



Solid Information and a Sense of Humor

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### *Working Writer*

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## The No-Show Writer

In the past few weeks I've heard this statement from several different writers: "I'll never show my writing to anyone again!" One author-to-be got stung by a manuscript doctor who charged a lot and left her kids' book in shreds. Another aspiring writer was disheartened to hear relatives' "destructive criticism." He swore he'd never let *anyone* read his manuscript again. A third swore off critique groups and well-meaning, but demoralizing, advice from writer friends.

### Ostrich Strategy

Letting someone read your writing is a little like standing up in front of a group to sing—in your underwear. You're vulnerable, looking for reassurance that you did good. Hiding your manuscript is one way to make sure no one hurts your feelings, and it protects you from those who feel the need to rip and shred.

But books are a form of communication—they're supposed to be read. Some folks write privately, for therapy, to exorcise demons. Those works may not be meant for public eyes. But if your goal is publication, someone eventually has to read and

evaluate (mercilessly) what you wrote. So grow a thicker skin.

You may be disappointed to hear your novel is too long, your characters sketchy, your dialogue forced, your facts muddy, and your plot convoluted. But if, in fact, that's the case, better to know before you send your work out. Submissions readers rarely point out manuscript problems; they just reject.

### Not for the Timid

Writing is not a business where you can stick your head in a hole. And believe me, writing IS a business, bottom line and all. Your book is a product you must sell; you'll have to get out on the street and hawk your wares, make presentations, sign books, deal with less-than-glowing reviews -- tough going for the sensitive scribe.

So suck it up and find a critique group, mentor, or someone you trust to tell you the truth. Take in the good stuff and question the questionable. Stay away from friends or family with hidden agendas. But get your manuscripts into the light of day. You'll survive—really!—and might find yourself admitting, "Yeah, that could be better."

*"The man who is asked  
by an author what he thinks  
of his work is put to the torture  
and is not obliged  
to speak the truth."  
-- Samuel Johnson*

## Going It Alone

### Freelance Writing Blues by Brandi-Ann Uyemura

There's baby blues and even shopping blues, but freelance writing blues? Yep. You heard me. If you're in the low right now, when your phone stops ringing, people stop e-mailing and your blog is as empty as an ice-cream shop in wintertime, then you know what I mean. You wonder if this is it, the last shebang, the final sign that you didn't make it, that you're just not that good of a writer and your \_\_\_\_\_ (mom, sister/brother, father, uncle/aunt, cousin) was right. But before you throw in the towel and raise that white flag, let's see if you're jumping the gun. A few things you should ask yourself:

- Have I been here before? If this isn't the first time that fear and doubt has got you wrapped up in its little self-sabotaging web, then maybe it's a sign you're still in the game. Maybe this has more to do with faith than it does with reality. You've been here during the lows, but you've also risen above it. Sometimes we forget and only focus on our failures. Use your new downtime to get refocused and motivated by remembering

that you have been here before and have already gone through it successfully.

- Is this fear calling? When fear calls, it's hard not to answer. Writers already have lots of worries and vulnerabilities—more than the normal Joe. When there's no one praising you or giving you feedback, it's easy to jump from uncertainty to rejection. In this case, call your writer friends and ask them what they think. Meditate. Leave your computer for a bit and go outside. Do anything to take your mind off of the fear. Then get back to work.

- Is this seasonal? Sometimes there are lulls according to season. Summer and winter are when lots of clients take off on vacation. But so do other writers. There are things you can do to get ahead while everyone else is relaxing. Get your papers in order and all your ducks in a row so that by high season you'll be off and running without worrying about taxes you owe or invoices you need to send.

- Have I been marketing myself and working on my craft? You know that saying, "It's not you, it's me?" Well, maybe in this case, it IS you. The reason why you're not getting the business you so deserve is that you haven't been getting your writing out there or you haven't taken the time to really focus on your writing goals. You may want to start marketing or find a good writing class. There is a ridiculous number of courses (online and offline) and some free ones, so educate yourself while you can.

You may be feeling the freelance writing blues now, but like everything else in life, it's temporary. This too shall pass. In the meantime, there are things you can do to get yourself out of the rut.

Connect with other writers and your non-writing friends. Surround yourself with people who are good at buttering you up. Supportive people are like food for the writer. When you're feeling blue, call on them for a quick pick-me-up.

Be kind. Try not to be so hard on yourself and realize that all writers are either facing what you're dealing with now or have so in the past. Take this as another opportunity to grow as a writer. And when you're busy again with tons of clients and lots of queries accepted, remember where you were and use that as strength for the next time you hit another valley.

