

Writer's Quest

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Tell the world about your

Dear Writer,

Find out what to do next when plotting your novel. Considering studying writing but don't know the best method? Read our comparisons and decide what is best for you. Read about famous authors' secrets to success.

Please contact us via email or check our web site if you would like to contribute to our e-zine.

Happy writing!

From the Writer's Quest team

Writers' Corner Solving Writers' Block: Plot Done, Characters Next

by Mary Broadhurst © 2008

Last issue we discussed how to plot out a novel, now that your plot points (or points of action) have been worked out, you may wish to stick each of these pieces of paper onto a thin piece of cardboard or corkboard so that you don't lose any. Perhaps you'd prefer to keep them in order in a box so you can flick through them. The idea is not to leave them spread out on a table where somebody may disturb their order or destroy them. These pieces of paper form your story's blueprint.

The next stage is to keep a record on our characters. This is very important so you don't change a character's looks or personality. Index cards can be purchased along with an index cardholder for very little. Otherwise you can cut up some thick paper (or very thin cardboard) and keep them in a small box.

Write down the character's name on the top left-hand

Tell the world about your work. [Send us](#) the release date and/or a review. It's free.

Write down the character's name on the top left-hand corner. Write if the character is a protagonist (main character), villain or secondary character on top right-hand corner. A villain can be anyone that wants to harm the main character in any way. A secondary character is anyone that is present, but isn't our hero or villain. That doesn't mean that the secondary character can't cause mayhem.

Jot down the characters physical looks, personality and emotions. Include the character's background, if he/she has plans, anything that makes your character come alive. Add to them as you need to, and keep them up to date at all times. If you suddenly mention one of your characters has a fondness for cats then record it on the appropriate character card straight away.

The same applies to scenery and places visited by your characters. Record the details so you're not likely to make mistakes.

Armed with all the details, you're free to start and develop your story. If a better idea comes to mind then make the change to the plot cards. You may have to adjust several cards to get it back on track or take it somewhere else entirely. Don't destroy your creative flow just to keep it in line with your plot points. Sometimes ideas will take you to a better place; don't be afraid of the journey.



Having trouble with your story or article?

Why not post the problem to our Writers' Workshop forum and gain help from other writers. It's free!

Sentence Starter ...

Many writers suffer the 'blank page' complex; therefore, each month we will supply you with a first sentence. Now your page isn't blank any more. Let your imagination take you on a journey.

This issue's sentence starter:

The distorted shadow stretched across the tent's canvas
...

Views on Writing

The 7 Habits of Highly Successful Authors

(Reprint article)

By Suzanne Harrison

The more I read how the successful authors do it, the more I realise that, like successful people in all walks of life, they all do things in common that contribute enormously to their success. So how can we learn from successful authors to ensure our own success in 2008 and beyond?

We can start by adopting what I call 'The 7 Habits of Highly Successful Authors'. Adopt these seven habits and you just may find that 2008 is the year you break through your own writing barriers!

1. Write about something you care about

Whether you are writing fiction or non-fiction, it is imperative you write about something you care about. The successful authors have some emotional connection to their content or story. If you are writing fiction, then write from a place of emotional familiarity. Your genuine experience will come through in your writing and your readers will connect with that. If you are writing a non-fiction piece, choose a topic you are passionate or enthusiastic about. After all, if you are going to invest your precious time in what you are writing, you owe it to yourself to write with passion, feeling and enthusiasm.

2. Take risks

Don't be afraid to put your head, or your hands, on the chopping block when you write. In the world of fiction, you will have no doubt heard about creating characters that are 'larger than life'. That doesn't mean they are giants, it means they go above and beyond and take risks and make decisions that we would not have the courage to take in our own lives. After all, it's not about what we would do when we are tethered by the restrictions of polite behaviour, it's what we would do in our wildest imaginations that make our readers sit up and take notice.

For the non-fiction writer, it's time for you to take a stand. Take a view and stick with it, presenting your case with conviction and vigour. No one listens to someone who writes meekly, or with a wishy washy hand. Stick your neck out, and don't be afraid to get it chopped off. All the greatest journalists are the ones who are not afraid to speak their minds. Get into that habit and you're well on your way to being that next great journalist.

