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1) Welcome to the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine!

Those of you who have joined in the past month (more
than 600 of you signed up in August), welcome to my
e-zine!

You should be on this list only if you signed up for it
on my web site. If you no longer wish to hear from me,
don't be shy -- there's a link at the bottom of this
e-mail that will put you out of your misery.

If you need to change your e-mail address, there's a
different link to help you do that.

If you missed a back issue, remember that all previous

issues are archived on my web site at:
http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine

What's in this issue:

The successful novelist needs good organization, good
craft, and good marketing. In this issue, we'll talk
about each of these in turn.

One of the hardest problems in fiction is managing your
scenes. A typical novel has around 100 scenes, and it's
tough to keep them in line. Want to know my favorite
way to keep track of them? Find out in my article,
"Lining Up Your Scenes."

Fiction is about characters in conflict. One of the
best ways to create conflict is to make your characters
misunderstand each other. Do you know why some people
simply can't get along? Take a look at my article, "A
Failure To Communicate."

If you don't know an agent or editor and want to make
initial contact, the standard approach is a query
letter. Want to know the rules of the road in writing
query letters? Check out my article, "Query Letter
ABCs."

Are you reading my blog? Join the fun here:
http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog

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2) Organizing: Lining Up Your Scenes

One of the hardest parts of organizing a novel is
keeping all the scenes straight. Novels typically have
50 to 100 scenes or more. That's a lot to keep track
of! Here are some typical problems you'll face in
managing all those scenes:

* Deciding what happens in each scene
* Deciding what order to present your scenes
* Deciding how long each scene should be
* Deciding on the point-of-view (POV) character
* Deciding whether to cut a scene
* Deciding how to edit a scene

It's hard to keep all the scenes in your head at one
time. In fact, it's probably impossible, since humans
are made to keep only a few things in the mind at the
same time.

I solve this problem by creating a "scene list" -- a
list of all my scenes with key information about each
one. You can do this however you like.

The low-tech easy way to do it is by using 3x5 cards. Just write the important information about each scene on one card and then spread them out on the kitchen table or the living room floor.

I prefer to throw more technology at the problem by using spreadsheet software. For our purposes, a simple way to think of a spreadsheet is a list of items, where each item can have several parts.

When I make a scene list, each line in my spreadsheet keeps track of the important information about one scene. Here are some typical things I track:
* The POV character
* The date the scene happens (and maybe also the time)
* What happens in the scene
* How many pages I think the scene will take
* How many words I actually wrote in the scene

Each of the above goes into a different column of the line. Since spreadsheets are divided up into rows and columns, this is extremely easy to do.

If you've never worked with a spreadsheet before, don't panic. Find a techie friend who knows how to use spreadsheets, show them this article, and ask them to show you ONLY what you need to know in order to make a scene list. It should take less than ten minutes to learn the essentials.

You can make a scene list any time you feel like it. Many writers like to make one before they write their first draft. Others prefer to write their first draft and then make a scene list to help edit the manuscript.

I make a scene list before I write my first draft, but I keep tweaking it as I write. When it's time to do revisions, I use the scene list to make a strategic plan for editing the manuscript.

The beauty of a spreadsheet is that you can save copies of it and try out new ideas. If you decide you don't like the new scene list, you can throw it away and make a new copy of the original and try again.

Let's look at each of the basic problems I mentioned at the start of this article, and see how you solve each of them using a scene list.

Problem 1: Deciding what happens in each scene

Each scene in your scene list should tell you what happens in the scene. Write one or two sentences -- just enough to show you at a glance what the scene accomplishes. By boiling each scene down to its essence, you can get an overview of your story by running your eye down the scene list.

Problem 2: Deciding what order to present your scenes

Normally, you start out by putting your scenes in chronological order. This is one reason each scene should track the date (and possibly time) of the scene.

You'll find that some of your scenes may overlap in time, if you have several POV characters. You'll also find that sometimes it makes sense to put the scenes out of order. In these cases, it's very easy to move the scenes to a new order. (A spreadsheet allows you to easily move entire rows as units.)

