



Write ON!

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
WOMEN'S FICTION WRITERS ASSOCIATION

Summer 2017

BE A PRO: HOW TO BEHAVE IN PUBLISHING

Plus

**WRITING DIFFICULT CHARACTERS WITH
EMPATHY**

**ADDING FLESH TO YOUR STORY
BONES**

**GRAMMAR LIGHT - THE PASSIVE
VOICE**

TAKING IT TO THE STREET

**HOW TO CREATE & UTILIZE YOUR AUTHOR
SUPPORT TEAM**



CONTENTS

Departments

02 President's Note

05 Member Releases

Columns

20 Guiding Scribe:
Be a Pro: How to Behave in Publishing
by Heather Webb

29 Grammar Light: The Passive Voice

Features

09 The Importance of Revision
by Stephanie Knipper

12 Adding Flesh to Your Story Bones
by Elizabeth A. Havey

16 Writing Difficult Characters with
Empathy
by Erin Bartels

24 Taking It to the Street:
How to Create & Utilize Your
Author Support Team
by Kerry Lonsdale



President's Note

Even though I've been writing in some form for almost twenty years, it wasn't until several years ago that I ever considered writing a novel. But when the idea for one came to me, I loved it so much that I jumped in with both feet and started writing, even though I was a complete fiction newbie and knew nothing about anything. Three act structure? Sounds like something for a play. In media res? Never heard of it. Pitch? Hook? Logline? Nope, nope, nope. Needless to say, my first draft was lousy, but I consoled myself that all first drafts are lousy. I studied books on craft and I did my best to apply the lessons to my manuscript. I had friends and family read it and give me feedback, then made more changes.

After querying for a year and getting a few bites, one revise-and-resubmit request but no takers, I went back to the drawing board and did what felt like a complete revision for six months. More querying, bigger bites, more rejections. They were approaching ninety by this point. Although I refused to let it become "that book in a drawer" that every author has and I loved it as much as ever, I decided to put the manuscript away for a while and take a break. Recently, I pulled it out again, with new determination. What changed?

Now I have a writing community. The [support](#), [connections](#) and [tools](#) I gained from WFWA, including information-packed issues of Write On! like this one, helped keep me going. Workshops, discussions, and articles taught me about structure, publishing, and process. Perhaps most importantly, when I was ready to throw in the towel, my WFWA peeps sent me virtual hugs, wine, and coffee emojis and reminded me I could do it. They believed in me and my story. With their encouragement, I cast a wider net: I entered writing contests, enlisted additional [critique](#) partners and even jumped into the [Pitch Wars](#) pool. The result has been objective (read: tougher) feedback, more critical eyes, and deeper, more purposeful revisions.

Without the thick skin I grew from all those original rejections, I'd never have been able to absorb these extensive, detailed critiques. Did it sting to receive them? Heck yes. Did I grumble about it for days? You bet. Have they made a difference in my manuscript? No question. Writing is a labor of love, but publishing is a business and we must meet its standards if we're going to succeed. Never lose faith in your story, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

I've often read authors' notes at the end of great books that said they were the culmination of years of work. Now I get it. Writing isn't just about writing. That's the easy part. It's the revising—the seemingly constant revising—that takes so much time and hard work. But it's also what will make that story you love shine its brightest.



Christine Adler
WFWA PRESIDENT

Editors

FEATURES EDITOR

Erin Bartels writes copy for a living, but she writes novels for a life. She has worked in the publishing industry for fifteen years and has been a finalist in WFWA's Rising Star Contest and in the *Saturday Evening Post's* Great American Fiction Contest. You can find her in her home office in the middle of the Mitten State or at www.erinbartels.com.

LAYOUT EDITOR

Sierra Godfrey writes fiction with international settings and always a mention of football (soccer) or two. She is also a graphic designer with a soft spot for magazine layout, and a sports writer covering La Liga for online sports sites. She lives in the foggy wastelands of the San Francisco Bay Area with her family and can be found at www.sierragodfrey.com or @sierragodfrey.

ASSISTANT LAYOUT EDITOR

K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe: teetering dangerously on the edge is more interesting than standing safely in the middle. She is passionate about women's issues, loves noisy clocks and fuzzy blankets, but HATES the word normal. Her historical novel, *Life Before*, is about two women separated by a century who discover they've shared a soul. Web: KLRomo.com or @klromo.

MANAGING AND COLUMNS EDITOR

Stephanie Knipper is the author of *The Peculiar Miracles of Antoinette Martin*. She lives in Kentucky with her husband and six children, where she is currently at work on her second novel.


CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Patricia Friedrich is Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge, 2016), the award-winning *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-compulsive Disorder* (Palgrave, 2015), and several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.

Write ON! is published quarterly by the WFWA.

womensfictionwriters.org

 facebook.com/WFWritersAssociation

 twitter.com/WF_Writers

ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for male and female writers of women's fiction. The publishing industry is morphing—with new opportunities and, as yet, unknown futures. The founders of the Women's Fiction Writers Association wanted somewhere to amass and disseminate information to and about our chosen genre.

Defining Women's Fiction has proven as subjective as the types of books we prefer. For that reason, our guiding statement is broad and comprehensive:

Stories that are driven by the main character's emotional journey.

Our stories may have romance. Or they may not. They could be contemporary. Or historical. But what binds us together is the focus on a main character's emotional journey.

Write on!



Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:

membership@womensfictionwriters.org

READER LETTERS

Like what you've read in *Write On!*? Send us a letter! We'd love to hear your feedback and reactions on the stories and features. Email them to writeon@womensfictionwriters.org. Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

2017 WFWA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Christine Adler

President

Kathy Sechrist

Vice President, Programs

Martha Sessums

Vice President, Communications

Laura Drake

Vice President, Finance / Treasurer

Maggie Marr

WFWA Legal Counsel

Tasha Seegmiller

Secretary

Heather Webb

Guiding Scribe

Crystal Klimavicz

Membership Director

THE WFWA FOUNDING TEAM

Orly Konig

www.orkonig.com

Kerry Lonsdale

www.kerrylonsdale.com

Laura Drake

www.lauradrakebooks.com

Linda Avellar

www.lindaavellar.com

Marilyn Brant

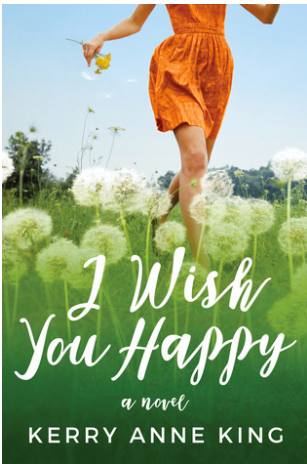
www.marilynbrant.com

Maggie Marr

www.maggiemarr.com

MEMBER

Releases

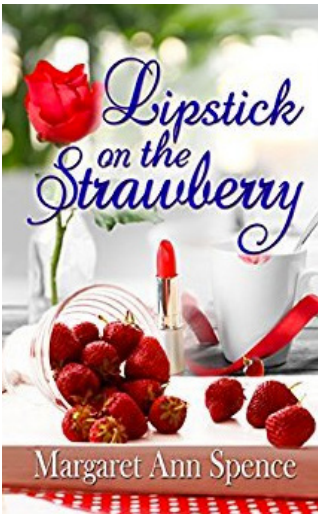


I WISH YOU HAPPY
KERRY ANNE KING
JULY 1, 2017

Rescuing abandoned animals is easier for Rae than attempting relationships with people. According to her therapist, she lacks a dimmer switch—her energy is either full-intensity on or off. Lately, she’s been opting for off.

