INTRO TO CREATIVE WRITING

a workbook for new writers

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A Workbook for New Writers

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Reasons to Write

☐ Writers have influence and can help shape the world

☐ For the love of writing and making art for others to enjoy

☐ To share something—knowledge, ideas, experience, message, etc.

☐ To challenge people's perceptions or make people think

☐ To help people understand themselves and the world

☐ To offer people an escape from the world or create characters they can relate or look up to

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1. Why do I want to write?

Paths for Learning How to Write

☐ Practice

☐ Online articles

☐ Craft books

☐ Online/in-person courses and workshops

☐ Coaching

☐ Critiques

☐ Creative Writing program at a University

2. How will I learn how to become a better writer? How do I like to learn and learn best? Am I an independent learner or do I like more structure and guidance? What type of education can I afford?

3. Why do I read? What do I look for in a story?

4. What is my favorite book? What did it make me feel? How can I provide a similar emotional experience for readers in my own writing?

What is Story?

A story is about someone (hero) who wants something (goal), sets out on a journey to attain it (plot), faces obstacles (villain/opposition), and grows or learns something along the way (change).

What is Word Count?

Publishers and agents use word count to measure the length of a novel. Since The type of font, font size, line spacing, and page margins can add to or subtract from the number of pages in a novel, word count is a more accurate form of measurement than word count.

Categories of Fiction

- Children—ages 1-7
- Middle Grades—ages 8-12
- Young Adult—ages 13-18
- New Adult—twenties, college/post-college age
- Adult—18+

5. What age category will I write for? Who is my audience?

6. What content, themes, etc. are age-appropriate for this category? What struggles or experiences is this age group encountering?

What is Genre?

A **genre** is a specific type of story.

Best-selling fiction genres:
- Mystery/Thriller/Crime
- Fantasy/Sci-fi
- Modern & Classic Literature
- Romance

Other genres:
- Adventure, Drama, Contemporary, Fairy Tale, Historical Fiction, Horror, Humor, Magical Realism, and Western

What is Subgenre?

A **subgenre** is a specialized subcategory within a genre.

Genre: Fantasy
Subgenres: Dystopian, High/Epic Fantasy, Urban Fantasy, Steampunk, Time Travel, Paranormal Fantasy, etc.

Genre: Romance
Subgenres: Chick-Lit, Historical Romance, Contemporary Romance, Romantic Comedy, Military Romance, Western Romance, etc.

7. What genre do I want to write? Subgenre?

8. What books in this genre and within my chosen age category are popular? Write them below to read later.

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Literary vs. Commercial Fiction

Literary
- Written chiefly as art/to explore the human condition
- Focuses more on internal conflict of characters
- Emphasis on character development
- Uses beautiful, artistic prose
- Slower paced

Commercial
- Written chiefly as entertainment
- Focuses more on external conflict of plot
- Emphasis on character achieving a goal
- Uses clean, simple writing
- Faster paced

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9. Do I want to write literary or commercial fiction?

The Writing Process

Pre-writing
- Find an idea
- Develop idea, outline plot, world-build, develop characters, etc.
- Research

Drafting
- Write the rough draft

Revising
- Write additional drafts that address plot holes, rearrange events, add, remove, or change scenes or characters, etc.

The Editing Process

Editing
- Editing focuses on making small corrections.
- Check for grammar/spelling errors and typos, fine-tune sentence structure and pacing, fix awkward sentences, play with word choice, etc.
- Optional: Share novel with beta readers and use the feedback to make any additional changes.

10. What is my timeline goal for finishing my novel's first draft?

11. When is my goal for having my novel completely revised, edited, and finished?

12. Will I share my novel with beta readers? Who can I ask to beta read, or where will I look for beta readers?

The Traditional Publishing Process

Publishing
- Query literary agents
- Submit to publishers through agent
- Negotiate & sign deal with publisher
- Work with publishing house editors for further editing of your novel
- Publisher will design cover, discuss marketing strategies, set a release date, and send out advanced copies for review.

Self-Publishing Resources

- http://completelynovel.com/self-publishing/how-to-self-publish
- https://janefriedman.com/self-publish-your-book/
- http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/your-guide-to-self-publishing/

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13. Do I want to self-publish or pursue traditional publishing?