*Brandi-Ann is an Associate Editor for Psych Central and a freelance writer with a penchant for all things inspiring. Visit her freelance writing website at <http://Brandi-AnnUyemura.com>.*

*[Fear calling? Leave a message.  
-- Ed.]*

### We can take it!

**Send us your feedback:  
considered opinions, keen  
observations, picky-picky  
complaints, or  
humorous repartee.  
We love it all, and we'll  
probably print it!**

**FEEDBACK:**

"I have a grammar question about something I thought I knew well, but I've seen it misused frequently this last year, even in a recent issue of WW, so I need clarification. Is it correct to say 'I wish it *was* true,' or 'I wish it *were* true?' In school I was taught that if the fact was questionable, not a determined fact, the plural *were* should be used. Another example would be: 'If he was here, we would have had a quorum,' or 'If he were here, we would have had a quorum.' The determining factor is that he is not here. I know grammar and punctuation rules change, and I would like to know the status of this one."

-- Reba Cross Seals, via Internet

*[You're right. It's called the subjunctive mood, and if I were paying attention (a questionable fact), I'd have caught it! -- Ed.]*

"[RE: Copycat Books, Sep/Oct 10] Soon is not too soon for the vampires to bite the dust, or whatever. By the time one follows up the trend, another trend is surging. It just won't pay off. But if a writer has something to say, I believe it will get published. Someplace. Sometime. About retiring phrases: have we done 'at the end of the day' and the superfluous suffix 'before'? As in 'I did that before' or 'I've been there before'?"

-- Rod Riggs, Los Angeles, CA

*[Yes, we retired "at the end of the day" before. Oops. -- Ed.]*

**Tempus Fugit****Waste No One's Time**  
by Lila McGinnis

Listening rather sleepily to a last-afternoon speaker at a writer's conference, I was jerked awake when he shouted, "WASTE NO ONE'S TIME."

He then explained that a friend, a professor of music composition at his college, kept those words above his desk, writ large. He suggested we all do the same. "Don't submit half-baked prose, pointless poems, unrealized characters, careless punctuation, or anything you think is pretty good, for pretty good is not good enough. It's a do-it-yourself-world, my friends," he said. "Send something just nearly good enough and it has only wasted that editor's time, not to mention your time, the mailman's time, the postage, the—"

A hand shot up in the first row. "How do we know it's not good enough if we don't send it out? I'm a poet. . ."

"How do you know if it is good enough? READ. How many poems by contemporary poets have you read in the past week?"

The hand and the head of the poet disappeared.

"That's how you learn. Read. Picture book writers, read picture books. Sit down at the library and read dozens of them. What made those good enough? Why were they chosen? Novelists, read like a writer. Why do you read on, chapter after chapter? Why did that editor turn

the page?" He took a breath, and hands shot up across the auditorium.

"You want specifics?" he asked, ignoring the hands. "Have you read any Ezra Pound? 'Go in fear of abstractions,' he said. Do you know what he meant? Read your latest manuscript. Do you form a picture in your mind? An abstract idea, describing how wonderful love is will not impress an editor as much as an image of what love is. How love acts. Offering a rose, washing a dish, leaving a hot supper. That's love."

The speaker grinned at his audience and kept on talking, but I was recalling the classes I'd sat in that week. Every workshop leader had mentioned images. "Show, don't tell," one had emphasized and was answered by groans. "I know, you've heard that before. But the height and the depth of your words are in the details, and the details come out in a scene, and we read a scene as though we are watching it happen, right there in front of our eyes."

The leader paused a moment. Then . . . "If, instead, you simply, even beautifully told us what was happening, would we care as much? No. We prefer to be shown."

Another leader began with beginnings. "Start with something happening," he said, "with an image, something real, so that the editor says 'and then what happens?' and turns the page. That's your most important job, getting the editor to turn the page, and you do that with action, not philosophy or a description of the

weather. Make us a picture."

One leader stopped her class on the way out. "Remember," she called after us, "whatever you write, end with an image, with a picture to be carried away, one that expresses the idea you want them to remember. Try hard to do that. Not the idea, but the picture of that idea. The image."

Since I had just reread the classic *Of Human Bondage*, I thought at once of Maugham's last line—after six-hundred pages of misery mixed with an occasional success, the lovers discover each other and the author discovered the perfect last line, a simple image that will stick with the reader for a long time. He might have let Philip think about how happy he would be, how good he felt—instead a simple scene: they walked down the museum steps, "and the sun was shining." Picture perfect ending.

I came back to the present as the speaker on the stage came to his conclusion. "I've borrowed from a lot of fine writers this afternoon," he said, "but now I come back to my musical friend. Learn to write well by writing, by reading, by listening, and thinking, and when you are ready, learn to proofread correctly. That's more important than many of you seem to believe. And most of all—" he leaned forward and smiled. "WASTE NO ONE'S TIME."

