

Agents, Editors and Writing by Jay Dubya

So, you just wrote your first science fiction novel. Your friend read it and told you that you were the next Ray Bradbury or Gene Roddenberry. Your fertile mind fantasizes your name up there on a Borders' wall poster right next to images of Isaac Asimov and Jules Verne. Before going off the deep end and equating your excellent achievement with Hemingway and Steinbeck, give your ego a vital stiff reality check.

Few of us mere mortals are literary Mozarts that can plop down in front of a computer screen and author a perfect manuscript the first time around. Let's get one thing straight right now. You wrote a manuscript and not a book. After an author takes the time and care to read, analyze, evaluate, edit, and rewrite the manuscript at least five times, the work has finally evolved into a publishable book manuscript.

Literary agents have represented several of my books. Truthfully, I never learned too much from literary agents except that they will show a strong interest in you and your work only if publishers and film producers do. If the power brokers in the literary world think your work is marketable, then you are a viable commodity. If you have no track record in the publishing industry, then forget all about your friend's praise and about your artificially inflated ego. You're going to have to accept criticism from your agency's all-too-busy editors, compromise ideas and plots in your artistic masterpiece, rewrite paragraphs, sentences and pages to conform to editorial evaluations and suggestions, admit making errors, learn from these grave "mistakes" and conscientiously avoid them when constructing future "manuscripts."

Although I never had learned too much of importance from my literary agents, I absorbed plenty from editors I had worked with. It took me three years to finally master what the editors considered the "mechanics of the writing craft." I reluctantly learned that good writing involves much more than the knowledge and demonstration of grammar, spelling and punctuation skills I had mastered as an English teacher. I picked up a hundred or so "recommendations" from my "literary editors" and I will now share some of them.

To facilitate good transitions and chapter integrity, don't begin sentences and/or paragraphs with pronouns (when writing in the third person). Stay away from "lazy sentence patterns" such as starting out with constructions such as "There are" or "There is." And above all else, if you plan to be refreshingly original and creative, stay away from using stereotypical clichés and hackneyed idioms, which tend to irritate book editors.

A good sci-fi' novel or any other genre novel should first be a "love story" at its core construction with the attendant genre decoration adroitly wrapped around that core. For example, H.G. Wells' classic breakthrough novel *The Time Machine* is at its core a love story between the Time Traveler and Weena and secondly, the work is a wonderful adventure story about the ongoing conflicts between the Eloi and the Morlocks. In Ray Bradbury's masterpiece *Fahrenheit 451*, the success of the novel has as much to do with the struggle in the main character Guy Montag's personal love relationship with his dysfunctional drugo' wife as it does with the tyrannical government controlled by the powerful fire department that Montag works for. Guy Montag is searching for love as much as he is in quest of truth and justice. So, if you think that genuine sci-fi' is simply about alien invasions, green-headed one-eyed monsters, laser attacks and wars between planets with lots of terrific action scenes with Apache helicopters and UFOs

exploding, you are dooming your manuscript to both mediocrity and to commercial failure. Your main character must have love or/and must be searching for it while he's saving the world.

The main character cannot be a villain or an evil person. Perhaps he could start out that way but he must change for the better as the story progresses, and the quicker, the better. He or she must be a compassionate protagonist that the reader can sympathize with and care about. The reader has to identify with the main character's noble conscience and his (or her) extraordinary empathy for others. Reader's allegiance is the author's greatest weapon. Yes, you can have bad guys in your novel but they have to be the definite antagonists and not the heroes. And the bad guys should hang around until almost the end and if they do hang around until then, they ought to relinquish some of their devious traits and be positively influenced by the good guy's superior demonstrable personality strengths. The main character must have "character."

The protagonist (good guy main character) ought to be present engaging in dialogue and showing activity in every chapter, and the nefarious antagonist must appear or at least be mentioned in each and every chapter.