Advances

- Average advance for first-time author around $4-$10k
- Amount varies depending on size of publisher, type of story, how well the publisher thinks it will sell, etc.
- You will need to pay taxes on your advance, and also pay your agent's fee (usually 15%)
- Usually you will receive your advance in two payments, one when you sign your contract and the second when you turn in your edited novel.
- The size of your advance will likely increase for subsequent books if your published books sell well.

Royalties

- Your book must first earn back its advance before you can begin receiving royalties.
- If your book doesn't earn back its advance it won't generate royalties.
- Your agent will also get a percentage of your royalties.
- The average royalties for hardback books is 15%; for paperbacks the average is 7.5%

Making a Living as an Author

- To make a full-time living as an author you must establish a writing career and write many books.
- More books on the market means more money from royalties and advances.
- It will take years to write enough books to build a sustainable income.

14. Do I want to write novels as a hobby or career? If I want to do this as a career, how will I support myself financially while I'm getting established as an author?

Finding a Writing Community

Twitter chats for writers
- #StorySocial Wednesdays @ 9PM EST (Hosted by Kristen Kieffer from She's Novel and Jenny Bravo from Blots and Plots)
- #StoryCrafter Sundays @ 8PM GMT (Hosted by Faye Kirwin from Writerology)

Writing challenges
- NaNoWriMo.org (National Novel Writing Month, November)
- CampNaNoWriMo.org (April and July)

Writing websites
- Wattpad.com
- Movellas.com

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15. Where will I look for other writers to befriend and connect with?

GLOSSARY OF WRITING TERMS

A Resource for New Writers

Active Voice: when the subject of the sentence performs the action, rather than being acted upon (Ex. "He kissed her" rather than "He was kissed by her").

Antagonist: the villain of the story; the opposition to the hero.

Anti-hero: a dark hero who is riddled with flaws instead of the positive, noble traits we come to expect from heroes (Ex. Han Solo, Wolverine, Jack Sparrow).

Archetype: a recurring type of character in fiction found across multiple cultures, such as a trickster, mentor, healer, etc. (Ex. Yoda, Haymitch, and Dumbledore are all mentor archetypes).

Backstory: the details and background about a character's past.

Beta Reader: someone who reads a writer's story and provides them with feedback before publication.

Beat: the thoughts and actions of a character which comprise a scene. Often used between lines of dialogue for dramatic pause and to increase the emotion/tension of a scene.

Cardboard Character: a character who hasn't been developed to feel realistic or like a unique individual.

Character Arc: the character's inner journey throughout the story, and how they transform in some way by the end. Can either be a positive change or a negative change.

Character Trait: characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes that create a character's personality. Can either be positive or negative (Ex. Brave, pessimistic, honest, loyal, greedy, stubborn, etc.).

Character Quirk: a strange/interesting behavior, habit, hobby, or mannerism.

Characterization: the act of creating the specifics of a character such as traits, quirks, backstory, goal, etc.

Cliché: something that has been overused. In fiction this can mean a phrase, plot, character type, or dialogue.

Climax: the height of the story's action before the ending. The final conflict where it is decided whether or not the hero will win and achieve his goal.

Conflict: any opposition that keeps a character from getting what they want. The main conflict of a story is that between the hero and villain.

Deep Point of View: a style of writing that strives to bring the reader deep into the hero's head by eliminating "evidence" of the author's hand such as speech tags, words like "felt," "wondered," and "thought," and using more of the hero's voice in the writing.

Denouement: the ending of a story where any loose ends are tied and all questions are answered.

Dialogue: the spoken conversation between characters, signaled by quotation marks.

Dialogue tags: the verb after a line of dialogue that signals how it is being spoken and who is speaking (said, exclaimed, shouted, asked, etc.)

Epilogue: a section after the main ending of the story that reveals what happened to the characters afterward.

External Conflict: the struggle between the hero and an outside force such as nature or the villain.

Falling Action: when the story begins to slow down after its climax as it heads into the ending.

First Person: when the character uses "I" to tell the story (Ex. I walked along the bridge at noon).

Fleshing Out a Character: the act of creating a realistic character with traits, quirks, backstory, goal, etc. (See also, Characterization).

Genre: the type of story (Fantasy, Historical, Romance, Science Fiction, etc.)

High Concept: a story with a unique or fresh premise that grabs attention and appeals to a large audience.

Hook: the first sentence of your novel, designed to grab the reader's attention and arouse curiosity.

Info Dump: when the writer reveals a large amount of information or backstory all at once instead of spreading it out.

Imagery: descriptive, visual writing that often uses figurative language such as similes or metaphors.