Sometimes, you don't know what the chronological order should be -- all you know is what happens. The scene list lets you move things around until you get the ordering right. Then you can assign dates and times if you need them.

Problem 3: Deciding how long each scene should be

You don't have to track how long your scenes are. You can just trust to luck that your book will have neither too many words nor too few. But knowledge is power, so if you can estimate how many pages each scene will be, then you can make your spreadsheet add up all the estimates and tell you roughly how long your novel will be. If that's useful for you to know, then do it. Otherwise, don't.

Once you've written your manuscript, you can have your word processor count the words in each scene and put that number into your scene list. This can be very useful if your editor has told you that you need to cut 15,000 words. You can use your scene list to make decisions on where to make the cuts. If you add a column listing how many words to cut from each scene, your spreadsheet can add up all the cuts and tell you when they add up to the required amount. Then all you have to do is make your target cuts on each scene and you know for sure you'll hit your mandated word count.

Problem 4: Deciding on the point-of-view (POV) character

I make a column in my scene list that shows who the POV character is for each scene. (If your novel only has one POV character, then you don't need to do this.) I color-code each POV character, which is easy to do in a spreadsheet. Then I can see at a glance how much air time each POV character is getting.

Sometimes this shows me that Bellatrix has an awful lot of scenes during the middle part of the story and Throckmorton has hardly any, while the reverse is true at the ending. Then I can look at each scene and ask whether I want to change the POV character.

Problem 5: Deciding whether to cut a scene

After you've written your first draft, it's easy to
believe that every scene is really necessary. The
tragic truth is that some of them may not be. If a
scene isn't pulling its weight by moving your story
forward, your scene list will tell you.

Then you have to decide whether to pump some new life
into that scene by making something happen, or whether
to kill it. If you decide to kill it, then just draw a
line through the scene in your scene list. That shows
you immediately that in your next draft you'll delete
the scene.

Problem 6: Deciding how to edit a scene

Not all scenes work. If you've got a scene that doesn't
seem to be hitting on all eight cylinders, make a note
in your scene list on how to fix it. This should take
just a sentence or two.

This lets you map out strategically all your revisions
before you do anything. If you work on your scene list
for an hour or two, you can easily plan all the
revisions for an entire new draft. When you have the
plan in place, then you can jump into a new draft with
confidence that the revisions will all work together to
make a better story.

If you've never used a spreadsheet and need to learn
just enough to do all the tricks I've discussed in this
article, here is a list of the 12 basic skills that you
need to learn. Have a techie friend teach you these and
ONLY these:
* How to create a new spreadsheet
* How to save a spreadsheet to a file
* How to open an existing spreadsheet file
* How to create column headers
* How to resize the width of columns
* How to type information into a cell
* How to edit a cell
* How to delete a row (or column)
* How to move a row (or column)
* How to insert a new row between two others
* How to add up all the numbers in a column
* How to change the background color of a cell

You can always learn more about spreadsheets if you
need to know more, but these 12 basic skills will get
you on the road to creating a scene list that will give
you a bird's-eye view of your story.

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3) Creating: A Failure To Communicate

There's a famous line in the movie COOL HAND LUKE:
"What we've got here is failure to communicate." The
line comes twice, once said seriously by the evil
prison warden and once said mockingly by the title
character, Luke.

Failures to communicate are pretty common in real life,
and in many cases, they're caused by different
personality types. In last month's column, I talked
about the Myers-Briggs scheme of classifying
personalities into 16 different types

This month, I'll look at a somewhat simpler scheme
developed by D. Glenn Foster, who started his career as
a polygraph examiner. What Foster discovered was that
his own observations of his subjects told him a lot
more about their guilt or innocence than his
lie-detector machines could.

Foster's original idea was that there is no one best
way to interrogate somebody. Methods that work on one
personality type won't work on another. So if you want
to get a confession, your first task is to "read" your
prisoner's personality type. Then you use the
appropriate methods to get your confession. Of course,
if the prisoner isn't actually guilty, you'll discover
that soon enough.

Eventually, Foster became an "interview consultant" who
taught methods of interrogation to law enforcement
agencies to help them get confessions from prisoners. I
recently read his book, HOW CAN I GET THROUGH TO YOU?
-- coauthored with Mary Marshall -- on the subject of
interpersonal communication.

