for a moment before answering. "Seems a stretch to compare..."

"Not if you had watched your labors from my vantage point. That manuscript was and is your baby. You created it, watched it develop as you agonized over every word, every paragraph, every chapter. Its creation has been a major part of your life for years. How did you expect to react after you finished it?"

"Whatever," I said, and changed the subject, the normal ploy I used to save my fragile male ego any further embarrassment.

Hours later, I admitted the truth behind her words. Like all craftsmen, a writer by nature comes to view his creations much like his birthed babies. He knows every blemish as well as every right word or perfect phrase.

I moved on to my next lesson.

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The First of a Zillion Rejections

A few weeks after receiving my lesson on postpartum blues, I mailed a query letter and partial manuscript to a literary agent. I knew in my soul this woman waited expectantly for the envelope to arrive.

I imagined a smiling courier handing my letter to a nodding and knowing secretary who, upon seeing the return name and address, smiled.

She passed the query to a messenger who rushed towards a closed conference room where the agent had assembled a group of publishers, each prepared to outbid the other for my work.

The messenger knocked, failed to wait for a response. He burst into the room and announced, "It's here."

Without waiting for the applause to die, he approached the agent and presented her with my gift.

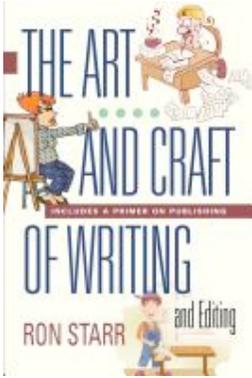
The woman clutched my letter to her bosom. Her retirement assured, she beamed.

Such are the dream-like wanderings of the uninitiated mind—and thank God for such dreams. Without them few of us would persevere through life's roadblocks.

My perseverance continues to this day and will into the future as far as I can see, although at my age it's a future that grows shorter and dimmer with each passing year. But, will I cease and desist? Hell no! Much like Admiral Farragut at the Battle of Mobile Bay during the Civil War, my motto is, "Damn the torpedoes. Full speed ahead!"



I hope this book helps you avoid one or more roadblocks. But if it doesn't, don't worry, either find a way around the roadblocks—or mow the suckers down.



The craft of writing involves an interchange of emotions between an author and a reader. An author creates a story line, conflict, and characters, gives his characters words to speak, and then hands off these materials to a reader. This process results in a constant dialogue between the mental imagery produced by a reader and that proposed by the author. An author, however, should never try to control the mental images readers discover.

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