

The Writing Academy presents the
ultimate guide to writing compelling
novels and short stories for publication
and sale.

Fiction 101

Module One

Part Two

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Hi there,

Welcome to Part 2 of Module One of Fiction 101.

We've a lot to cover in the coming lessons.

I suggest you start a file – either on your PC or use a real folder to print off information, make notes, collect research, whatever, so you can store it all in one place.

Personally, I use Evernote to collect info and Scrivener to make notes and create stories.

Evernote is available for free [HERE](#)

Scrivener is available on a 30-Day trial [HERE](#).

Introduction

I don't know about you but I still – after all this time – go into panic mode when I'm about to embark on a new fiction project. And to this day, I'm not sure why.

It's not as if I haven't been doing it for long enough!

I started writing fiction when I was about six, describing trips to the moon, alien encounters (which I wrote as true stories, much to chagrin of my teachers) and schoolboy mysteries. I wrote my first stage play when I was nine and a bunch of us put it on in a neighbor's back garden (we charged sixpence for people to get in.) It was a Western, complete with toy guns, slapstick and fight sequences.

During my adolescent years, I wrote many short stories and novels that I never finished – except one called, *Long Enough to Know* which now seems completely incomprehensible to me – it's all teen angst and has long passages about how sex wasn't for me. Ah, the dumb innocence of youth!

Later, in my twenties, I wrote a lot of plays and scripts for TV and film, some of which were performed and made. But that wasn't my focus at the time. I was a musician then and I spent much of my time in recording studios and noisy nightclubs when I wasn't lazing on the deck of my chic houseboat in Chelsea, London.

Much later, after the time I call the Dark Age (when I worked for six years as a buyer in an investment company in the City of London) I went back to writing, the artist in me re-emerging into the light of creativity like a blinking worm from its self-imposed cocoon.

Nowadays I write fiction mainly for pleasure, when I have spare time, which is not often enough for me. I am working on a new novel currently – which is one of the main reasons I decided to run this course. I wanted to share the experience along with you – and hopefully give you some tips along the way.

Fear

Sometimes, when we think too hard about writing, we're creating barriers to action in our minds. Worrying about our next project can get so bad that we become afraid of action. We may even begin to fear the whole project. We fear failure, or an inability to live up to our own expectations.

It can become a *Catch-22* situation. The more we fear starting a project, the more difficult the project becomes in our mind.

This is self-defeating. You must stop thinking about your project and just get on and begin it. The only way to get over writing problems is to write. No amount of thinking or worrying or analysis will cut it. You must begin.

You must write and not fear what will end up on the page. It doesn't matter whether your writing is any good at this stage. It doesn't matter that what you've written might be terrible. The only thing that matters at this stage is to get used to writing – and often.

Procrastination

In a life containing duties and distractions, it's far too easy to put things off – especially writing, which you and your loved ones might regard as a frivolous use of your time. It's not.

To deal effectively with potential delays you need to set goals. Even just tiny ones.

You see, the reason why we put off jobs is that we get overwhelmed by the prospect of doing something we think will require vast amounts of time. But this is a mental issue

that doesn't reflect reality. The reality is that if we give something time, then the 'doing' will take care of itself. The trick is not to fear the whole project but to keep breaking it down into little, doable, chunks.

Whenever you fear a writing project, mentally cut it in half.

If the prospect of doing half still seems too daunting, cut it in half again. Keep breaking down the task until you get something you can do in five or ten minutes.

Too many writers set a goal like: *Plot the book* and then never get around to it because plotting a book may take several hours, even days, which they then begin to dread and so they put it off.

What you need to do is put aside ten minutes per day to work on the plot and/or tell yourself you'll at least *begin* to work on the plot. Then you should set a realistic deadline for completing the plot. Please, don't be too hard on yourself at first. Take baby steps.

Anxiety

You may put things off to the extent that you begin to get anxious just *thinking* about your next writing project.

There is only one way to deal with this and that is to begin. And beginning means writing. Getting words on the page – no matter how rough they may be.

Whenever I'm feeling anxious over some writing, or if I'm not sure where to begin, I make notes. Headings mainly that will act as prompts for me in the future. So, for instance, as I begin thinking about my novel, I make the following notes:

Prologue: murder

Chapter 1, introduce Patrick

Chapter 2, Judith called to crime scene

Chapter 3, Patrick is arrested.

And so on. To me, the act of making notes (headings) diffuses the tension of inactivity. It also helps me to get some idea of where to take the plot. I find another neat trick is to make notes on the ending too. That way, I don't feel I am writing with no end in sight, wondering where to go next.