You might think that Foster's methods are only useful
to novelists writing police procedural mysteries. Nope.
An interrogation is only one of many ways that people
communicate -- or fail to. The book by Foster and
Marshall is actually aimed at anyone having
communication failures. Whether you're not
communicating with a friend or a family member, a
co-worker or a Congress-critter, this book shows you
how to read people and analyze what's gumming up the
communication lines.

Foster categorizes people into four basic types:
* Feeler
* Driver
* Analyzer
* Elitist

Let's look at each of these in turn:

A FEELER likes to get along with people. Feelers put
other people's feelings first. A Feeler wants to get
along with you and will try to accommodate you, if
possible. Feelers are people persons. If you run a

business, you want your receptionist and your PR director to be Feelers.

A DRIVER likes to get things done. Drivers don't much worry about hurting somebody else's feelings, so long as they hit their task objectives. A Driver likes to argue and doesn't get a bit offended if you argue back. In fact, a Driver likes that and respects you if you push back. If you run a business, you want the sales-droids who make cold calls to be Drivers, because they don't take no for an answer.

An ANALYZER likes to figure things out. Analyzers don't have any need to "share their feelings" with others. They'd much rather share their thoughts. Analyzers don't mind a spirited discussion, so long as it's about ideas and doesn't get personal. Analyzers dislike "ad hominem" arguments and will walk away when the heat turns on. If you run a business, you want your business strategist and your engineers to be Analyzers.

An ELITIST is a one-of-a-kind person. The Elitist marches to his own drummer. There's a bit of the Feeler, the Driver, and the Analyzer in the Elitist. The Elitist rarely gets close to anyone, because there just isn't anybody like him. If you run a business and you need a visionary who thinks differently, then an Elitist might be what you need.

When two people are talking, they tend to treat the other person the way they expect to be treated. This works fine, if they're both the same personality type, because they have a common idea of how to communicate.

A Feeler talking with a Feeler will get along fine, because they both want the other person to feel good about the exchange. Each will bend over backwards to accommodate the other. No hard words and at the end, everybody's happy.

A Driver talking with a Driver will also do great. They'll likely get into a spirited argument, each giving no quarter, hacking away at each other until one of them wins or they reach a happy stalement. Plenty of hard words, but no hard feelings, because shouting is just part of the game, and at the end of the game, everybody knows who won.

An Analyzer talking with an Analyzer will have a terrific time. They'll get into a deep discussion about ideas. It may or not be an argument, but even if there's a strong difference of opinion, each will take care to attack the other's ideas, not his person. No hard words, no hard feelings, and at the end, one or both of them may have changed his mind, but both will feel like they learned something.

An Elitist talking with an Elitist rarely happens, because there just aren't that many Elitists. Each will recognize that the other is someone special and rare,

because all Elitists are special and rare, but always
in different ways. Elitists most likely won't share
their feelings, not even with another Elitist. If
necessary, they may argue like a Driver or reason like
an Analyzer, but at the end of the game, they're really
above all that.

When members of two different groups talk, it's a
different story. Each will treat the other the way they
want to be treated. But neither will be treated the way
they want. Let's look at what can go wrong. We'll be
brief here, because we have six different kinds of
pairs:

When a Feeler talks with a Driver, she may very well be
irritated by the Driver's "pushiness." Feelers see
Drivers as being "control freaks" who want to "run over
everyone else." The Driver will be annoyed by the
Feeler's wimpiness. Drivers expect push-back, and when
a Feeler just gives in, where's the fun in that?
Drivers see Feelers as being "spineless" slugs who
"beat around the bush" and "won't stand up for
themselves."

When a Feeler talks with an Analyzer, she'll be annoyed
by the Analyzer's "coldness." Feelers see Analyzers as
being "too much in their heads" and as eggheads who
"don't care about other people's feelings." The
Analyzer will be irritated by the Feeler's
"mushy-headed" approach to life. Analyzers see Feelers
as "uninterested in ideas" and "losing their heads in a
crisis."