*Lila has sold sixty eight short stories, five children's books, and one novel. She has taught writing and led critique groups, with her students selling a dozen books so far.*

### **WE NEED SUBMISSIONS!**

Yep, it takes a pile of articles, tips, and what-not (especially what-not) to fill these 12 pages.

We received a pretty good response to our last begging session. But there are lots of mega-talented writers (flattery works) out there who have an article or two sitting in a folder or drawer. Send 'em in!

First-run, reprint, whatever.

Do it today!

[e-mail an article](mailto:workingwriters@aol.com)  
to [workingwriters@aol.com](mailto:workingwriters@aol.com).

### **Write in Front of You**

#### **Make Editing a Daily Practice by Jo Judy**

It can be frustrating, even discouraging, for aspiring writers to work fulltime while hopefully reserving weekends and evenings for their craft. However, when writing does not provide sufficient income, practicality compels even the most impassioned to take a job that pays the bills.

I, for example, worked for twenty years in the legal profession while writing in my spare time. I did not realize until later that my legal work provided an excellent opportunity to practice writing—and I do not mean just on short breaks or during lunch.

Writing is a skill that needs to be exercised, and many jobs require employees to write. For example, almost every commercial business depends on memos and letters. Patient summaries are essential for

laboratories, hospitals, and medical and dental offices. Financial institutions, real estate, and legal establishments all utilize detailed written reports. And do not forget e-mail, blogs, personal websites, and tweeting, all of which dominate both our public and private lives. Although drafting a business letter, interoffice memo, or e-mail may not seem conducive to honing skills needed in writing a successful short story or novel, there are areas of overlap. Here are a few suggestions where you may be able—as the aphorism so aptly states—to kill two birds with one stone.

- Spice up those sentences. When writing just another form letter or boring memo, pull out the thesaurus and add some life to those barren nouns. Be adventuresome, even inspiring. Try alliteration to subtly draw attention to the main point in a paragraph. When faced with a long report, look for sentences where the subject is lost in subordinating clauses and untangle them. Journal editors complain that convoluted language is a huge problem in academic writing. Eliminate flowery or out-of-date words. Professionals can unintentionally *obfuscate* meaning through the use of arcane language or unnecessary nomenclature. A letter, memo, report, or other document that is written in a simple, clear style will be easier to understand and more appealing to the reader.

- Organize and reorganize. Once the document is drafted, focus on unity. Begin with the paragraph. One exercise I found helpful is to read the first sentence of a

paragraph to determine if it introduces the topic and then read the last sentence to see if it sums it up. Rewrite them appropriately. Next, read the sentences in between looking for those that do not relate to the topic of the paragraph and either delete or move them. Ensure that appropriate transitions exist between sentences and paragraphs. Once the document seems to flow and changes have been made, apply this same technique to the first and last paragraphs.

- Do not forget e-mail. Whether at work or home, e-mail—and this now includes blogs, personal websites, text messaging, and tweeting—has become the main mode of communication. Just because an e-mail or text message seems more akin to an informal note than a formal document does not mean that it should be treated casually. Misspelled or missing words, lack of punctuation, disjointed sentences, and failure to use a paragraph format are all lapses that can leave the wrong impression or annoy a reader. And, even those who do not or cannot practice writing at work can develop a personal website or blog.

- If these changes seem too radical there are less intrusive but nevertheless essential skills that will benefit from practice. For example, proper placement of commas demands an expertise more difficult than it seems—one that grows rusty from nonuse. Paste the basic comma rules over your desk and use them. Another easily overlooked area is action. Scan sentences for passive verbs and replace

them with active ones. And remember, even a busy professional appreciates a writer who varies the length of sentences.

Utilizing these and other techniques to hone your writing skills may serve a dual purpose. While practice ensures that your personal writing is polished, it can also enhance your marketability in the workplace. Business and technical writing is considered its own genre, and, as such, is taught as a regular course at many universities. Businesses often hire consultants to provide writing skills workshops to employees.

For those writers who want to practice writing all the time, opportunity abounds. And who knows, it just may improve your query letter or book proposal.

*Jo is a retired attorney currently working part-time in a used bookstore and writing fiction. She lives and works on the beautiful Big Island of Hawaii.*

*[ u know its good idea 2 e-mail tweet n blog properly. -- Ed.]*

### **Words That Tickle Us:** **“hyperbole”**

Defined as an exaggeration or extravagant statement (*I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!*), this is one of the most useful words in the world. Yes, that's hyperbole. Warning: there are four syllables in this word, not three. Mispronouncing it will forever brand you as an uneducated derelict (also hyperbole).