But the switch flips back on when Rae’s car collides with a cyclist, leaving the rider fighting for her life. After discovering the crash was a suicide attempt, Rae invites the victim—emotionally and physically fragile Kat—into her home. Soon, Rae finds herself opening up, not just to friendship but also to the possibility of love with Cole, the crisis worker assigned to Kat’s case.

However, Kat’s pain threatens to overshadow Rae as their codependent friendship deepens. When disaster strikes again, Rae is desperate to help Kat heal, but the plan backfires, putting at risk Rae’s tenuous connections and forcing her to confront the most difficult challenge of all—embracing her own happiness.



LIPSTICK ON THE STRAWBERRY
MARGARET ANN SPENCE
JULY 5, 2017

Estranged from her family, Camilla Fetherwell now lives in the United States and owns a successful catering business. Returning to England for her father's funeral, she reunites with her first love, Billy, whom she hasn't seen since her father broke up their teenage romance. Billy seems eager to resume their love affair. But after one blissful night together, things take a turn.

Camilla suspects her father may have led a secret life, and when Billy reveals something he, too, has discovered, her apprehension grows. Billy holds her heart, but their relationship might be tainted by her father's hidden life. A reunion seems impossible.

Her life feels as splattered as her catering apron. As she watches her food stylist make a strawberry look luscious with a swipe of lipstick, Camilla wonders if a gloss has been put over a family secret? Can she and Billy survive what's underneath?



FACE THE CHANGE
SAMANTHA BRYANT
JULY 11, 2017

The Menopausal Superheroes are coming out of the closet and the pressure is high, on the job and on the homefront.

Now that he knows what it's like to be a hero, Leonel "Fuerte" Alvarez can't imagine going back to his former life as a grandmother and housewife. But putting his life on the line may cost him his husband even while he saves the city.

Jessica "Flygirl" Roark is holding on to her second chance at love with both hands while learning to balance single parenthood with her new career in crime fighting.

Patricia "Lizard Woman" O'Neill is blindsided by an unexpected romance just as she signs on to join the team.

Meanwhile enemies abound—old and new. When superpowers alone aren't enough, what a woman really needs are her friends.



CURVA PELIGROSA
LILY IONA MACKENZIE
AUGUST 15, 2017

When Curva Peligrosa arrives in Weed, Alberta, after a twenty-year trek on the Old North Trail from southern Mexico, she stops its residents in their tracks. With a parrot on each shoulder, a glittering gold tooth, and a wicked trigger finger, she is unlike anything they have ever seen before. Curva is ready to settle down, but are the inhabitants of Weed ready for her?

Possessed of an insatiable appetite for life and love, Curva's infectious energy galvanizes the townspeople, turning their staid world upside down with her exotic elixirs and unbridled ways. Toss in an unscrupulous americano developer and a one-eyed Blackfoot chief, stir them all together in a tornado's tempestuous tumult, and the town of Weed will never be the same again.

A lyrical account of one woman's journey and the unexpected effects it has on the people around her, Curva Peligrosa pulses with the magic at the heart and soul of life.

Her life feels as splattered as her catering apron. As she watches her food stylist make a strawberry look luscious with a swipe of lipstick, Camilla wonders if a gloss has been put over a family secret? Can she and Billy survive what's underneath?



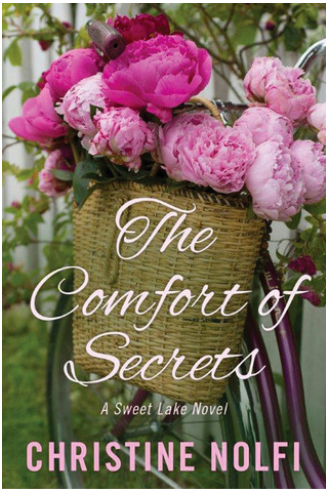
WHERE THE SWEET BIRD SINGS
ELLA JOY OLSEN
AUGUST 29, 2017

People respond to tragedy in different ways. Some try to move on. Some don't move at all. A year after her young son's death due to a rare genetic disease, Emma Hazelton is still frozen by grief, unable and unwilling to consider her husband Noah's suggestion that they try to have another child.

As the future Emma once imagined crumbles, her family's past comes into sharp relief. Searching for the roots of her son's disease, Emma tries to fit together the pieces in her genealogical puzzle. Hidden within an old wedding photograph of her great-grandparents is an unusual truth Emma never guessed at—a window into all the ways that love can be surprising, generous, and fiercely brave . . . and a discovery that may help her find her own way forward at last.

In this provocative new novel, the author of *Root, Petal, Thorn* offers a powerful story of resilience, hope, and the secrets that, no matter how deeply hidden, can shape and ultimately unite a family. What connects us to one another? Is it shared history? Is it ancestry? Is it blood? Or is it love?

Meanwhile enemies abound—old and new. When superpowers alone aren't enough, what a woman really needs are her friends.

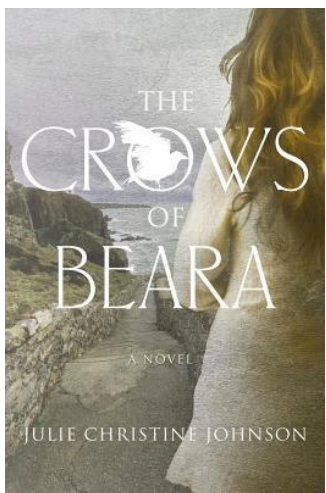


THE COMFORT OF SECRETS
CHRISTINE NOLFI
JULY, 18 2017

Cat Mendoza needs a win. After a business failure and years of dating the wrong men, she's ready to turn things around.

First she must convince the residents of Sweet Lake, Ohio, that she's taking her responsibilities seriously. As the events director of the newly restored Wayfair Inn, she has the support of her best friends, Linnie and Jada. But everyone else—including her overprotective mother and the well-meaning Sweet Lake Sirens—can't help but chime in with advice about her plans, her apparently too-tight clothes, and her undeniable attraction to Ryan D'Angelo, the charming ad exec hired to promote the inn.

Cat knows she should keep Ryan at a distance, but she's drawn closer by the heartbreak he tries to hide. Will uncovering his secrets derail the new life Cat hopes to achieve . . . or will she gain something to cherish forever?



THE CROWS OF BEARA
JULIE CHRISTINE JOHNSON
SEPTEMBER, 15 2017

When Annie Crowe travels from Seattle to a small Irish village to promote a new copper mine, her public relations career is hanging in the balance. Struggling to overcome her troubled past and a failing marriage, Annie is eager for a chance to rebuild her life.

Yet when she arrives on the remote Beara Peninsula, Annie learns that the mine would encroach on the nesting ground of an endangered bird, the Red-billed Chough, and many in the community are fiercely protective of this wild place. Among them is Daniel Savage, a local artist battling demons of his own, who has been recruited to help block the mine.

Despite their differences, Annie and Daniel find themselves drawn toward each other, and, inexplicably, they begin to hear the same voice—a strange, distant whisper of Gaelic, like sorrow blowing in the wind.

Guided by ancient mythology and challenged by modern problems, Annie must confront the half-truths she has been sent to spread and the lies she has been telling herself. Most of all, she must open her heart to the healing power of this rugged land and its people.