When a Driver talks with an Analyzer, he may be annoyed
by the Analyzer's cautious "look before you leap"
foot-dragging. A Driver wants to forge ahead, because
"he who hesitates is lost." The Analyzer will be
especially infuriated when a Driver makes a "personal
attack" in an argument. The Analyzer is sensitive to
personal criticism and wants to "focus on ideas, not
personalities."

When a Feeler, Driver, or Analyzer talks with an
Elitist, they'll be put off by the Elitist's "arrogant
and condescending" attitude. Since Elitists generally
dress with excellent style, Feelers, Drivers, and
Analyzers may criticise the Elitist for being
"aristocratic." Elitists have elements of the Feeler,
the Driver, and the Analyzer, so they have all sorts of
ways to cross communications. The Elitist may see the
Feeler as "weak" or "spineless"; may see the Driver as
"pushy" and "overbearing"; may see the Analyzer as
"cold" or "smart, but lacking vision."

There's a lot more to be said on Feelers, Drivers,
Analyzers, and Elitists. I highly recommend the book
HOW CAN I GET THROUGH TO YOU? by D. Glenn Foster and
Mary Marshall for vastly more information on how these
personality types work. Their interest is in helping
people understand their own type and the types of

others, so they can learn to get along.

Our interest, as novelists, is in learning how to understand our characters so we can pick a fight. Fiction is about characters in conflict. The more you know about what causes conflict, the more realistic your fiction will be.

I thank my friend, Mark Mynheir, a working cop and novelist, for alerting me to the Foster Method.

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4) Marketing: Query Letter ABCs

These days, it's pretty hard to sell a novel to a traditional royalty-paying publisher unless you have an agent. It's possible, but it's a lot harder than it used to be.

And how do you get an agent? That's not so easy either, if you haven't been published with a traditional royalty-paying publisher. (Most agents are not much interested in your track record of self-publishing, unless you've had truly amazing sales.)

Does that reek of Catch-22?

Yes, of course it does. Life isn't fair, and one of the main ways life chooses for being unfair is that it's a whole lot easier to sell your second novel than your first one.

We'll ask it again -- how do you get an agent?

You have two main options:

* Meet one live at a writing conference or some similar event where you can pitch your idea

* Submit your work to an agent by mail or e-mail

I've written in this column often about the joys of writing conferences. They're fun, scary, exciting, discouraging, entertaining, lonely, and wonderful -- all in one lump. But not every writer can go to a conference, and not every agent goes to conferences. Besides which, conferences are fairly expensive.

But anyone can submit their work to an agent, and it's cheap. You either mail it in or e-mail it in. But mail in WHAT exactly?

That depends. Do your research first on which agents you're interested in. Pick 10 or 20 who seem interested in the category of book you write. Look at their Web sites to see exactly how they prefer to be contacted

and what they want to receive.

Some agents prefer paper mail; some prefer e-mail; some don't care, as long as you spell their name right.

Most agents prefer that the first contact from an author should be a query letter -- a short letter that introduces the author and the book idea.

The emphasis here is on the word "short." Successful agents get thousands of queries every year. They have to read them all, or at least skim them all.

If you were an agent and you received five succinct queries and five meandering ones every single day of your life, which would you read carefully and which would you skim? You'd pay more attention to the concise ones. So do real agents.

How short is short enough? Three or four paragraphs, each with a few sentences. Anything more than that is probably fluff.

You need only a few things in your query letter:
* A "hook" that generates interest
* A short summary of your story idea that leads up to the "story question" of your novel
* A small amount of relevant biographical information to make it clear that you're qualified and able to write a novel
* A request for permission to send more information

An example is worth 1000 words, so let's concoct an imaginary query letter for John Grisham's novel THE FIRM, which was published in a year when the economy had taken a dive and many people were unemployed. Here's the query letter I'd have written if I had been John and was looking for an agent to sell THE FIRM. (We'll assume the agent's name is Joe Smith.)

Dear Mr. Smith:

If you were a flat-broke law school student, what would you give up to lock down a fantastic job offer from a wealthy law firm? In my legal thriller, THE FIRM, my protagonist only has to suspend his disbelief . . .