### ***On the Contrary***

[Re: Phrases To Retire, WW, Sep/Oct 10] “I take issue with the suggestion to retire the phrase ‘push the envelope.’ It’s a useful metaphor to indicate the breaking of new ground or expanding the boundaries. It has been and continues to be used in the scientific community in expanding current boundaries. The space program is an example. In the physics of matter, it is now accepted that the smallest building component of life forms is not known but the search continues, perhaps forever, thus pushing the envelope of atomic knowledge. The phrase implies risk-taking in breaking out of the comfortable known and venturing into the risky unknown. I’m certain there are counter arguments, but this is the way I see it, perhaps because I am comfortable with the phrase.”

-- Paul A. Contos, San Jose, CA

“‘Pushing the envelope’ is a legitimate expression from aviation, and means to push an aircraft or a design to or beyond its stated height or speed limits. It refers to the term ‘flight envelope,’ which means abilities an aircraft is built to operate at. To use it in everyday terms means you're trying to go beyond what's been done before or do something completely new. The only problem with the phrase is that it's used too much to describe something that isn't all that new.

-- Robert Collins, Andover, KS

*[To all you ground breakers out there who love this phrase, I concede! “Push the envelope” is unretired, to be used sparingly. -- Ed.]*

## **A Cautionary Tale**

### **Beware Ye of the Hope Vultures by William D. Canavan**

A strange title you might think? Not really. The vultures are out there, in the high branches and soaring in the skies overhead. Riding the winds and waiting for the right moment to land and feed off your hopes. There is a word out there for writers that is worse than *rejection*; it is *deception*.

They got me because I wanted another publication too badly. I was young and naïve, but I was still cautious and watchful. They, however, were good at what they did. That is not a compliment for them, that is a warning for you, the beginning writer. Here is what happened.

It was around 1978 or so, many moons back. I was getting up two hours earlier than I had to for work, so I could have some writing time. My efforts were starting to pay off. I had a few publications rolling in. My confidence was building in my ability to write, and my office had moved out of my bedroom and into a small room next to it.

Out of the blue skies, I received a notification in my mailbox (the snail kind—this was still in the dark ages) that Gold Seal Books, an imprint of Bookman Publishing Co. out of Honolulu, was accepting submissions for a series of hard-cover anthologies in all genres. I was overjoyed and yet, at the same time, I wondered how they had gotten my name. I sent in the re-

quired reply, expressing that I was interested in submitting, along with that exact question and a few more.

In a short time I received my answers. They claimed they had gotten my name, and many more, from the list of subscribers to a well-known writer's magazine. I read the information they had supplied in regard to length, manuscript format, and so on, and all seemed in order with standard procedures. So I wrote a story and sent it away.

It took a fair amount of time to hear back from them, but it seemed like a plausible response time for the submission and was in accordance with the information sent months earlier. So I opened the reply, in front of about six friends who were visiting, and pulled out a beautiful parchment certificate of acceptance for publication. It elegantly congratulated me on my success. There was a small, golden emblem on the right corner that said Gold Seal Books. It was signed, dated, the whole works, and looked professional. I received congratulations from my friends, and after they had left, I read the enclosed letter more closely.

It congratulated me again, requested a brief biography, and suggested I send them a list of all local newspapers and radio stations in my area so they could be informed of my achievement and contacted in the future for marketing purposes. Also enclosed, was a publication contract with all the legalities, in a triplicate form. I had never seen anything like this. It claimed that since this was a new imprint, a fee of \$100.00 (I am not completely sure of that

price anymore, but it's close) would be required to help cover the cost of marketing the book.

The bells and whistles went off like it was New Year's Eve. I took it to an attorney to have him read through the contract to see if it was legally sound. He said the contract was a bit one-sided, leaning toward the publisher, but most of those kinds of contracts were (no offense to any publishers—blacklist the attorney). He also explained that it was not necessarily uncommon for publishing companies to request a small marketing fee when going out on a limb with a new imprint, especially anthologies.

I felt better (kind of). Throughout the next few days, I was still haunted by that little voice inside that tries to tell us when something is wrong. But at the same time I was struggling with another voice that was saying "What if this is legitimate and I don't follow through with it? What if I hold back, and then later realize I missed my shot at a big one? Possibly THE big one?"

I am sure you have figured out the rest of the story. I wrote my brief biography and sent it in to Bookman Publishing Co. along with the signed contract and the check made out to them. Then I waited. And nothing ever happened. My check was cashed, and my heart and my hopes fell like rain. For the longest time, I was too embarrassed to tell anyone. When people asked, I told them the whole thing had been killed by the publishing company due to costs.

I can even remember crying one night in bed, because of the damage done.

What I did not do was stop writing. I took the certificate and hung it right over my desk. Every morning before I started to write, I looked at it and told myself that I would not let that decision define me or my ability to write. I was human and all human beings make mistakes. Some also deceive and rob other human beings. I moved on, and so did my writing. Eventually, the certificate came down and went in the garbage because it wasn't important anymore.