3. Plan

This is definitely the most ignored but equally the most important phase of the writing process. Planning is essential to the success of any undertaking and writing is no different. JK Rowling spent five years planning the entire Harry Potter series before she put pen to paper on a single word that appeared in the books. If you are writing a short story, novel or screenplay, planning the story before you begin writing is as essential to your success as ink in your pen or power to your laptop. There are some writers who claim to just start with an image or a sentence and then the whole thing just unfolds before them, but the writers who can do this with any degree of success are few and far between. Take the time to plan out your story, at the very least know where your beginning, middle and end are. The more planning you do, the more enjoyable the writing process, and the less rewriting and editing you will have to do. The same goes for non-fiction pieces, where it's always advisable to have an outline in place before you write your article or book.

4. Write every day

Joyce Carol Oates said that she would write, even when her soul felt as thin as a playing card, because somehow the act of writing would set it aright. There are going to be times when you just 'don't feel like it', but like any other job or activity that is important to you, you must still, somehow, sit down every day and write. It has been said that it is by sitting down every day to write that one becomes a writer. Stephen King writes every day, including Christmas Day. Whether you are working on a book, story, article or nothing, still sit down and write something every single day. Even if you only write one page every day, that's 365 pages in a year and that's a whole book, isn't it? When you are a writer, you cannot not write, and writing is like breathing. You have an urge to put things down in print, so to keep that fresh and alive, you need to turn that tap on every day. It's more than practise. It's life.

5. Be prepared to work hard

I read somewhere once that John Grisham worked for four hours per day and made \$20 million per year. Whether that is true or not (about the hours worked or the money he makes) doesn't matter. It is far more common to hear tales today of the world's most popular commercial authors working their proverbial butts off to keep up with deadlines, promotional commitments and the ins and outs of their everyday lives. Janet Evanovich gets up and writes every morning at 5 am so she can get a full day's writing in before she has to answer mail, emails and deal with her other affairs of business. Jodi Picoult has a wonderful stay-at-home husband who allows her the luxury of writing through school pick-ups and travelling for long periods to do research for her novels. JK Rowling also said that she (misquidely)

novels. JK Rowling also said that she (misguidedly) thought life as an author would be a Jane Austen-type of affair, sitting in a room overlooking a field and writing in anonymity. Of course her life is a whirlwind of book launches, movie premieres, media commitments, school commitments, and of course she has a family with three children. And while we all no doubt wish we had her 'problems' it is very obvious that in the early part of the 21st century, the life of an author, successful or not, is a hard-working life. We are either working hard to get noticed, working hard to stay noticed, or working hard to avoid being noticed. Any way you look at it, if you have an aversion to hard work, you need to look elsewhere. Successful authors work hard. Period.

6. Persistence

It is said that persistence outstrips all other virtues. I have a card propped up on my desk that says, 'Success seems to be largely a matter of hanging on after others have let go'. Almost every successful author I have studied has said that his/her success is due, at least in some part, to pure persistence and determination. If your manuscript or article is rejected, rewrite it and submit it again. Or submit it to someone else. The first Harry Potter novel was rejected by every major publishing house before Bloomsbury picked it up for a song. Even so-called 'overnight successes' have a story behind them about how many times they were rejected, or how many novels or articles they've written that have no value other than as fire kindling. The authors that succeed are the ones who don't stop until they do. It's that simple. Never give up. Winners never quit, and quitters never win.

7. Let it go

And finally when you have written your article, book or screenplay and have submitted it for publication or approval, let it go. If you've done the best you can with it, let it go and trust that it will make its way to where it needs to be. And start something else straight away. Regardless of whether what you have submitted is accepted or rejected, you are a writer and a writer writes. Once you finish one manuscript start immediately on another. If the one you've sent is picked up, they'll be happy that you've got something new already, and if not you're well on your way to finishing your next manuscript.