Mitch McDeere is third in his class at Harvard Law School when he's invited for an interview with a little-known firm in Memphis. They make him an offer he'd be crazy to refuse -- much better than what the big firms in New York and Chicago are offering. Why so much money? -- Mitch asks. His interviewers simply smile and tell him they're the best. "We do things differently." Soon, Mitch is on the job working 100 hours a week and it's only months later when an FBI agent contacts him that he starts to realize that there's something creepy about his company.

I'm a lawyer living in Mississippi. May I send you a proposal or the complete manuscript?

Sincerely,

John Grisham

Let's look at each of the components of this hypothetical letter in turn. Notice how short this is -- 167 words.

The hook comes in the first paragraph, and it focuses attention on something that held high reader interest when the book was published -- getting a dream job. It also highlights the fact that the job offer is a bit implausible, without giving details.

The second paragraph is a summary. Notice that it doesn't summarize the whole story. Normally, a summary covers roughly the first quarter of the story, up to the first disaster, which defines the "story question" for the book.

The story question for THE FIRM is simple -- is Mitch McDeere in over his head, and if so, can he get out alive?

The final paragraph gives Mr. Grisham's credentials -- he's a southern lawyer. Then it asks permission to send more material -- either a proposal or the full manuscript.

Before you send a query, you should research the agency you're submitting to, so you know what they want to see and when they want to see it. If they expect a query first, followed by a proposal, then end your query letter with a request to send the proposal. If they say that they'll want a full, polished manuscript after the query, then offer them that.

Every agency does things differently, so there's no one best way to approach them all. Study the Web site of each one and write a query letter individually tailored to that particular agency.

As an exercise, you might want to try to improving on the imaginary query letter above, or try writing one for a different novel you're familiar with. Writing a query letter is an art, not a science.

If you'd like to learn more about how to write a query letter, I recommend Noah Lukeman's e-book, "How to Write a Great Query Letter," which you can get on Amazon.com.

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5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

In April, I signed a contract with the publisher of the
popular "Dummies" guides for a book titled WRITING
FICTION FOR DUMMIES. This will, I hope, be an essential
guide for pre-published novelists, and a useful
reference for published authors. I've now completed the
editorial revision process.

I recently posted the latest installment in my monthly
humor column. This month's title is "No Ifs, Ands, or
Butts," in which my plumber Sam finds a new and
powerful technique for helping writers beating
procrastination. Want to know Sam's revolutionary new
technique? Here's the link:
http://www.ChristianFictionOnlineMagazine.com/biz_rooney.html

I teach at roughly 4 to 6 writing conferences per year,
depending on my schedule.

I'll be teaching my infamous workshop on "Writing the
Male POV" at the American Christian Fiction Writers
conference in September. Ever wondered why men and
women just don't understand each other? I'll give my
thoughts on all that in this workshop. Details here:
http://www.acfw.com/conference

I'll also be teaching two workshops on internet
marketing at the Oregon Christian Writer's One-Day Fall
Conference in October. Details here:
http://www.oregonchristianwriters.org

If you'd like me to teach at your conference, email me
to find out how outrageously expensive I am.

If you'd just like to hear me teach, I have a number of
recordings and e-books that are outrageously cheap.
Details here:
http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info

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6) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's
worth at least 483 times what you paid for it. I
invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely
. . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright
Randall Ingermanson, 2009.

Extremely tasteful postscript: I encourage you to email
this E-zine to any writer friends of yours who might

benefit from it. I only ask that you email the whole thing, not bits and pieces. Otherwise, you'll be getting desperate calls at midnight from your friends asking where they can get their own free subscription.

At the moment, there is one place to subscribe: My fiction site: http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com

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7) Reprint Rights

Permission is granted to use any of the articles in this e-zine in your own e-zine or web site, as long as you include the following 2-paragraph blurb with it:

Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 17,000 readers, every month. If you want to learn the craft and marketing of fiction, AND make your writing more valuable to editors, AND have FUN doing it, visit http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com.

Download your free Special Report on Tiger Marketing and get a free 5-Day Course in How To Publish a Novel.

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Randy Ingermanson
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