So why bring it up all these years later? Because it's important to remember, especially these days with the Internet and the "here one day, gone the next" website capabilities, that the writer is just as vulnerable to scams as is the average consumer. One more reason: never rush into anything for the sake of being published. The desire for publication is natural, and sometimes can be overwhelming for the beginner, but be patient, and be resilient.

Always remember that dreams can be accomplished if you work hard enough. If you run into a bad editor/publisher, for every one of those there are thousands of good, honest ones that want what you have to offer. If you fall into a bad situation and get burned, like I did, learn from it, grow from it, because one day you'll look back and you will find that although it hurt at the time, it shaped you for bigger and better things.

*William is a part-time freelance writer, author, and greeting card copy writer. His current novel in progress is titled Frampton and Fobb.*

## Words That Need To Be Retired Permanently

This month's nominee:  
**"noisome"**

**This word isn't overused, it's misused. Just as "fulsome" doesn't mean full, "noisome" doesn't mean noisy. Both describe something offensive to the point of disgust. So no "fulsome praise" and no "noisome anything" unless it's absolutely foul.**

### Lions and Tigers and Bears

#### **Straight Talk About Talking Animals** by Laura Backes

Twenty years ago "talking animal stories" were everywhere. Then, in the early 1990s, many editors decided they didn't want to see these books anymore. Of course, established authors like William Steig never stopped populating their stories with chatty mice or frogs, but beginning writers had trouble getting talking animal books past the slush pile. Now the tide has turned again, and it appears that every publisher has new picture books featuring animals with something to say.

However, you can't just plop a cute bunny in your story and expect it to sell. The number one rule in children's fiction writing will always be to base your story

on endearing, believable, unique characters. I've studied talking animal books and found they fall into three basic categories:

#### \* Animals Who Act Human

Everyone is familiar with stories like Marc Brown's picture books about Arthur the aardvark, or Else Holmelund Minarik's *Little Bear* series of easy readers. In these books the main character lives with his or her family within a society of animals that mirrors human society. They go to school, wear clothes, play with toys, and have very human problems. The main character is a child just like the reader, and has childlike thoughts, feelings, and concerns. The fact that they're animals makes them visually endearing to young readers, but it's easy to forget that they're not human.

Another kind of book has stories in which the characters are animals who act human, but they're not really kids. They live alone without parents. Though they're adults in the animal world, they're really kids at heart with very childlike outlooks on life. Often these books center around the friendship of two animals, such as the *Frog and Toad* easy readers by Arnold Lobel, and the *Toot & Puddle* picture books by Holly Hobbie. Part of the charm of these characters is that children can relate to creatures who are supposedly grown up.

#### \* Animals Who Act Mostly Human

Another category is books in which the animals act mostly human, but retain a few elements of their true animal nature. This subtly reminds the reader that

though these animals may talk, ride bikes and visit the playground, they're still animals. Often the characters are depicted in illustrations without clothes. Children are drawn to these books because they're about talking animals, an idea they find funny and delightful, and they know it's something adults would never accept.

Paulette Bourgeois' picture books about Franklin the turtle is one example. Though Franklin functions mainly as a kid, he sleeps in his shell and doesn't have teeth (and thus feels cheated because he'll never be visited by the tooth fairy). Jonathan London's series of very early readers shows Froggy hopping and flopping around as he tries to get dressed, and being reminded by his mother that he's supposed to sleep through the winter (because that's what frogs do). In Mem Fox's *Possum Magic*, the possums live in trees in the Australian bush and are wary of snakes, even though they dine on pumpkin scones and vegemite sandwiches.

Once you start gravitating toward reality with your talking animals, you open the door for older readers. The juxtaposition of fantasy and reality can be a compelling mix if done skillfully. Brian Jacques' *Redwall*, a young adult novel about an abbey of peaceful mice that is attacked by an army of savage rats is a prime example.

#### \* Animals Who Talk But Remain Animals

The third category are animals who happen to talk, but other-

wise remain true to their animal selves. Generally, if these characters interact with humans, they act as any real animal would; in other words, they don't carry on conversations with people. Though the animals may (and should) face problems that children can relate to, these problems arise and are solved within the boundaries of the animal world.

This scenario is perfect for middle grade readers. In E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, when Wilbur the pig learns his fate is to be sold to a butcher, it's Charlotte the spider's intelligence that helps save his life. James Howe's hilarious *Bunnica* is the story of a dog and cat who go to great lengths to find out whether or not the family's pet rabbit is really a vampire. In each case the authors used real animals as their models, and then imagined what they might actually say if they could talk. Such careful groundwork results in characters who are believable and very real to the reader.

Of course, you'll always find variations on the above, but the most successful books tend to fall within these guidelines. Like any "rules" of writing, they are meant to provide a framework within which infinite stories can be told. And like all rules, only after you've mastered them can you begin to break them.