Beautifully crafted with environmental themes, a lyrical Irish setting, and a touch of magical realism, *The Crows of Beara* is a breathtaking novel of how the nature of place encompasses everything that we are.

If you have a Women's Fiction novel being published in the next quarter (October through December), and would like Write On! to feature it, please [fill out the submission form here](#).



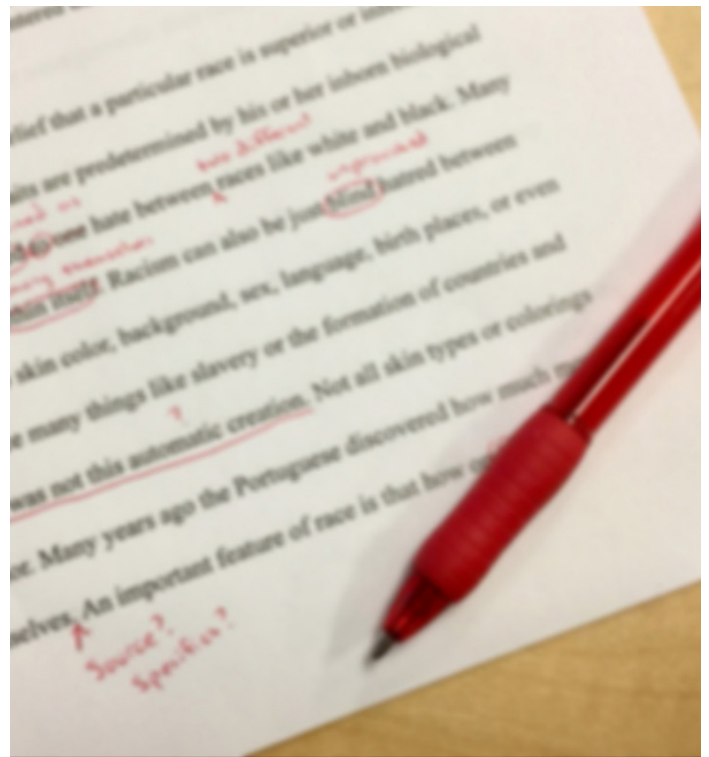
The Importance of Revision

by Stephanie Knipper

I teach fiction writing as an adjunct at Northern Kentucky University. Over the years, I've found that students consistently fail to grasp the importance of revision. Despite dedicating several classes to the subject and basing a large percentage of their grade on how well they revise their stories, many students settle for only *editing* their work instead of *revising* it.

I talked with colleagues about the issue and discovered that they had the same problem. On the whole, our students were not revising their work. I thought about the reason for this and came up with two things: either the writer understands the concept of revision, but doesn't feel their work needs it, or the writer has confused revision with editing.

This article addresses the second issue, but I want to spend a moment talking about the first. We all know people who believe everything they write is perfect—they don't need to change a single word, and they certainly don't need to do anything as drastic as cut entire paragraphs (or—gasp!—chapters.) Should you dare to suggest otherwise, you're just too dim to understand their brilliance. To those who fall into this category I say, *Cut it out*. Stephen King and J. K. Rowling revise their work. If it's good enough for them, it's good enough for the rest of us. I've revised this article four times. My agent and I spent a year-and-a-half revising my debut novel



The Peculiar Miracles of Antoinette Martin. After it sold to Algonquin, I spent another year revising. The simple fact is if you want to be a writer, you'd better embrace revision. It's part of the job.

So what exactly is revision? Isn't it just going through your work, correcting misspellings and making sure commas are in the right place? No. That's editing and it comes *after* you've revised your work.

Revision is the process of going through your

novel to make sure you have an acceptable draft. It can be both an ongoing process and something that occurs once you have finished your first draft. Revision is tearing your work apart, then piecing it back together. It's time consuming and messy. To make the process easier, I break it into three stages, moving from a macro-view to a micro-view of the project. I work first on a chapter level, then a scene level, and finally a paragraph level.

Step one of revision is to examine the chapters of your novel. To make this faster, once I've completed my draft, I write a one paragraph description of each chapter. I do this in Word, but you can use Excel or even notecards. In my description I include the point-of-view character, the setting, and the main action in the chapter. This gives me a high-level overview of the novel, and if I need to move (or cut) chapters, I can rearrange them right there in Word to see if my changes work.

As I read through my descriptions, I ask myself: *Are the chapters in the right order? Should I switch them around? Should I cut some? Do I need to add a chapter to transition between two points?* If I'm writing in multiple points-of-view, I make sure one character isn't stealing the show. And if one character *is* stealing the show, I ask whether I really need those extra point of view characters.

In this step, I also address the plot. I make sure that my major plot points are in the right place. For me, the first point hits at about ten percent into the novel, the next at 33 percent, then 50 percent, 66 percent, with the climax hitting at 90 percent. If I have major subplots, I make sure their beats fall between those of the main plot. In the above example, the subplot beats would hit at 25 percent, 50 percent, and 75 percent.

After completing step one of the revision process, I move on to step two—focusing on each scene. I make sure that I don't have too many flashbacks in a row and that my transitions between scenes make sense. I move scenes from one chapter to another, and I might cut or add scenes.

In this step, I focus heavily on character and theme development. *Are my characters being true to themselves? Are they believable? Do my "good" characters have flaws? Do my "bad" characters have redeeming qualities? Is my theme consistent throughout? Or do I start off writing about sacrifice and end up writing about good versus evil?*

Finally, I examine the novel on a paragraph level. I break up paragraphs that are too long. I look at one or two sentence paragraphs to make sure they're needed. If not, I cut them or add them to other paragraphs. I check the dialogue. *Is it realistic? Or is it too formal and stilted? Does the dialogue ring true to each character?* I make sure that it's easy to understand which character is speaking.



During this last step, I let myself play with the language. I want it to be beautiful, but easy to understand. People shouldn't need a thesaurus when they're reading my work.

You might notice a pattern, even in this article. The amount of work decreases as you go through the steps. Most revision work happens in step one. By the time you finish step three, your novel will be in good shape, allowing you to focus on editing.

Revision is a grueling process. It's messy and can make you question your desire to be a writer in the first place. However, your novel will be stronger for it. So embrace this part of writing. When you're finished, pour yourself a drink, eat some chocolate, or buy something shiny. You've earned it! •



The title character of **Stephanie Knipper's** debut novel *The Peculiar Miracles of Antoinette Martin*, a young non-verbal girl, was inspired by Stephanie's daughter, Grace. Stephanie and her husband adopted Grace from China in 2005 unaware that she had several severe special needs. Stephanie lives in Kentucky with her husband and six children, five of whom were adopted from China with various special needs. She is currently at work on her second novel.



Adding Flesh to Your Story Bones

BY ELIZABETH A. HAVEY

I'm not a painter, but I imagine that when an artist gets the glimmer of an idea, no matter the medium, she makes a sketch. It's a beginning and it may even become the focal point of the work. But what we might see in the art studio or the museum months or years later is far more than that seed, that humble beginning.

Writers also have to start somewhere. The vision of a character or a voice in your head. Someone's pain or sorrowful experience. Someone's confession or achievement. You find yourself taking notes at odd hours of the day—and night. The seed could also be a fully-formed scene that flows onto the page easily, the dialogue clear and building as you work, the characters conforming to how you imagined them. This is yours; this is the story you want to write. You're excited; it's coming together. Your book is alive and . . . it needs so much more.

That's okay. It's all part of the process.

