

Uncommon Advice for Beginning Novelists

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- 1) Convince yourself you want to do something else. If you don't succeed, proceed to number 2.
- 2) Write what you don't know. Write what interests you. Fiction is about emotion not personal experience--that is a memoir. Truth comes from emotion. Write with passion.
- 3) Embrace rejections. Not literally unless it makes you feel good. Understand that they are as inevitable as bad hair days, gum on your shoe, and taxes. You're in the marketing business. Everyone will not buy your product, but eventually somebody will.
- 4) Procrastinate. You don't need to write every day. On some days just be idle. Use these days to fill up your creativity well. Take a long leisurely walk, organize your cupboards, read, buy the stationary you'll send to your fans, imagine a brilliant review and write it down, sketch your book cover with a blurb from an author you admire.
- 5) Write to make money. Poverty need not be a mandatory requirement of the writing life. Artistic expression is all well and good, but you need to eat. So write the books of your heart, but also understand the market and see if you can tailor some of your work to fit it. You can write your Great Novel on the side, but trust me it's very difficult to be creative when you're starving.
- 6) Skip the book and watch the movie. Especially, the movie versions of classic novels. The writing style has changed drastically in the past centuries. So writing like Charles Dickens or Henry James will not get you far in today's market. However, don't let it skip your notice that their books (or the rather movie versions of them) still capture contemporary movie audiences. Why? Because of the stories they tell.

Watching the movie of these books will help you learn how to develop your storytelling abilities. See what stands out, pay attention to what scenes linger in your mind, what dialogue makes you gasp or laugh out loud, what does the camera focus on? How does that enhance the tale? We live in an age where people are very visual; writing to that preference will help make your work successful.

7) Get into character. Use stick figures to lay out a scene, listen to the music a main character would listen to, wear a piece of clothing a character might like, write a diary entry for them. Photograph the area where your character lives; if your character comes from a different place, eat the regional foods they might eat. These activities will help you make your story and your characters come alive.

8) Laugh at yourself and the industry. Many authors like to offer dire warnings about the death of the mid-list, how publishers are consolidating, they bemoan the few options there are for new writers and how publishers promote only the lucky few. Yes, that's true, but you can be a happy author despite the industry.

Unfortunately, too many writers take themselves too seriously. We're a maudlin group despite available Prozac, alcohol and pills. It's a crazy life. It's supposed to be. We make up stories for a living! It's a Peter Pan profession like dancing and acting. You want to emotionally strip yourself naked and have people applaud. Isn't that bizarre?

So you can get discouraged, but you don't need to be depressed. Stories are needed. They keep our cultures alive.

9) Don't worry about promotion. If you haven't written a word, don't concern yourself with bookmarks, getting on national television, networking bookstores or the like. Anyone can sell an idea, find out if you can deliver.

10) Celebrate milestones that don't seem to count. Contest losses (can't win if you don't enter) bad drafts (at least you finished) rejections (at least you're in the game), \$25 checks (at least you got paid to write), personal notes (someone read your work) and anything else that gets you closer to your publication goal.

Celebrate being a writer in every little way that you can. You deserve it.

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