*Laura is the Publisher of Children's Book Insider, the Newsletter for Children's Writers. For great info including market tips and insider secrets, go to [www.write4kids.com](http://www.write4kids.com).*

*[Vampire rabbits? What's next—Zombie Bambi? -- Ed]*

## Abecedarian Corner

*Inspiration and advice  
for aspiring scribes*

### The First Commandment of Success by Delma Luben

What is the one attribute common to all writers (and all people) who achieve their highest goals?

Except for rare flukes, they all keep the first commandment of success.

The first man was sent forth out of a workless garden and admonished, "By the sweat of thy face shall you eat bread." God decreed it. The all-time best seller mentions it over 350 times. Topping the list of fame and fortune requisites, it has no stand-in, no substitute.

Networking and getting along with people rank near the top, even with loners called writers. We must get along with editors. Yet there are celebrity authors who don't know how. Education and special training are invaluable; but uneducated novelists have made millions. Sometimes the top winners seem to possess no special talent or genius.

The name of the game these people play? WORK, hard continuous work.

George Bernard Shaw said, "When I was young I observed that nine out of ten things I did were failures. I didn't want to be a failure, so I did ten times more work.

"By dint of hard work" Adela



Rogers St. John earned the title, "most successful author of her time." She died working, at 94.

At age 78, Upton Sinclair had published 90 books. He gave this advice to young writers: "Work. Study hard, think for yourself, and work."

As the successful repeatedly tell us, the constantly working turtle passes everybody—even the genius. And luck is preordained by work. Writers who meet their computer at dawn, or commence at midnight if necessary, and exert indefinitely (like laborers who start at sunup and toil till dark) have the best chance of getting lucky.

When Andrew Carnegie, once a laborer (who came to be called "the richest man in the world"), wrote his *Ten Commandments of Success*, hard work topped the list.

But what if it tops your list and you're not free to create—can't begin until the end of a wage-earning day (on lucky days), have no privacy, no peace and quiet, or are forced by family duty to give up your supposedly allotted time?

Nobody ever said that becoming an author is easy. For most of us it requires rebellion against someone insisting we should be doing something else. And always, we're fighting the colorful, powerful forces of commercialism that can so easily imprison artistic desire.

If you have tried to down "the divine discontent," for the good money, and found it impossible;

if every spare minute you study and dream writing, even while recognizing the long up-hill road, strewn with myriad boulders ready to block your way; if you have chosen the lonely artistic path, but are not free to follow the pull (something or someone continually inhibits you)—while thwarted, study and practice when you can. Write earlier, write longer, by stealing time from sleep or play. An attitude of continuous learning, and perseverance, is imperative. You can't take your writing too seriously.

Tom Robbins said, "we must maintain a pitch next to madness."

And as we work fervently to build our creative ability into a positive power we must also remember to protect the source of that power, our physical health. However great the aspiration, physical breakdown forfeits the dream. Those who win in spite of ill health are rare, those who lose because of it, countless.

Keep your body and mind healthy with good food, good care, good habits. Exercise. Make yourself immune to worry and tension. Stay able to pay the hard work price. This expensive price tag on success weeds out the weak and the pretenders. The real writers stay, and pay—and keep paying.

Dickens was lucky. He burned the candle at both ends and lived to enjoy the glow. His breakdown came after fame. Still, he worked when "he felt as if already dead."

Tolstoy, reportedly "hanging on by his nerves" after working night

and day for six long years on *War and Peace*, made so many changes and improvements on the manuscript proofs, the typesetter bills became exorbitant. The editor despaired. "If you go on like this we will be correcting forever. Half the changes are unnecessary; for love of God, stop!"

Yet Tolstoy worked on, to make a masterpiece better.

Many famous authors don't possess exceptional talent. The best of them doubt and suffer as we do. The difference? With rare exceptions, they simply work harder, and longer. If you do likewise, and confidently proceed in the direction of your dream, the brighter day will dawn. By die-hard dedication and the magic tonic called work, you, too, could one day see your masterpiece read by the world.

The wonders of work make history. Enough effects miracles. The first commandment of success decrees for planet earth: "By the sweat of thy face shall you eat bread."

How much bread do you want?

*Delma is a writers' advocate, producer/host of "The Writing World" television show, and longtime contributing editor for Writer's World Magazine. She is also an inspirational speaker at writing conferences. Contact her at [dlubn3@yahoo.com](mailto:dlubn3@yahoo.com).*

*[I'm just trying to maintain my pitch next to madness. -- Ed.]*

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### ~ Homophone Hunters ~

"From AOL news: I refer you to the caption for a picture of a boxer leaping around in exultation, EXULTation, mind you, after having knocked out his opponent in some record short time. Here's how the caption reads: 'Dan Hardy EXALTS after the referee stopped the fight.' A transitive verb, no less! Whom was he raising up on a pedestal as he leapt around in triumph? Himself, I suppose. Oh well, as fight fans might say, 'Whom cares?'"