Each character in your novel should have a separate and unique personality. No two characters should seem alike to your readers. In my satirical novel *Ron Coyote, Man of La Mangia*, Ron Coyote is the idealist, the dreamer out to change the immoral world and his companion Pancho Sanza is practical, naughty, and hedonistic. The two engage in many amusing conversations, and their polarities in interests and values facilitate and support the humorous theme of the adult-oriented novel. Ron Coyote is out to change the world and convert it to Christian morality while Pancho Sanza is quite happy with the way that the planet's population is dysfunctioning.

No easy formulas exist that can guarantee success to an author. One must find his (or her) writing style and writing voice through years of experimenting, rejection, frustration and failure before fame and fortune become realistic products of your labor. But most importantly, accept criticism from knowledgeable editors, admit you've made mistakes and then the author must learn something from them. You've finally made it when a reader could be shown a paragraph from an unidentified work and immediately recognize the words as special language originating from you. Then it is quite apparent you have developed a unique "writing voice."

Writing a novel is not a task; it is a labor of love that represents an ongoing project. If writing seems tedious and too much like work, you'd be better off organizing letters or newspaper ads than attempting to professionally author a noteworthy book. Novel writing is like a sickness that you are addicted to love to do. It is mental madness that must be completed, and while your masterpiece is in progress, your book is the most important thing in your life that exists on a higher plane than even food and oxygen.

Characters alone do not make a good story. Plots and subplots by themselves do not make a good novel. Novel writing is akin to the famous double helix DNA model. Your characters on one strand and your plots and subplots on a second strand wrap around each other in an upward spiral, forming a dynamic symbiotic relationship. Together their chemistry should unite in a synergy that builds and expands and reinforces itself from chapter one until the final chapter's last sentence. Good characters need good plots and subplots, and good plots and subplots need good characters. One factor cannot sustain a strong novel without the aid of the other. It all sounds quite simple and rather elementary, doesn't it?

Okay, your sci-fi' novel now has terrific characters, both protagonists and antagonists, and an extraordinary plot and well-synchronized subplots moving upward in a well' organized inverted pyramid structure.

Congratulations! You now have seventy percent of the elusive good novel writing mystery competently solved. But please remember that the fiction book industry itself is also a giant pyramid, and only the top three percent of the "damned' hard-working" authors at the apex of the writing matrix make the big bucks. To enter into their eminent and lofty 3% domain you have to be better than the 97% of "wannabe' writers" in the base of the overcrowded literary pyramid. This is where diligence in pursuing excellence must be both honored and implemented.

Setting is another crucial element of novel writing that novice authors take for granted. My editors at the literary agency kept reminding me, "Everything that is said, all dialogue, must have a definite time and place where the characters are exchanging conversation. You can't state something like 'Tom Smith once told Bob Jones that Jones was incompetent'." When did Tom say that? What year and date was it? Where were Tom and Bob when the comment was made? It is the author's responsibility to extend the courtesy of time and place setting to the reader in everything that is alluded to in both real time and in "flashbacks," and by all means do yourself a mighty big favor by leaving "foreshadowing" to the motion picture industry.

Another must in good novel development is balance between dialogue and narrative. If you insert too much dialogue, you've written a script for a movie or for a screenplay; but if your story has too much description, your sci-fi' narrative then reads like a non-fiction book. In this regard an author must practice discretion and always be judicious while weighing "narrative versus dialogue."

Mingled into the delicate mix of dialogue and narrative usage are such significant elements as theme, suspense, drama, author's writing style, writing voice, tone, conflict, setting, action, adventure, plots, subplots, grammar skills, creativity and acceptable character definition. If the author can weave all of these intangibles into a viable series of chapters of seventy-five to one hundred fifty thousand text words, then he (or she) has advanced from being a writer of manuscripts and stories to an authentic novel author.

Above all else, the concept of "show and tell" is not limited to elementary school classrooms. It is also indispensable to authors of successful novels. The author objectively "tells" the story but the characters' conversations and actions "show" the story. Show is better than tell. Good dialogue (and action) is better than good narrative. And a good novelist knows the difference between active and passive voice and habitually prefers the former to the latter.