Whether pantsner or plotter, we each start by making decisions about the basic story and are eager to forge ahead. Often we actually cannot wait to get back to the keyboard and help the process. There are character traits to flesh out, worlds to create. The power of the keyboard is heady. Where will our characters live, travel? Who will they love or hate? Will they have an

unusual occupation, be homeless, be physically or mentally challenged? How will the pages we write affect our readers' emotions? Can we make them laugh and cry, cringe and yet maybe even imagine that they are living the lives we are creating?

Stories are living things as we create them. They grow, become unruly, resist being tamed. But your tools are sharp. You go back and cut. You are giving your work shape, because all along you have another important goal: to dig down, to give your story depth. Readers love that.

There's no set timeline to this process. Each of us works our own particular way. Your process is yours. Stick with it. My purpose here is to highlight some methods, that when you are ready, will help you add flesh to the bones of your story.

Two effective ways I have found to flesh out my stories are world building and adding adversarial characters.

Two years ago during a workshop with Katie Shea Boutillier, I discovered I wasn't building my story world as effectively as I could. My



novel needed so much more of a sense of place in order to capture my reader, bring her smack dab into, well—my MC’s kitchen. Katie pointed out how a child’s drawing on the fridge could become a metaphor that moved through my story. Thanks to Katie, Sarah’s “house drawing” is now alive and well and reoccurs throughout the novel.

World building is shorthand for grounding your story, your characters, and your reader in a sense of place. To be effective, you need to think on the macro level (country, state, city, urban, suburban, rural, etc.) and the micro level (what does *this* room look like? *this* street corner? *this* refrigerator?).

Setting your character in a place where she can hear the ocean along the coast, the traffic on Michigan Avenue, smell the pizza from the restaurant across the street, hear a basketball bouncing on the floor of the apartment above—pulls your reader in. Place is where a character lives and why that character stays or leaves. Place defines aspects of personality and can be a source of incredible tension. In my WIP, it is place that sets the plot in motion as my MC’s husband insists they move out a neighborhood they have lived in all their lives.

I had to bring the reader to that place. So I set the story in a North Side Chicago neighborhood where I lived for four years. Firsthand experience is great, but it’s not necessary. Your novel can thrive anywhere in the world—with research—and you can travel using your keyboard.

But it’s not only the place itself. You’re not just creating a map so the reader knows where something is happening. You’re creating mood, developing symbols, fleshing out themes, and, most importantly, exploring character when you are building your world. It’s the character’s attachment, fear, anxiety, or excitement about that place. The reader will see your story world the way your character sees her world. You’re creating a physical world, yes, but you’re also creating an emotional world. So all my emotions about Des Moines, Iowa (where I lived for 17 years) could apply to London, Paris, wherever. Make it your goal to deepen the writing and get the emo-

tional connection to place on the page.

What about adversarial characters? These are minor characters who can be annoying, comedic, overly positive, argumentative, despicable, totally generous, etc. Donald Maass writes, “Adversarial allies can deepen characterization and help us understand why the protagonist does what he does.”

There’s that word again. Deepen. These characters help develop your main character’s personality through interaction and reaction. They force your characters’ emotions onto the page. Conflicts that deal with love, danger, success, death, missed opportunities, etc., require that your MC bump into these people who may not have much time in your story, but who can contribute greatly to your reader’s interest and understanding. Adversarial characters cause your reader to root for your MC and thus they will be turning to the next page.

We’ve probably all read books that felt “thin.” It’s not a problem of length. It’s a problem of depth, of fleshing out the story so that the reader lives in the world you are creating. It’s what makes the reader say, “I didn’t want to put the book down. I was actually sad when it ended.”

Here are five tried-and-true methods to deepen your story, create a sense of place, and delve into the heart of your characters.

1. READ WORLD NEWS

It’s out there—people struggling and winning, sometimes losing and dying. Diverse characters who walk upon that bigger world stage are finding a prominent place in today’s literature. This character could be a major presence in your novel or someone who just passes through, leaving an echo, a mark. Knowing about lives you never thought you would be interested in can enhance your work. Put someone with narrow ideas in conflict with your MC who lives on a wider stage, or vice versa. Who changes whom? Who will win? Place your MC in a typhoon, a sandstorm, or the middle of a war. It’s your world to create.

2. READ OTHER NOVELS

I am constantly finishing a book and then going back to my own thinking, *I'll never write like that*. No, I probably won't. But when reading good fiction, becoming immersed in the life of a character, the character's world, the conflict that writer is focusing on—every bit of it can stimulate ideas. That's good. Often I even take notes. *Ideas* are free—not a line of text, but the idea within it. *There is nothing new under the sun*. You can riff off (not rip off!) another writer's ideas.

3. READ RELEVANT NONFICTION

I love doing this and the subject I work with right now is medicine—and that's not narrow. But my MC is a Labor & Delivery RN, and even though I worked in that field, I want new ideas about conflicts in a hospital or how to handle a certain kind of patient. Again, I want to flesh out what I already know. And it's not just terminology, because you can find that with a Google search. What I get from reading nonfiction is viewpoints, arguments that can fuel your subject, embed it more deeply in the work.

For example, what if some of your novel takes place in a vineyard. You might dip into a book on oenology, the science of making wine. Yes, you'll find the terminology, but more importantly, depending on the author, you might get an insight into the personality of a winemaker that could bring a fresh and lively perspective to your character and her choices. That's cool. That's the stuff that can really get you to the keyboard.

4. TAKE NOTES—ON EVERYTHING!

I think we all do this. I write down personal experiences and phrases I hear. I record conversations (with permission) or eavesdrop to find a rhythm in speech or a peculiar repeated phrase to color the place or life that the character is leading. I find images, either in printed material or on the Internet or television, that can build color and theme into my novel. I store notes and images on my computer using Evernote. And I have notes all over my desk.

Always have a note pad or a cell phone handy so that the moment, the idea, the words are not lost. Like many of you probably, I often get ideas when I am trying to fall asleep, so I keep a pad of paper and pen at the bedside. Personal experiences can linger, but that phrase, that word someone used, or that remark—get it down now.

Many of you probably have created Vision Boards. You read a magazine and there is the beach scene, the car crash, the lighted window that you know you can use—good, cut it out. I tape things to my den wall. Such visuals can stimulate help describe a room, set a mood, or create the sentence that best reveals how light is coming into a garden. The possibilities are endless.



5. READ BOOK REVIEWS, SPECIFICALLY FOR THEMATIC CONCEPTS.

Maybe I'm crazy, but I find this stimulates my writing brain. To illustrate, here are lines from an *LA Times* review of Katie Kitamura's novel, *A Separation*: "I think there's such a fine line in a relationship. . . . The role of imagination and privacy . . . how much space can you allow before that becomes distance? And similarly, imagination is empathy. That's how you achieve empathy. It's how you can be with another person and understand how they are in the world. At the same time, imagination

is what's behind jealousy and obsession and fantasy and everything that can also tear a relationship apart. So I think marriage is this crazy contract that you go into which is completely irrational.”

If you have a couple's conflict in your novel or are thinking of creating one, there is much to ponder in this quote. Yes, this is another author's way of attacking a universal subject that will be written about for centuries, but I find her point of view, her reference to imagination and empathy fascinating. I haven't read the book yet, but when I'm deeply into the conflict between my MC and her husband, I will be reading these words and considering them.

What are your favorite ways to add flesh to your story bones? Did I miss something that works for you? Let's continue the conversation on the WFWA Community Facebook Page!