Inciting Incident: the event that is the cause of the story. Without this event, no story would follow. (Ex. Katniss' sister getting chosen at the reaping is the inciting incident of *The Hunger Games*).

Internal Conflict: the struggle of the hero against his own self. (Ex. a struggle against a fear, flaw, or vice).

Manuscript: a term used to refer to an unpublished novel.

Minor Character: characters who appear in the story but don't play a large or significant role (Ex. Prim and Cinna in *The Hunger Games*).

Mood: the emotion a scene evokes in the reader.

National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo): an annual contest held during the month of November in which participants try to write a 50,000 word novel in 30 days.

Narrative: the written events of the story, as told by the viewpoint character in either first or third person.

Narrator: the person telling the story, either in first or third person.

Novel: a written work over 40,000 words in length.

Novella: a written work between 17,500-40,000 words in length.

Omniscient Point of View: a point of view where the narrator is god-like in that he knows the thoughts, feelings, secrets, backstories, etc. of all other characters and reveals them to the reader.

Pantsing: the act of writing a novel "by the seat of your pants" without any planning.

Passive Voice: when the subject is acted upon, rather than performing the action (Ex. "He was kissed by her" rather than "He kissed her").

Plot: the events that unfold in a story as the hero overcomes obstacles to try to achieve his goal, and how he changes along the way.

Plot Device: an object or character that moves the plot forward. Can sometimes be created in a way that feels too deliberate and unrealistic.

Plot Hole: an inconsistency, contradiction, or issue with the plot that makes it illogical or unbelievable.

Plot Point: 1) a significant event that moves the story forward; 2) a turning point; 3) the two moments of action and/or decision that lead from Act 1 into Act 2, and from Act 2 into Act 3 in a story.

Premise: a story's main idea or concept (Ex. The premise of *The Hunger Games* is 24 teens forced to fight to the death in a televised event).

Prologue: events that take place before the main story, but have a significant connection to or impact upon the main story so that it is important for the reader to know them.

Point of View (POV): the perspective of a certain character who is telling the story.

Prose: ordinary, written language without rhyme or meter (Ex. What you're reading right now is prose).

Protagonist: the hero of the story.

Purple Prose: writing that tries too hard to be descriptive, and in doing so overloads the reader (Also called flowery prose).

Rising Action: the events of the story leading up to the climax.

Secondary Character: characters who appear in the story but don't play a large or significant role (Ex. Prim and Cinna in *The Hunger Games*).

Scene: a single event that takes place in a single setting in a set amount of time. A story is made up of many scenes.

Scene Break: the writer's way of signaling a change in scene to the reader by leaving a blank line between the scenes or three asterisks centered in the page. The break signals a passage in time and/or a change in setting.

Setting: the place where the story and scenes occur.

Stakes: the consequences or reward for the hero's success or failure of their goal.

Stereotype: a flat, undeveloped character that focuses on a single widely perceived trait or misconception associated with them

Subplot: a mini storyline in addition to the main plot. (Ex. The romance between Katniss and Peeta is a romantic subplot while the Hunger Games is the main plot).

Subtext: the underlying meaning in writing or dialogue that is hinted at but not plainly expressed.

Suspension of Disbelief: the willingness of the reader to set aside their judgement and believe the story they are being told.

Synopsis: a summary of the novel's events, including its ending.

Tone: the attitude the writing expresses (Ex. Could be sarcastic, pessimistic, cheerful, etc.).

Theme: what your story is trying to say/prove about a topic (Ex. Love conquers all, the strong will always crush the weak, etc.).

Three Act Structure: the most common structure for plotting a story, with Act I representing the beginning, Act II the middle, and Act III the end.

Three Dimensional Character: a character who is realistic and has dimension like a real person.

Trope: another term for a cliché.

Twist: an unexpected revelation or turn of events in a story.

Two Dimensional Character: a character who is flat and doesn't feel real, and seems only to exist in the confines of the page.

Voice: the expression of the writing through the narrator, revealing their thoughts, opinions, and attitudes.

Word Count: how the length of a novel is measured. (The type of font, font size, line spacing, and page margins can all vary, which can add to or subtract from the number of pages. Word count doesn't lie and is always accurate).

Word Sprint: a 30 minute writing session in which the participant writes as fast as they can.

World Building: the act of creating a world so that it resembles our own with details such as culture, government, geography, politics, religion, etc.