Generally, stories come across as more believable when written in the first person. The author's big problem with utilizing the first-person technique translates into how not to overtax the reader with the repetition of the pronoun, I. Most novels are written in the third person but I have written two in the first with the main character recalling the story as "a testament" of what had truly occurred. Good fiction must always read as if it was good non-fiction and conversely and ironically, good non-fiction must read as if it was fiction.

Presenting a novel in the third person (speaking about the characters) gives the author a distinct choice. The narrator (author) telling the story can objectively advance the tale as the "detached presenter" revealing events either in chronological order or arranging episodes accompanied by flashbacks and/or foreshadowing. Flashbacks are more desirable (remember to include setting) because they promote "show," where "foreshadowing tends to orchestrate "tell" and leans one in the direction of "author interference," a major mortal sin of novel writing. Stay out of your story and keep your opinions to yourself! Allow a character to express what you (the author) might think and feel!

This next part is rather tricky. The third person method of writing could also implement the “omniscient narrator” technique. The storyteller knows all about the characters, even some things the characters don’t know about themselves. You can’t be both the “objective narrator” and the “omniscient narrator.” You have to choose one or the other approach and stick with that pursuit throughout the novel. The “omniscient narrator” method dangerously points the author in the direction of “author interference,” which is recognized in the publishing industry as literary quicksand that must be avoided at all costs.

“Author interference” is something that all good writers can recognize and sidestep. Stay the hell out of the story you are telling. Again, permit one of the characters to possess your attitudes and opinions if you feel they must be expressed but by all means, don’t editorialize or opine. You are writing a novel and not an essay or an opinion column for the local newspaper. And by all means, don’t be preachy in your carefully arranged narrative that appears in between characters’ dialogue, and if one of your fictional human creations coincidentally has your attitudes and opinions, make sure that he or she is not too preachy or boorish, too!

Give some credit to your readers’ intelligence. They have minds of their own, and they are continuously perceptively hypothesizing, evaluating, and deducting conclusions as your story progresses and evolves. You don’t have to tell them everything and explain every little detail. Leave some things open for their hungry imaginations to ponder. Don’t over-describe and “overwrite,” although this suggestion is easy to give but hard to employ. Your reader will genuinely respect you and your story if you reasonably stay within those particular guidelines.

Finally, this last advice is the hardest part of all. Once you have finished writing your fantastic masterpiece, do not run to the post office and send it off to a publisher. Remove yourself (your emotions and your heart) from your work for at least one month. Distance yourself from your marvelous product. Harness your wonderful enthusiasm pertaining to your great contribution to American and World literature. Writing is an art, and that’s where the “talent” part is exhibited. But an axiom to remember is that patience and prudence are paramount parts of being “talented.”

At last, you are en route. You’re now seriously involved in making the art of writing into a “science.” And only when there is a true marriage between art and science that then your work is ready for public presentation and consumption (if you want to distinguish yourself from the 97% of the writers that are comparable to crabs in a bushel, crawling over each other desperately and frantically trying to get out of their mediocre enclosure).

Confidently show self-control and put your manuscript on your closet shelf. After a full month, take it down and read it again from stem to stern. Now you are better able to evaluate your work, your errors, and your inadvertent departures from good novel writing methods (that should now stick out like ugly poisonous thorns throughout your comprehensively prepared work). You can now be more objective in

doing your final revision, which should be a “new vision” of your work as you proudly steer your stellar literary contribution onward toward perfection and deftly bring your writing ship into port. After that very necessary procedure is enacted and accomplished, it is finally time to launch your splendid masterpiece into the literary universe.



Author's Page At Book Marketing Global Network:

<https://bookmarketingglobalnetwork.com/book-marketing-global-network/jay-dubya-books/>



We Are A Unique Group Of Authors!
We Are Building A Strong Readership!

Book Marketing Global Network!