

Fiction Writing

By Walter S. Zapotoczny

When you write fiction, you have the freedom to write exactly what you want. You only have the limitation set by yourself. Nobody can tell you that you are wrong. However, the writer establishes an un-written contract with the reader. The reader agrees to turn the page as long as the writer compels him to do so. Whether writing fiction or nonfiction, the writer accomplishes this by having regard for the craft of writing. Make a cheat sheet if you have a problem with certain words such as where/were, their/there and are/our. Sloppy workmanship can be eliminated by using some basic writing and editing techniques.

Determine Your Subject

Ensure your topic meets the requirements of the assignment and is limit in scope. Decide what specific subject you are going to focus on and be content to cover it well. Decide where and when your story takes place. Determine where and how your characters will fit into your story. Create a chronological time line to keep dates straight.

Decide on Tense

Determine if you are going to write in past, present or future tense. Past tense expresses action that is completed at a particular time in the past. Present tense expresses action that is happening at the present time. Future tense expresses action that will take place in the future. You can change tense but you should address the reader principally in one.

Choose Mood and Decide the Unity of Pronoun

Determine if you are going to write in the first person, as a participant, or in the third person, as an observer, or in second person, like a sportswriter might describe a game. You might want to talk to the reader in the casual voice. Or you might want to approach the reader with a certain formality to describe a serious event. Do not mix two or three.

Create a Plot

If you are telling a story and not merely writing a description of setting or character, a plot is necessary. It is the element that helps the reader follow your story. To hold the reader's attention, there must be action and development, a movement of some sort throughout the story that brings the reader along with it. A plot makes sense of what is happening in the story. A plot can be as simple as boy meets girl, a WWII buddy story or rags to riches.

Create Characters

The plot in your story and your character are intertwined. Give your character choices by placing him in a situation with opposing forces. Develop the situation so it grows more complicated and reaches a climax with a resolution. The character in your story is what holds the reader's interest. Characters need a personality. They must have their own idiosyncrasies, their own way of walking and talking. The more specific the information you convey to the reader about your character, the more real the character will seem.

Creating Dialogue

Dialogue is what your characters say to each other. Dialogue allows your readers to experience the story through the senses and perceptions of your characters. The character's pain, joy, wrath or fear must be shown to the reader in order for a bond to form with the characters.

Develop the Lead

According to William Zinsser in, "On Writing Well," the first sentence is the most important sentence. Leads can hook the reader with a few well-bated sentences or continue for several pages, pulling the reader slowly along. The lead must capture the reader immediately and force him to keep reading.

Create the Ending

The perfect ending should take the reader slightly by surprise. The ending should resolve the conflicts set up in the plot. It gives the reader closure, even if the reader is left with the choice to decide what really happened to the characters.

Revise and Edit

Revising is part of your writing project. Begin with a copy of Strunk and White's, "The Elements of Style" and check your work. You may discover serious flaws in the arrangement of the materials, calling for moving entire blocks of words. When this is the case, the word processor can save you time. Look at composition, usage and grammar. Read it aloud, listen for inaccuracies. Listen to your voice inflection when you do, determine if commas are needed. Use your chronological time line. When you are finished revising and proofreading your story have a peer or instructor read you work. Ask them to look at style, word choice, format and punctuation and grammar. Revise your story based on their feedback.

Use a Process Technique

Write for about 30 minutes on each character. Choose a character every day for one week and write for 30 minutes. Write everything you can about the character -- such as his family history, favorite color and education. This process will allow you to get to know and develop the character using an unforced technique.

References

Zinsser, William, *On Writing Well*, 2008

Strunk, William and White, E.B., *The Elements of Style*, 1972

Scholastic: Creating Writing and Editing Techniques [<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3750439>]

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