Happy Writing! •



Elizabeth A. Havey is a former high school English teacher, labor and delivery nurse, and freelancer for McDougal Littell Publishing and Meredith Books. With her three children grown, she has more time to pursue her passion for writing. Her short stories have appeared in several magazines and were published in May 2015 in a collection entitled *A Mother's Time Capsule*. Born, raised, and educated in Chicago, Havey now lives in Southern California, but the spirit of the Midwest remains fresh in her fiction. Find her at www.elizabethahavey.com or her blog, www.boomerhighway.org.



Writing Difficult Characters

With Empathy

BY ERIN BARTELS

Stop reading this article. Stop right now and get out a blank sheet of paper. I'll wait. Got it? Good.

On the front, write the name of the worst person you know. Someone you can't stand. Someone you just can't get along with. Beneath this name, divide your paper into two columns. In the left hand column, I want you to list every despicable thing you can about that person. Don't hold back. Don't give them the benefit of the doubt. Just put it all out there. I'll give you a few minutes...

Okay, done? Next step. Turn your paper over. On this side I want you to write the name of someone who is the polar opposite of that rotten person from the front. The best, most admirable person you know. Got 'em? Now, you guessed it, make two columns beneath that name. In the left hand column, list every wonderful quality you can that this person possesses. Again, I'll give you a few minutes...

Now hold onto your paper. We're going to come back to it. But for now, let's talk about one of the most vital qualities a writer can have: empathy.

When we write any character outside of our own direct experience, we're employing some level of empathy, which is "the ability to understand and share the feelings of others."

Did you catch that? It's not just learning about others. Not feeling bad for others. But *un-*

derstanding and *sharing* the feelings of others. For some characters—the ones we really like—empathy is easy. For others—ones whose actions confound us even though we are their creators—it can be a challenge. But it is with those difficult characters that the need for empathy actually *increases*.

Like the definition says, it's about *understanding* and *sharing* someone else's feelings. Well, how the hell do I do that for a character I don't see eye-to-eye with or maybe that I don't even like?

Let's start with the first part. Understanding.

Understanding something or someone obviously can't happen until we encounter them in some way. You can't understand someone theoretically. There are many ways we as writers can begin to understand people from a different time, place, ethnic background, religion, sexuality, political party, etc. Some of these suggestions will no doubt seem obvious, but we have to start with the basics because, when we have not had the experiences our characters have had, we are starting from a place of ignorance, and acknowledging that is fundamental. Being humble and honest about what we don't know is important. Because it colors how we learn.

Here are just a few ways we can slowly get closer to understanding difficult characters:

OBSERVATION

Use your senses. Observe people in person, in movies, on TV, on documentaries. Listen to speech patterns and accents. Note interesting vocabulary and figures of speech. What kind of music do they listen to? How loudly or softly do they speak? Why? Taste the kinds of foods they eat. Experience their world through smell—their gardens, their cologne, their hair products, their favorite restaurants, their exhaust fumes. What textures are in their clothing? Are their hands rough or smooth?

All of these are basic observations on a surface level. We can't *understand* a person by observing him, but we have to start there. And I recognize that this can sound creepy and stalky. But it doesn't have to be. Introduce yourself, tell them about your book, and ask if it's okay to ask some questions so that you can be sure you're being respectful and accurate. Empathy starts with getting to know someone, so go get to know someone! Especially if they're "not your kind of people."

RESEARCH

Read historical documents or news stories written by *and* about the people in question. Read fiction by *and* about the people in question. If you're trying to get to know someone you don't know and can't understand, it's important to get both sides. If you're writing a character who is an illegal immigrant or a neo-Nazi or a militant animal rights activist or a follower of a religion you think is ludicrous, reading the writings of just one side or the other will not give you a fully rounded understanding of the issues and viewpoints involved.

ACT IT OUT

Allow yourself to inhabit someone else's viewpoint by acting. Choose to take on a point of view that is contrary to your own. Back in debate class, you sometimes had to argue for a point you did not agree with. This ability to put yourself in the position of having to take a position you detested—and therefore being forced to come up with logical defenses of that position—is being lost, as evidenced by the sophomoric

and vitriolic way public discourse is being held in our day and age.

For practice, you might create an online alter ego completely unconnected to your real name and start some arguments where you take the side you would never take, the side your difficult character would take. Or have a friend play devil's advocate with you if you don't want to end up on any government watch lists.

A DOSE OF HUMILITY

Acknowledge that your view came from somewhere. Walk it back, discover why you believe the way you do. Who taught you that belief and from what worldview are you coming? Now imagine a different upbringing and how that might lead to a different but equally logical view. You don't have to change your belief as you do this (though you might), you just have to acknowledge that other beliefs *can make sense*. That everyone around you believes what he or she does for some logical (to them) reason. Doing this for your difficult character can work wonders for writing them with empathy.

At this point we are nearing the ability to *understand* the feelings of our character.

As an example of how this all works in the writing process, let me tell you about JJ Rich. JJ is a young black character of mine, about thirteen, who is growing up with his single mother, his grandmother, and his uncle in 1960s Detroit. He is flirting with various black militant movements and personalities because he is resentful of his situation in life—living in subpar housing, limited in what he can do in school and in a later career because of the color of his skin, lacking a father despite his uncle doing his best to be a father figure for him.

Now, when I was in school learning about the Civil War and Reconstruction and the Civil Rights movement, whenever there were examples of resistance, I always sided with the group that was "polite" about it. The ones who marched silently or sat at counters, the ones who tried to work within the system. They were passionate, but they weren't "rabble rousers."

But the more I studied the period between 1850 and 1970, the more I realized that, were I a black American during those times, I would be far more likely to have supported the more militant leaders, the ones who just weren't going to take it anymore and screw being polite!

This is not how I was brought up. At all. But through my in-depth research, including reading materials written by people on all sides of the issue, I began to truly understand the people who wanted to blow the system apart rather than work within it. I understood the desire to break free. I understood why people would riot and loot and burn their own neighborhoods. It was never my experience—not in the least. I've never marched in a protest, held a sign, broken a window, or thrown a Molotov cocktail. But I could understand why someone would in this situation. It was *logical* to me.

It wasn't until I actually wrote the chapter in my novel where JJ takes part in the Detroit Riots of 1967 that I *shared* JJ's feelings. But in the writing, I did, and it was incredible. Even though on principle I would normally have disapproved of his actions, when I wrote JJ, I wrote him completely without judgment or bias. And in doing that, he came alive as a real, three-dimensional person. He and I have nothing in common, but I could truly empathize with him. I hope that means readers will too.

BRINGING IT HOME

Time to take out your paper again. Turn to the side with the "good person." Look over that list of wonderful qualities. It's time to fill out the right hand column. Write down every single bad thing about this person you can think of, even if it's petty. No one is perfect. No one is all good. What does this person do or what view does this person hold that embarrasses you or makes you angry? Write down every negative quality you can think of...

Now flip your paper over. You know what's coming. I want you to fill up that right hand column with every admirable quality this nasty person has. Start small. Maybe they're a sharp dresser. Maybe you like his wife. Maybe she has a sweet dog. Maybe just that one time he helped

you out. Then once you've done the little things, look for the big things. No one is all bad...

What do you think? Was it harder to come up with negative qualities in your good person or positive qualities in your bad one? Are you surprised by the number of bad things you had to say about your good person? By the number of good things you had to say about your bad person?

