

HowMaster explains with published examples exactly how effective writing happens.

HowMaster: The Writer's Guide to Beautiful Word Crafting

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by

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Introduction

Ideas were natural to me even as a kid and my constant *how come?* and *but why?* frustrated my grownups and sent teachers tattling to them with report card comments regarding my “wild imagination” and their academic prognoses that I should “settle down.” None of them knew any more than I did that my strange behavior was necessary to a future as writer.

My first novel happened when I was about 12 and discovered nurse novels. I got out a batch of notepaper and stapled it together and set about writing a story that no longer comes to mind except that there were included a nurse, a policeman, and a bad guy, and that every time I wrote *Sergeant* I put three stripes beside it. I asked my mother what she thought of my story and she replied, “It’s good but you start out with a story and end with a play,” to which I responded by stomping out in my usual prepubescent huff.

Writing is what came with me through the decades and inasmuch as the frenetic becomes at times interspersed with the fallow the journey continues. Writing like any work requires training and practicum because nobody just grabs paper and pen and in four hours writes the Great North American novel and then best-sells it. *Nobody*. It takes patience, persistence, practice, and supportive souls telling you truths you don’t wanna hear and sorely need to.

Libraries and stores are full of writing how-tos and while I devoured tomes of them I still didn’t grasp *really how* to make words sing. I knew I was supposed to write beautifully but the method eluded me except for sudden peeky-boos of creativity that appeared from time to time in journal entries. Eventually and close in time two things happened: I asked God what I was supposed to be doing with this gift and discovered

Janet Hagberg's *Wrestling With Your Angels: A Spiritual Journey To Great Writing* and later Judy Reeves' *A Writer's Book of Days*, which continue to be instrumental in my growth as writer. *HowMaster* aims to make your path easier step by step throughout your writing journey. Writer, proceed.

Stolen Moments: Optimize your Writing Opportunities

Ideas, Ideas, Everywhere and Naught a One to Think

Ideas are everywhere, anywhere, anytime, and some of the best ones come straight out of our mouths. When you talk to yourself for instance, every time you say or want to say something to yourself, there's an idea seed. Every time you overhear a conversation on the bus, at the gym, or in the lobby of your apartment building, those are idea seeds.

When you go at rooster call on Monday to the laundry room and Missus Battlesmuch stomps in right behind you hollering that it's *her* washday and *you* can use only *one* machine at a time you get lots of ideas. You look out seconds before the sun slips behind the mountain and see orange and violet lay fire across the sky and you have an article about a goodnight kiss from God. And when the emerald green hummingbird you thought was forever gone because you hadn't seen it for a few years stops long enough to hover over the petunias at the same moment you happen to be at the window you have synchronicity and in one case a Haiku poem.

Ideas are abundant as the cells that make up your being. Lightning struck recently in a park at the edge of our city. More than twenty-one thousand hectares continues to burn and amazingly no human life was lost. Several thoughts rused in (be my guest):

- Even some of our firefighters have never faced an inferno of this magnitude. Man, who thinks s/he can control the environment and life in general, faces supreme power and sees or fails to see man's insignificance in its wake.
- Conservationists have in protecting our forests allowed an overabundance of fuel for wild fires.

- All is temporary and can be wiped out in seconds.
- Gawkers in boats hamper firefighter attempts to fill up water bombers at the lake, thieves ransack evacuated homes, and smokers continue to toss lit cigarettes from car windows.
- Smoke and cinders bring suffering to those with heart and respiratory conditions during a time when emergency rooms are packed and there are cutbacks in medical care.
- Love of neighbor burns through fire as donations pour in to relief organizations.
- This is the second driest summer in this area in 100 years. How did people handle forest fires a century ago without helicopters, water bombers, chemical retardants, and all the other accoutrements of modern fire fighting? What did they do a century and a half ago when homesteaders hacked out space *in* the wilds and fire came?
- All our police and fire resources are busy with the fire. What are the local bad guys doing with that opportunity?
- Ousted wildlife has to go somewhere. What happens when bear and cougar meet man on man's turf?

Those ideas came with no time taken to seek them. Ideas are everywhere, anywhere, anytime, as my daughter, Steph, a people watcher with writer's cramp, says, "I think on my feet. Usually in the middle of something boring or monotonous, the proverbial light bulb will come on and blind me. I will be cleaning the shower stall, thinking about something that's happened, like all the people who lost their homes in the recent fire, and

I start to wonder how in a row of 10 or 15 homes, for every one standing the ones on either side have been demolished by the blaze.”

