

Write Your Best Newsletter

January, 2009 Newsletter

Greetings,

You received this newsletter because awhile back you expressed an interest in writing. Enjoy!

Quotes For Writers

"Truly great painting retains some element of a child's emotional authenticity. Great writing does, too."

Susan Orlean, in *Telling True Stories*

"Skill alone makes it too easy to write around what we have to say; to build a fortress of words that is hard to breach...One reason we're so fascinated by writing techniques is that they promise to help us tap-dance elegantly around what we really have to say."

Ralph Keyes, *The Courage to Write*

Recommended Books for Writers

The Writer's Idea Workshop by Jack Heffron

Want help moving from your idea to getting it on the page? If so, this book's for you. What if you don't have an idea? No problem, there are prompts to generate ideas. It's practical and inspirational. Pick it up now and then for writing exercises, or read it through for guidance.

Recommended Website for Writers

<http://www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/>

Resources for Writers and Writing Instructors from Rutgers University. A treasure trove! More than 3,000 links to sites useful to writers. No matter what you're looking for, you'll find a link to it here.

Some, but not many, links are broken. CAUTION: this site may result in a work slowdown.

Back to the Basics

Tina hired me a few months ago because she was fed up with writing for her own pleasure, then stuffing the finished pieces in a drawer. Committed to taking her writing more seriously, she asked me to teach her how to write better and to help her develop a goal for her writing.

I suggested we work together on one essay at a time. I edit it and then we meet and I explain the edits in terms of writing craft. Between sessions, Tina works on the next draft. We repeat the process with each draft.

She's already submitted her first essay to a regional magazine, which responded positively. Now we're working on two new essays that she'll eventually send out. Tina's hard work has paid off already: her goal is to become a freelance writer.

Last week I was preparing for a session to explain why one aspect of her writing was problematic. I turned to my bookcase and grabbed Strunk and White's "The Elements of Style." You may know this classic on writing from college.

I opened to the chapter, Omit Needless Words, but soon had read the entire book. In only 77 pages, it gives you everything you need to know about the fundamentals of clear, powerful writing. And because the authors practice what they preach, the book is engaging and concise.

If you haven't read Elements of Style recently, it's time to pull it off the shelf or get a copy from Amazon (mine cost \$1.50).

If you are a new writer, it will give you confidence. If you are a veteran writer, it will shake you out of bad habits.

Set aside a couple of hours to read it from cover to cover. Make it your commitment to your writing.

Tips for Writing Fiction: Locating Your Story's Perspective

by Lynn C. Miller

(Note: I have invited Lynn, a novelist and playwright, to write a series of columns on strategies for fiction writing.)

Writers begin novels or short stories because of various impulses, among them an image, an idea for a plot, a headline in a newspaper, a family member or friend who suggests a character, a longing to tell some aspect of self. But in the practical business of structuring a story, deciding who is telling it is an essential step.

The speaker of a story usually will introduce herself in either first person or third person. First person narrators are personal, highly motivated--they want to share their version of events--and totally subjective. For example, in *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway opens the novel. He's going to tell us a story about his friend Gatsby and from the moment he opens his mouth, we know that the story will come through him. Audiences like first person, because the speaker seems to be talking straight to each reader.

The price we pay as writers when we use the first person is that our subjective narrator, like any one person in life, is limited in what she knows.

Third person, or omniscient, narrators are more wide ranging. From the third person, this unseen witness can easily move in and out of any character's head giving us a broader view. For a story that has several main characters, this kind of narration allows us complete freedom. We can share a number of subjective perceptions, all the while keeping the illusion that someone knows the whole story. We have Henry James to thank for the idea of a central consciousness, a central character that the third person narrator favors and frequently uses as a perceiver.

In general, if the story has several strong characters that you want to show both inside and out, a third person narrator gives you the most freedom. To showcase an idiosyncratic voice or privilege one person's perspective on events, choose the first person.

*Lynn C. Miller is author of the novels *The Fool's Journey* and *Death of a Department Chair*. A fiction writing coach and editor, she also conducts generative writing and critique groups in Albuquerque, NM. For more information, visit her website, www.lynncmiller.com.*

Summer Writing Festival

Want to take your writing to the next level? The University of Iowa is offering week-long writing workshops from June 7 through July 24 in all genres, open to all levels. For more information, email iswfestival@uiowa.edu

Questions about writing or publishing? Send them to me at cindy@writeyourbest.com .

Happy Writing!
Cindy Barrilleaux

If you know someone who is writing or wants to write, and think they'd be interested, forward this newsletter to them.

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www.WriteYourBest.com, Cindy@writeyourbest.com