For people we like, we usually find it easier to overlook negative qualities. Think about your main character. Usually, though not always, we write main characters that we like. If we write them without any negative qualities, they seem less real, less believable than when we allow them to be their whole selves, warts and all.

Now think about your difficult character or your antagonist. Have you managed to give them any qualities or characteristics we might admire? We don't have to like them. But can we *understand* them? Can we *share* their feelings? What made them into the person they are today? If you don't know, we won't know, and that's a problem.

BARRIERS TO EMPATHY

If you haven't allowed your characters to be fully three-dimensional, you may just need to do some more research, observation, or interviews. Or there may be a specific hang-up or barrier that is holding you back.

Two of the biggest are...

- arrogance
- fear

Let's tackle the first: arrogance. If I believe that my way of thinking is right—and of course I do or I wouldn't think that way—but I don't allow for the fact that others have developed legitimate, logical views that are unlike mine, and that they have developed them because their experience of life has been different from mine, and if I can't put myself in their shoes and understand them, I will not be able to write them in a sympathetic light. They won't be real people; they'll be straw men, developed specifically to knock down. When you win an argument that

way, it's like winning an arm wrestling competition with a mannequin. You haven't actually won anything, but you have succeeded in making yourself look like you're afraid of actually facing a real opponent.

What about fear? Have you ever held back with a character because you're afraid that if you let him think that or say that or do that, that readers will think you would think or say or do that? If my novel involves racist views coming from characters' mouths, are readers going to think that I'm racist? If my novel involves a woman abandoning her family, are readers going to think I wish I could leave mine?

We have to allow some characters to be unsympathetic to the reader by first being *empathetic* toward them as writers. We have to allow our characters to be wholly themselves. They're not us. We're not writing from our experiences alone. We're writing to understand, to feel what someone else feels.

And that's what we want readers to do, right? When they read your story, you want them to feel something. Probably you want them to feel something specific, something you felt while writing perhaps. You want your reader to have empathy with your characters, to understand and share their feelings. But how can they do that if we don't first write with empathy?

The trick is to treat each of your characters as real, whole people who have a reason for everything they do, think, and say. Look again at the lists you made. No one is all good; no one is all evil. Even positive traits can be turned negative or have negative consequences. The sweet girl can be a doormat. The accommodating boss can be a poor manager. And those negative traits? The woman who is so infuriatingly stubborn? Maybe she never gives up on her wayward son. The boy who cheated off you in school? Maybe he got beaten senseless whenever he was less than perfect at home.

I want to end by challenging you to dive into your work in progress and see if you've given your difficult characters the benefit of the doubt. See if you've taken the time and care needed to understand them, to feel what they feel. Because

when you do that, your readers will feel it too. They'll see living, breathing people emerge from the page, people they never met before...and hopefully will never forget. •



Erin Bartels is a full-time marketing copywriter at an independent publisher, a freelance editor and writer, and the author of *The Bone Garden* (releasing January 2019) which is a novel filled with difficult characters you'll probably dislike (but hopefully understand). You can find her at www.erinbartels.com.

Be a Pro:

How to Behave in Publishing

BY HEATHER WEBB

There is so much advice out there about craft and social media and, on occasion, the ins and out of the industry, but you rarely see authors talking about professional behavior. Maybe because a certain degree of it is understood, or maybe it's because published authors are nervous about saying anything publicly that may make them look bad. Whatever the case, it's an incredibly important topic that isn't addressed enough, so I thought I'd dig in and talk about conference, book event, and online etiquette for both the aspiring and professional author.

Let's start at the beginning.

CONFERENCE ETIQUETTE

Be on Time: I don't know, maybe it's the fact that I was a military brat, or maybe it's the teacher in me, but I find tardiness extremely rude. It demonstrates to the other person that you have more important things to do than to keep your commitment with them. Of course, things happen, and everyone deserves a little leeway from time to time, but overall remember that your timeliness speaks volumes. *It shows how much you want this.* How much you're willing to dig and strive to become a better writer, to be a thriving member of the writer community. It shows how much you value your *own* time. Get there, or be square.

Hide the Yoga Pants (for now): As much as we'd like to be really comfortable, this is a no-no. Instead, think business casual for a confer-

ence or meeting, or if you like, full-on business wear. I've seen too many writers wearing sloppy t-shirts and ragged jeans. I know the conference bulletins say dress is "casual to business to casual," but don't believe that. The way you dress says a lot about how seriously you take yourself. Recently, I had a very poorly dressed publisher approach me for an indie project I was in the process of developing. On the spot I thought, "This woman doesn't care about how she represents her business so why should I care?" This is not about wearing designer duds. No one can afford those. It's about being a professional who takes their writing seriously. It's about kicking some ass.

Practice Your Pitch with Other Writers: It's always awkward when strangers approach and say, "Hey, what are you writing about?" The thing is, the more often you have to say it, the easier and more fluid your pitch becomes. By the time you hit your agent/editor appointment, you'll feel much more prepared and the words will flow easier. Besides, you will always, always use that pitch, even after you're published. Potential readers will want to know about your books, too.

Smile, a Lot. Oh, and Make Eye Contact: It's a universal truth that more people are attracted to smiles as opposed to frowns or frightened stares. Fake it if you must, but smile. People will want to talk to you if you seem approachable. Remember that networking is an important part of any job and publishing is no exception.

Buy Books: I know we all buy loads of books, but here's the thing. You're receiving a ton of hard-won insider info from a bunch of seasoned authors. That kind of advice is worth its weight in gold—but these author/speakers aren't paid, typically. (If so, it's a nominal amount.) If you have attended one of their sessions and truly found it helpful, buy one of their books to support them, to say thank you, to put dollars into an industry whose vitality is of big interest to you. If writers don't support each other, no one else will. If it's a book that doesn't particularly speak to you as a reader, host a giveaway on social media—also a great way to say thank you—or give it to a friend or relative. Donate it to your library or workplace. There are loads of great things you can do. Buy books. They aren't just your passion; books are your industry. Buy into it.

BOOK EVENT ETIQUETTE

Be Early: I know I've already harped on being on time, but in this instance you should be early. Chat with the bookseller, make a quick trip to the loo to help with nerves, read through your notes and/or pages one more time, and scope out the seating. I find that the longer I stand at the mic and look out over the seats, chatting with people as they trickle in, the more at ease I feel. Also, you never want a room full of people waiting on you.

Say Thank You: Send the bookshop a thank you note. It's a simple but elegant gesture and something that isn't emphasized enough in our society as a whole anymore. Thank you notes and gifts are priceless. They show that you have true gratitude—and manners.

Frequent the Shop: Support your local indies. For those stores that are out of town, you can help them by promoting them through social media or by helping direct readers to their buy links. Do gift card giveaways that support them, etc.

INTERACTING ONLINE

Social media and easy access to chat rooms and email has allowed us to connect with other writers (and hopefully readers). All good things. But with great power comes great responsibility. This great connectivity reaches beyond our colleagues and “fans.” Now we have access to the world's darkest corners, all day long, 24/7.

As people in the public eye, we need to focus on how our presence may add to or detract from this environment. How we treat one another is a commentary on how we view our worth as a whole, our importance (or lack of) to culture and society. We are the thinkers and creators, the match to the fire. How we conduct ourselves matters, not just to us individually, but to all those whose lives we touch.

Social media posts, journals, blogs, forums, review sites. These places are where writers live and, to my horror, the “writers gone wild” culture appears to be growing.