Lack of Inspiration

Sometimes we get stuck wondering what to write about. This is common. But wondering isn't writing. Writing is writing. Putting words on paper has a way of firing up the brain and provoking inspiration, even if you must force it sometimes.

My wife, a full-time fiction writer, says whenever she doesn't feel inspired, she fakes it, telling her mind that she *is* inspired – and guess what? Her mind complies.

Here's another trick that I use.

If you having trouble coming up with things to write about, don't sit and think about it. That won't help. You need to address the problem by writing. Try talking to the page. Tell the page you can't think of anything to say. Ask your mind for inspiration by writing down that request.

For instance, you might write, *"What shall I write about today? Hm, I'm not sure. Come on brain, give me something to write about."*

You'll find this exercise is a great way of kick-starting your creativity. Time spent staring into space is wasted time. The only time that is useful to you as a writer is when you're writing.

Self-Doubt

Self-doubt about your abilities is another killer. I wrote an entire section on this in my book [The Easy Way to Write a Novel That Sells](#).

You can get a copy of the e-book version for free if you go to this Academy [LINK](#).

But again, self-doubt is a mental issue that happens when you're not writing. Just know that self-doubt is normal – all writers are plagued by it at least sometimes. You must make sure doubt doesn't stifle your creativity. And the only way to do that is to write more. *Just do it*, as Nike says. Worry later if you want to – but get something, anything, down first.

Notebooks

Notebooks can be useful for jotting down ideas but to me their main function is to simply get you used to writing. They can also teach you to translate the world around you into words, which is the most important thing. Use them often, especially if you have problems motivating yourself to write longer works.

Whenever you stop for a beverage, open your notebook and write something there. Anything. It doesn't have to be profound or even special. Just say hello to your notebook and write about anything – the weather, what you're worrying about, what you're going to watch on TV tonight – and sure, write down what you think of things, of people, of places. It's all useful to you because it's making you a writer. It's teaching your brain that this is what you do: you write things down.

Journals and diaries serve much the same purpose. I don't know about you but I find reading my old diaries rather tedious. I keep thinking I'm going to come across something profound, witty, or important but it's rarely there. But what is there is evidence that I write, that I'm a writer.

Some people like to use writing prompts – little brain teasers that set them off. I rarely use them because I don't need a prompt to get me going. A blank screen will usually do that for me.

I think the trick is not to think too hard about writing. Just to do it.

Get used to writing 50 or 100 word passages on any given topic.

For instance, make a heading like *Fifty Words on Trees* and then write down your thoughts. They don't have to be clever or insightful. You can just as easily write: *Trees are green and brown. They have leaves on them and I fell out of one when I was a kid.* It doesn't matter what you write, just that you are writing.

You'll find that these short passages will help galvanize you towards writing longer and longer passages. Over time, these short passages will help you think more confidently about writing short stories or chapters of your novel.

What you must not do is worry about the quality of your writing. Don't edit or correct any of your text. Simply get used to writing words down.

And if you're really stuck, try copying something out of a book. Do anything that tells your brain that you put words on pages. That you are a writer.

Time Management

Finding time to write can be a challenge, especially if you have children, or if you work nine to five or if you have a busy social life.

The simple fact is you must find the time.

Whether that be in front of the TV in the evening, or late at night, early in the morning, during work breaks, rest breaks or when you're traveling, you should become obsessed with the idea of making time – for yourself and for your writing.

For about a week, at the end of each day, make a note of how you spend your time. Then ask yourself:

Are there any gaps there you could better utilize?

Are there errands you could have combined that would have freed up more time?

Look at the time you spend watching TV. Calculate the hours per week. I bet you'll be surprised. Even the most ardent anti TV people watch around 5/6 hours of TV a week. Most of us watch a lot more, between twenty and thirty hours a week. Can you imagine how much you can write in all that wasted time?

There's no point wishing your life away thinking, *"One day I'll take off a couple of days, weeks, or months and then write."* Why? Because it'll never happen. You must make writing time now, build it into your day, even if the moments are stolen, a few minutes here, a few there.

Writing for long periods is what professionals do, yes, but we all have to start somewhere. Stephen King spent years writing after work before he sold his first novel. Most budding fiction authors do that too nowadays because we rarely get paid upfront for writing fiction.

Besides, we all write for the love of it first – and for the money later. Don't we?

Develop your love of writing now, and from now on give yourself a million reasons to write.

Whenever you think of a reason to write, record it, make a note. Keep a list of reasons.

Then, just do it.

I promise you that if you commit to writing every day, the time will, almost miraculously, begin to appear.

Ask any committed writer.

This is how it works.

Keep writing!

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Creating Better Writers

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