-- Billie Bowen, West Hills, CA

**Found a good bad one?  
Send it in!**

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### Pitching Practice

#### When the Book Promotion Well Runs Dry by Patricia Fry

Do you ever feel as though you've been up and down every promotional street, avenue, and pathway in every world city and you've come to that dreaded dead end? You wonder "Where do I go from here?" You feel as though you've tapped into every possible promotional opportunity available for your particular book and now you're stuck. You've run out of ideas and resources. You don't know where to turn or how to proceed. STOP! Don't start burning books or throwing your computer out the window. Take a break. Breathe... Breathe... Breathe...

There, now don't you feel better?

We all hit that brick wall of hopelessness once in a while. Sometimes it's just a matter of exhaustion and stress. It's nothing more than a strong signal that it's time to step back and get a fresh perspective. Go take a walk, reorganize your office, putter in the garden, play with your cat, take a nap. You'll come back to your office feeling a bit less frazzled and ready to resume the task of book promotion.

I didn't hit the wall, yesterday, but I was beginning to feel as though I was headed in that direction. It seemed as if I was running out of ideas for promoting my book *The Right Way to Write, Publish and Sell Your Book*.

Now, already having several writing/publishing-related books under my belt, I pretty much know my way around the promotional block when it comes to this topic. I contacted my extensive mailing list. I've sent review copies to those who typically review books of this type. I've signed with Quality Books, have entered my book into the Amazon Advantage program, and Barnes and Noble is considering my book for inclusion in their program. I've submitted numerous articles to dozens of writing/publishing-related magazines and newsletters to bring attention to this book.

I contribute to my blog every few days and I'm noticing that it's showing up fairly often at Google. And I'm in the process of setting up workshops. I'll have my books in the SPAWN (Small Publishers,

Artists, and Writers Network) booth at the L.A Book Festival. I'm also working on getting gigs in Virginia, Florida, Texas, Oklahoma, and Arizona this year and probably Missouri. That's a lot, but is it enough? What more can I do, I wondered? And I put on my thinking cap.

I thought about all of the authors I meet who have no idea where to start when it comes to promoting their books. Most of us, when we enter into this field, believe in the concept "Write it and they will come." We also rely on bookstores to distribute our books to all of those readers who are out there searching for a book like ours. Once this idea is exposed for the fallacy that it is, the author suddenly feels alone, confused, and as if he has been deceived. This is why I wrote *The Right Way to Write, Publish and Sell Your Book*. And this is why I urge hopeful authors to read it BEFORE putting pen to paper.

Yes, I know, I started out talking promotion. No, I'm not off track. Promotion should be one of a hopeful author's first considerations when he/she feels that inkling to write a book for publication. Build promotion into your book. Create a following before you begin to write the book. Have a solid promotional plan in place before you ever start writing. Then when you hit the wall—feel as though you've run dry of promotional ideas—it won't be nearly as hard to pick yourself up and move forward.

Here's what I did this week to

jumpstart my slightly diminishing promotional energy:

I contacted a writer friend and asked her to read my book, write a couple of reviews, and submit them to a list of magazines and newsletters. (She'll get the writer's credit and fee.) In the meantime, I did the research. I located some known and some obscure writing/publishing magazines and newsletters that publish submitted reviews (as opposed to doing the review in-house).

I was surprised by the number of newsletters I found. I printed out several of them and I subscribed to some of them. How did I find them? I started by searching for a directory of newsletters. I found a couple. I also found resource lists on major sites that listed magazines and newsletters that I didn't know about. Then I did something that I don't think most of us do very often. I went to the back pages that came up in a Google search. After viewing the first 2 or 3 pages, I clicked on page 10, page 16, page 23. It's a whole new world back there—a valuable new world for someone who is promoting a book.

I also like to occasionally use search engines other than Google for a fresh look at what's out there in cyberspace. Yahoo has a pretty good search system and there's AltaVista.com, too.

My little visit into the back pages of Google and to some of the other search engines yesterday has given me a huge new load of resources

through which to promote my writing/publishing-related books.

Another thing that I do when I feel the promotional well starting to dip near the panic level is to open my promotional file. As an author, you do have a promotional file, don't you—a folder that contains every book promotion idea you've ever had? Maybe now is the time to build a website or start blogging. Perhaps you can plan a book signing tour or go ahead and rent a booth at a major book festival this spring.