Let's begin with a few disturbing things I've seen lately:

- Rude and edgy comments when someone makes a mistake or typo in an article or post
- Belittling and bullying someone who has a different opinion
- Making passive aggressive statements in a public forum that betray another writer's confidence in some way (i.e., sharing private information about their topic, title, or cover, or calling someone out publicly for interactions that have happened "behind closed doors")
- Trashing an author's book in a way that is a personal affront, as opposed to a thoughtful, critical review
- Blowing off requests for book blurbs by not responding to the inquiry at all, or worse, agreeing to blurb and never responding with a decline or explanation of suitability, obligations, etc.

The problem is, when acting this way, you have no idea who that author knows and how they're connected. If you anger or disrespect them, they could black-ball you among other groups, with agents, or even editors. I've seen this happen. A lot. I'm not making this up. Just like in any other industry, "who you know" can be very important. Play nice. Be professional. Be generous. And do not, whatever you do, take out your angst over the rejections you've suffered or the nasty reviews that made you sick to your stomach in a hateful, jealous rant in public. That's what friends are for *in private*. This behavior will bring you no closer to your goal and it will make enemies. Also, no one wants to work with a poor sport—or read their books.

Why has this behavior become acceptable? I guess what I'm asking is, don't we all deserve a measure of respect? Doesn't this sort of behavior engender a self-centered culture that breeds a lot of anger and disillusionment, lots of resentment? We are better than this.

Many of these issues boil down to one thing: ego.

Ahhh, ego. It's what drives us. We don't have to ask Freud to recognize this truth.

One could argue writing is all about ego. What makes our stories so damn important anyway? Why should our books be published, recognized, heralded? Because we're _____. You fill in the blank. Yet I believe it's something more noble than that, at least for most of us. It's about touching lives, about starting a narrative around difficult emotions or controversial topics, or perhaps highlighting something which shaped our history and was forgotten. It's about adding beauty and intrigue and excitement to this trying life.

Why not...

TRY THESE THINGS INSTEAD:

R.S.V.P. (Répondez s'il vous plait): Politely decline a blurb request if you're too busy or if it's not the right book for you. Pretending the request didn't come is just poor manners and many people take offense. The other thing is, in publishing, one moment you're up and on top of the world with your killer book deal and press coverage, the next you're in the gutter and no one cares if you ever write again. Those are the breaks in a challenging, creative pursuit. Oh, and remember that author you snubbed because you hated their book, or you were too busy, or just couldn't be bothered to read it? They may be the next hottest thing since sliced bread and you'll need a favor from them—and they won't forget the way you treated them. Manners, manners, manners. Our manners separate us from beasts. Use them.

Express Opinions with Care: You are not the god of the universe. People are different from you and also, they make mistakes. So do you. Kindness goes a long way. Also, you may find yourself in the same shoes as this person you have laid low one day. Kindness, generosity, manners—rinse and repeat.

Keep Passionate Discourse Relevant: Writers are eloquent and have loads of skills the average human doesn't when expressing ourselves. Having impassioned ideals and opinions is fabulous. It's what shapes the future—just keep it relevant. If you're having an intense emotional reaction to a topic, take a step back for a few hours or a day or two and respond when your head isn't on fire. You may find you're being triggered emotionally because of some underlying cause that has nothing to do with this incident. Besides, once you've cooled off, you're more likely to bring intelligent points to the table.

Exercise Your Skills through Tone: Most of us learn the hard way that tone is everything. Tone is something we master as novelists. Why is it, then, that so many writers don't consider tone important in online discussions? While you can't predict how someone will take your meaning, as a novelist, you must use your abilities to put forth the message you wish to convey in the truest, simplest fashion. It's an incredible tool—and weapon—and we, of all people, possess that power. Choose your words wisely.

Take the High Road: When someone steps out of line, take a deep breath and either exit the conversation or respond with sense. I try to remember the Buddhist philosophy of “having no hooks.” Envision negative energy (or comments) flowing toward you and around you, over you. If there is no emotional hook sticking out, it continues past you. It can't grab hold and take purchase. Let the crap flow downstream. Hike to higher ground.

Which leads me to my last point:

Apologize and Win: There's this saying that goes something like: “Apologize for your part in something and let the rest go—even if the other party can't and won't apologize back.” It's called owning your crap. It's freeing and it tends to pop the tension balloon in an instant, and may also inspire the other person to take ownership of their mistakes as well.

Sadly, we have a way of forgetting the good and hanging on to the bad. Remember that. It's an unfortunate part of human nature, but it's a reality. Memories can be long and slights not

easily forgiven. Create the kind of professional writing life you are proud of, relationships from which you benefit as well as add to, and make like Aretha.

Show a little **R-E-S-P-E-C-T**. •



Heather Webb is a former military brat and traveling addict who found it tricky to choose a landing pad. At last, Heather settled in a rural town in New England. For a decade she put her degrees in French and Cultural Geography to good use teaching high school students. When the writing bug hit, she left her job to make her way in the dangerous world of publishing.

Heather's historical novels *Becoming Josephine* and *Rodin's Lover*, published by Penguin Random House, have received starred national reviews, and *Rodin's Lover* was a Goodreads Top Pick in 2015. Her works have sold in 10 countries and have been featured in national print media including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, *France Magazine*, *Dish Magazine*, the *Washington Independent Review of Books*, and more.



Taking It to the Street

How to Create & Utilize Your Author Support Team

BY KERRY LONSDALE

Street teams. Reader groups. Author support crews. You've heard about them. You've considered starting one. You just haven't gotten around to building yours.

You might not know how or when to start a team. Maybe asking others to promote you and your books makes you squeamish. Or, you simply don't have the bandwidth to manage a team. Whatever the reason (or, excuse), I believe any author can benefit from having a squad of loyal supporters.

WHAT, EXACTLY, IS A STREET TEAM?

If you start a team with the sole purpose of sales and reviews, you're going to feel frustrated with the lack of response, with those who join only to receive free books and those who don't leave reviews. – Steena Holmes

A street team is more than a crew of early book reviewers. It's a group of volunteers that support an author's marketing efforts beyond advanced reads of an upcoming release. They are your top readers who want to support you and spread the word about your books. They are your personal reader community and number one fans. A successful team will consist of a combination of friends, family, neighbors, bloggers, author peers, and most especially, your readers.

WHY YOU WANT A TEAM

I am starting a team because the reach I have as a single individual is limited by so many factors. – Tasha Seegmiller

One of the best author marketing decisions you can make is to form a team. While there are no guarantees, I honestly believe the awareness a team generates about an author and the author's books can propel that author to bestseller status.

Teams build buzz, share good news, and they've got your back with it comes to protecting your author brand. More importantly, in an industry swamped with new book releases, debut authors, rising stars, and bestsellers, you and your books have massive competition for your target audience's valuable reading time. There's a lot of noise in this space and you're shouting to be heard. One hundred voices are louder than one.

Yes, I said 100.

As Tasha mentions, those volunteers have a larger targeted reach than you can achieve on your own through a limited social media following and marketing budget.

WHEN TO START A TEAM

What would I have done differently when organizing a team? I would've begun a private group sooner. – Christine Nolfi



Before we get into HOW you build a 100+ member street team, let's address WHEN you should start.

Are you published?

You should start building a team today.

Are you pre-debut?

Same answer. Start today.

Are you querying or on submission?