I Don't *Have* Extra Time

Maybe you don't but it gets forced on you anyway. They aren't called waiting rooms for nothing and the bank that claims to serve you quickly should be made to do penance by having to stand in its own lineup. The nice thing about banks is that they have all those forms sitting there for us to write on the backs of when an idea hits and we didn't bring a notebook. Bring your own pen though or you'll lose your place in line. When you see a waiting room full of magazines you know they're not there because you're going to be attended any time soon so you may as well use your time to your advantage:

- Every time I see a cover girl with an overblown pout I think of fish and consider how even in this era of woman power, models are made to moue up and pose like they just can't wait to jump into bed – and not to sleep.
- Those magazines are for women. Are the cover (role?) models suggesting the reader too should flex her gills and simper?
- Consider the long term health implications of treatments employed to puff out those kissers.
- What do guys *really* think about all that pout pandering?

Incidentally, did you notice that every time you decide to actually *read* one of those waiting room mags the receptionist calls you in because it's your turn now – hey, there's a story seed about someone who could change events just by pre-empting them.

In my more arrogant days I believed memory would serve my writing as well as it does for what you said to me the evening of October 14, 1956. Not. Right away two huge

observations cackled at me. The first is that as soon as you get busy your brain brings the task at hand to the fore and everything else gets pushed to Incidental: The soup I wanted to turn down as I wrote this paragraph boiled over when I forgot four seconds after I got up and sat back down to continue typing. Secondly, having an excellent memory serves no one because nobody believes us anyway. Just try and convince someone they really did say or do such-and-such on that day in 1956 and see what happens. Write ideas down. Carry a pocket size notepad, the kind with no hard cover and curly wire to stick you in the eye every time you bend over. Okay so I don't carry one since I like to have my hands free but I do run around begging paper and a pen every time an idea happens. Ideas happen all the time but there is only so much we can hold so we have to write it down. Now all I have to do is explain to the income tax people what those squiggles are on the back of my T4.

But My Life Is Ordinary

Ordinary is normal. The idea for my first large work came as I lay on the floor one autumn afternoon in the living room of our tiny apartment while the radio played an old song about a spinning wheel in the parlor and the only reason I even paid attention is my interest in antiquity. My mind worked on nothing more serious than the way my elbow dug into the worn carpet and how the sunlight looked as it came in the window. Then it started. Yesterday sank its nostalgic clutches deep into my writer sensitivities and off I went to my primitive little desk between the wall and the foot of the bed to write a short story that wouldn't quit until it blew itself into a novel. The unconscious works best when brain is idle and hands are busy like when you scrub the shower or lie mindless on the floor.

A seller's policy is to think of everyone you meet as a prospect and to never assume that any individual won't buy. The same goes for ideas: it's *all* prospect. Getting up in the morning is routine unless you wake up somewhere else and don't recall how you got there or you find the place was ransacked as you slept. It's ordinary and you know it by rote, right? You've never gone bleary eyed to the coffee maker to load the filter and dumped coffee grounds all over the countertop or, like me, poured in the dark and missed the mug? How does a blind person handle the tasks we take for granted? What psychological gears and cylinders are operative for that individual to learn when the end of the loaded scoop is *almost* to the edge of the filter basket? How did my grandmother's sightless neighbor manage to hang her clothes on the line with same-colors together every single time? The ordinary is never totally commonplace, there's always mystery in its depths which we probe by thinking around corners.

Think Around Corners?

A few years ago I read that if you want to paint a picture from a photo, turn the photo upside down, which shuts down logical left brain and allows right brain creativeness to take over. Thinking around corners works because it looks at an issue from all angles. Time is a good example as we never seem to have enough of it and talk about it in terms of something we pass, spend, waste, take, or do. What if those verbs were story characters? What would they look and sound like? What would be the moral of such a tale? If those verbs were in a race which one would win? How?

Have you ever gotten into bed and wished it were morning because your day is planned and you're eager to get on with it but you have seven hours of sleep to go? When you wake it seems you just fell asleep when actually it's been long enough for night to

blacken and become light again. What happens around you while you're snug in your bed? You know what night looks like from your 2 AM window but what does it look like in doorways and alleys of downtown when the night crew takes over? There is certain order to living arrangements on the street, a hierarchy most of us don't recognize or understand. How do street folk manage to move around one another peaceably? What happens when someone gets sick and can't fend for their self? What could we learn from their habitation to apply to our workplace or neighborhood? Are we so different? How?

The difference between ordinary perception and faceted thinking is the difference between climbing all those stairs to the old City Hall building to pay your taxes -- and making your way along stone steps that resonate with the footsteps of five generations of taxpayers. Ordinary view glances at a yellowed snapshot of an unknown lady in a long dress while creative thinking burns with a thousand questions about who she is, what her life was like, how long she lived, whether and who she married, how many children she had, and how her photo got to be here in the first place, and whether the photographer's company made it into this century. Ordinary view is logical, beware of it.

A funny thing happens right about the time you open your thought processes and give light to mystery. You get happier. Life holds more meaning because you see everything differently, even reverently. While you walk up those everyday lifestairs, watch your step. Closely.

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