So those are the 7 Habits of Highly Successful Authors. Adopt these habits yourself, and before you know it, you too will join their ranks!

About the Author:

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Résumé Builder:

Learning to Write

by M Broadhurst © 2008

Personally, I don't believe it matters whether you obtain your knowledge from a classroom or a self-taught environment. Both aspects have advantages and disadvantages, but the most important thing to remember is how determined, motivated and eager the potential student will be. Let's look at those benefits and pitfalls.

Self-taught

Some times self-taught education can contain a certain stigma to it, yet it's probably one of the hardest things to do. It's up to you and you alone to motivate yourself, to fuel the initial spark of interest, and to complete the studies. This may be done in studying 'how to' books that offer exercises and advice, or it may be reading multiple books on a subject and retaining that information. I would recommend attending workshops and/or forums whether they are online or in person. If money is an issue then your local library is a great place to start, find out what they offer, chances are they have lecturers and guest speakers. You'll hit some pretty bad ones, some that seem to say the same thing, but you will also find quality information. Remember, the speaker doesn't know what you know, what you have done; therefore, he or she may repeat something that you've heard seven times before.

The beauty of self-taught education is that you can move at your own speed. If you're having a 'bad' day then you can take the day off and work at it tomorrow.

If you opt for this time of studying, don't feel bad because you can't afford the fees of a school, or the scheduled timetable doesn't fit into your hectic lifestyle. Feel proud that despite whatever the reason why you can't attend classes, you have the motivation, determination and the eagerness to learn, you have the potential to make it.

Classroom

This type of learning holds more influence of the graduate; a single piece of paper at the end of the journey stating the person has successfully completed

journey stating the person has successfully completed the task and is accepted into the literary world as a writer. Depending on the status achieved (e.g. credit, honours) can portray one writer as more outstanding than another.

Unfortunately, a classroom can only move as fast as the brightest or slowest student. If a student is having difficult grasping a concept, the rest of the class can be held up until everyone understands the lesson. This is great for the struggling student, but what about those that are ready to move on? If the struggling student doesn't speak up, then the class moves on and that student will continue to struggle and eventually feel overwhelmed. The pupil may even end up dropping out. It's not the teacher's fault, he/she may not have time to spare after the class to go over aspects that a student is having trouble with, and the teacher won't know someone is having trouble unless that person speaks up.

There can be considerable amount of wasted time in a classroom setting, especially when the classroom consist of adults. It's easy to stray off the track, or discuss a difference of an opinion regarding some grammar point. Discuss is great and it teaches, but unless you have a strong leader teaching the class then many hours can be lost.

The best opportunity to workshop and discuss you ideas arise in the classroom setting. It gives you an opportunity to see how your story can move others, how others interpret your story, and point out problems that you didn't even realise were present. It can be very daunting at first to read your story aloud and have twenty odd people pulling it apart, but the rewards are well worth the initial discomfort. Eventually you will get used to the process, even if you don't enjoy it, you'll see the benefits.

Online studies

This is probably the best of both worlds: classroom and individual learning. It offers students to move at their own pace, to cover the required syllabus, and the opportunity to seek help when needed in a virtual world. At the end, the student receives a certificate, although this is usually printed off the individual's computer and can look a little amateurish. Its virtual classroom means students can attend when it suits them, they don't have to be there at a precise time on the same day. It takes away the isolation feeling from those that have no choice but to study alone.

There are some restrictions with online learning. Tests are usually multiple choice, these types of test are much easier than having to write the answer from scratch.

easier than having to write the answer from scratch. Even if a student doesn't know the answer, there's a chance the right answer will be selected.

As online learning improves, so too will its recognition, and hopefully it will be in the same standing as attending a classroom.

No matter how you chose to study, the important fact is that you retain the information and that you achieve what you have set out to accomplish. A piece of paper may say that you completed a course in a particular year, but it doesn't show your determination, your motivation, or your creative skills. It's nice to have, to frame and say to people, 'Hey, look, I did this'. But it won't show what you're capable of. Your current work is the only thing that can show all these things. So above all, keep writing, and keep striving to improve.

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