Book promotion is an all-consuming activity. If you are an author, you probably already know this. If you are thinking about producing a book, you need to know that writing is the easy part. It's what comes after that will keep you busy, test your creativity and stamina, and sometimes drive you crazy.

So go ahead and write that great book, but also take the time to develop a promotional plan. And create a backup plan. Be prepared so that the next time you see the brick wall coming swiftly toward you, you can leap right over it without missing a promotional beat.

*Patricia is Executive Director of SPAWN. Subscribe to FREE e-newsletter, SPAWNews, and receive a FREE e-book, [25 Ways to Promote Yourself Whether You're an Artist, Author or Small Publisher](#). Go to [www.spawn.org](http://www.spawn.org).*

*[And look for us on the 26th page of Google's back pages. -- Ed.]*

### Tips Appreciated . . .

"Eavesdrop. Keep a pocket notebook and pen on you at all times, and sit in a coffee shop or on a park bench or on a bench in a mall, and simply listen to the people around you. If someone says something that makes you smile or just seems so typical of people that age (or that whatever-other-characteristic-you-are-interested-in) or gives rise to any strong emotion in you, steal it. You may find someone in your stories whose mouth it comes out of to great effect at the right moment."

--Donna Jo Napoli  
award-winning children's book author

If your e-mail address changes, don't forget to notify us or your WW will be lost in space!

### Going Postal

#### Those Disappearing Mail Slots by Don Rutberg

In a query letter to a publisher, I asked for help getting my non-fiction book published. "It's the biggest corruption case in IRS history," I wrote, "about an honest-yet-flashy agent who is pressured to work undercover for the IRS' internal investigation of corruption."

I had mailed the query letter and writing samples certified/return receipt so I'd be certain the publisher received the materials. The U.S. Postal Service lost my little black date book when I was 21—when it was still worth something—so I'm always skeptical of

their abilities. And sure enough, after a two week wait, the green receipt was not returned through my front door.

This disgruntled postal customer called to complain.

"Did you simply lose the return receipt or did you lose the package, too?"

The postal supervisor promised to ask the postman when he returned. So I called back and waited for a clumsy excuse from a destined-to-be-disgruntled postal employee. Maybe someone had found my little black book from the disco era.

The official excuse was: "The address in question has no mail slot."

I was thrown off-balance.

"You mean, it's not the post office's fault?"

"We warned the people at that address; they must provide a mail slot and they have not done so."

Then it occurred to me: this publisher was all over the Internet. The editors depended mainly on computers, having mutated into beings-who-live-on-Earth-but-don't-need-mail-slots.

But human beings have always needed mail slots. Cave men would use chalk to draw stick figures of a buffalo hunt on a piece of slate, then toss the work of art into a neighbor's cave. Caves, inherently, have mail slots.

One thousand years ago, religious scholars would write down rules

for society, such as, "Be kind to widows and orphans." These messages were delivered to houses of worship, which have always had mail slots.

Every inventor throughout history had to patent ideas (sometimes, right after they stole them) and could not have done so without a mail slot.

Vincent Van Gogh needed a mail slot to deliver his severed ear to brother, Theo. What were his options—Ear Mail?

Everyone we know depends on mail slots. But that's about to change. The computer and other communication devices will soon render the mail slot obsolete.

So what's next? The umbrella could go quickly, abandoned by people who never leave their homes. The same could happen to shovels since we won't have to clear a path through the snow for the mailman anymore.

What will happen to 40 year-old lost love letters that are found and then sent to their intended mail slots, when there are no mail slots?

How will we receive those free vacation offers in the mail, the ones that read, "Talk to us for 10 minutes and then enjoy the mansion near the lake for the rest of the weekend as our guest"?

How will we apply anonymously for gun permits?

And if mail slots are passé, we won't be able to make fun of the U.S. Postal Service anymore. Disgruntled ex-postal employees

will be at an all time high and are sure to make headlines. And when they do, they won't be stories about macho mailmen who wear their short pants through rain, sleet, snow or gloom of night.

They'll be stories about gloom.

I don't miss Richard Nixon, our Servel refrigerator, or eight-track tapes. But I would miss my mail slot—or would I?

I decided to find out. I went Stone Age and placed old stones over my mail slot.

It took a month until that single act of masonry raised a red flag with the IRS. It could have been the missing mail slot or maybe they thought I was a Mason; either way, I had visitors. The men said they were IRS agents.

In a conversation held in my living room, I said, "I'm glad you're here," then asked them for help getting my non-fiction book published. "It's the biggest corruption case in IRS history," I told the IRS agents, "about an honest-yet-flashy agent who is pressured to work undercover for the IRS' internal investigation of corruption . . ."

*Don is the author of [A Writer's First Aid Kit](http://www.writersfirstaidkit.com) (www.writersfirstaidkit.com) and teaches at Drexel University and Community College of Philadelphia.*

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