Start today. Even pre-submission and pre-debut, you want to utilize your team to create the perception your book will be a big deal when it hits the market. (Come on, think positive! Believe you'll be published, act as though you will be, and you'll get there.)

Are you unpublished and still writing your manuscript?

Don't start today. But do start identifying your prospective team members. Your top marketing priority as an aspiring author is to lay the foundation of your potential audience. You do this by:

1. Obtaining subscribers to your blog and/or newsletter.
2. Increasing your followers on your social media accounts and interacting with them.

3. Identifying family, friends, and neighbors you've kept apprised of your writing journey.
4. Networking with your author peers. Read their books and post honest reviews. Share with them when you've posted a positive review. (Because we don't need you pointing out our negative reviews.)
5. Observing which bloggers review comparable books to yours (story and genre). Follow those bloggers, interact with them, and share and comment on their social media posts.
6. Friending readers on Goodreads who like books similar to what you're writing.

When you're ready to approach these people for your team, they'll already know you and be more inclined to support you.

HOW TO START A TEAM

If a reader commented on your social media post, saying how much she loved your book, consider inviting her into your street team. —
Christine Nolfi

There are several methods you can employ to acquire members for your team. Like Christine states, you can personally invite them. Send an email or private message through social media. Steena Holmes has posted announcements on Facebook and in her newsletter. When I initially launched my team, the first announcement went out in my newsletter. I followed it up with a post on my Facebook page as well as my personal profile. My team has grown to the point where I include an invitation to join every few issues of my newsletter. Most new members now come to me directly through my website. Which brings me to my next point:

Consider having a sign-up form on your website for this specific reason: You want to vet your membership. Are they really joining to support you or just to get the freebies? My form doesn't submit until the reader checks "I Agree" to sharing good news about my stories and recommending my books. They know upfront what

they're getting into. Also, I don't grant them access until I confirm they have: subscribed to my Newsletter, liked my Facebook page, followed me on Twitter, and added my books to their Goodreads shelves.

I might put them through the rigors, but there are definite benefits once they officially join, for both me and the reader. By capturing the member's personal and social media information through the signup form, I can verify the member actively reviews books and shares her favorite reads online. The reader gets the inside scoop on my works in progress, the opportunity to do early reads, and contribute to my stories by suggesting character names and locations.

MANAGING YOUR TEAM

Street teams need a lot of nurturing. I would advise an author to only start one if you can be present. A lot. – Kaira Rouda

Some of the more successful street teams in size and activity have evolved as such because the author nurtured her team into a community. If you plan on having a larger team, consider creating a secret Facebook group where you interact with your members and they can meet each other. The secret group not only helps you manage your team, but it's the perfect location to post the news and updates you want to specifically share with your members. It's fun to watch your team comment and mingle with each other. They love and despise your characters together.

But, before you get too excited about starting your own team, here's a reality check:

Street teams eat up your time, especially when you first launch a team. They also take a hefty investment around each book launch. You not only have to monitor which members are doing early reads, but you must remind them to post an honest review and verify they posted that review (first on Goodreads before the publish date, then to Amazon on the publish date). You also have to be prepared to give them the boot if they don't post a review within the timeframe you specified. If an early reader requests



a galley from me three months before the book publishes, that honest review better be posted within the first week of release because they've had more than ample time to read.

Be honest with yourself. If you don't have the time to invest in nurturing a team, or you don't have an author assistant to help you manage one, consider these options:

1. Collaborate with authors who target a similar readership to create a shared team. You can devise a management schedule.
2. Befriend book bloggers and reviewers and hope they are interested in and have the time to read and review your book around its release date.
3. Create a readers group on Facebook with several other authors and promote each other across your social media platforms to expand your reach.

UTILIZING YOUR TEAM

I hope, by using a team, that I can share that same love of books and reading with them. – Tasha Seegmiller

Your team is more than a crew of early book reviewers. You should utilize your team

throughout the year, not just around book launches. Of course, if you strive to build relationships within your team and let them get to know you on a personal level, your team members will be more than happy to assist.

So, how can your team help keep you and your books in front of your readership? Your team can:

1. Share your social media posts with their friends and followers.
2. Select your books for their book club.
3. Ask their library to order your book.
4. Get their local bookstore to display and sell your book.
5. Host book giveaways.
6. Forward your newsletter to friends.
7. Help coordinate an offline book tour.

REWARDING YOUR TEAM

When readers know you honestly care about them, they are more apt to support you in your career. – Steena Holmes

Your team members don't have to be there for you. They want to be there because they love your books that much. How lucky you are to have readers who want to support your career! Always, always, be grateful for them and what they do for you. Thank them when they post a review, acknowledge when they tweet about you, and reply when they comment on your posts or send you an email. Make yourself available and accessible to them.

There are plenty of ways to reward your team. They love lines and excerpts from works-in-progress. Share with them deleted scenes. Run book giveaways within your group. Send them thank you cards or little tokens of your appreciation. My team members get themed charms from me. However you decide to acknowledge your team, just remember to say "thank you."

PRO TIPS FOR THE ROAD

If I had to do it over again, I wouldn't make [my street team] genre specific. – Kaira Rouda

Starting a street team does take some thought and investment, but when done right, it's worth



the effort. Loyal fans will become friends and social media followers will become lifelong readers. I asked several authors with teams, and one who's in the process of building a team, what advice they would give an author considering starting one on her own. I'll leave you with their tips:

1. Start a group for the purpose of connecting with your readers, of building relationships with them and be personable, then [your] sales and the reviews will follow. (Steena)
2. If you've gifted a copy of a book for review, ask your street team member to tell you when she's posted the review on Amazon, Goodreads and, hopefully, other sites. I've noticed an uptick in review posting since I've begun holding members accountable. (Christine)
3. Make the members of your team feel like they are part of something. I branded my street team as the Tiki Lounge and affectionately refer to the members as the Tikis. Everything about the lounge is tropical and fun. (Kerry)

4. Create a database of those who've reviewed your books and who've won giveaways. It helps tremendously in the long run. (Steenia)
5. If you've never participated in a group Facebook party, reach out to other authors at a comparable level in their publishing career, and make it happen. (Christine)
6. Engage your team. Ask them to beta read for you or to help you work through plot holes. Find out what they're reading, aside from your books, and invite them to discuss what they like about the book. (Kerry)
7. When organizing your team, keep it simple: Facebook group and newsletter. (Steenia)
8. It takes a village to raise a book—I've seen that time and again—and the best way in this day and age to create that village is online. (Tasha)

**Special thanks to Steena Holmes, Christine Nolfi, Kaira Rouda, and Tasha Seegmiller for contributing their expertise and experience. •*



Kerry Lonsdale is the Amazon Charts and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of *Everything We Keep*, *All the Breaking Waves*, and *Everything We Left Behind*. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and is a founder of the Women's Fiction Writers Association. She resides in Northern California with her husband and two children.

The Passive Voice

BY PATRICIA FRIEDRICH

Feared and often vilified, the passive voice, I argue, has its place in language and in writing. How can I make such a claim? I am a linguist by training, and a basic principle of linguistic economy is that, if a linguistic element has no functional use in a given language, it disappears. The very existence of the passive voice is evidence of its usefulness.

However, its use should be connected to a rhetorical choice. This means the writer has a purpose and chooses the passive to fulfill this purpose. Purpose and audience should be our guides in all our rhetorical choices.

Consider the following:

A young boy is playing with a ball in the living room. His mother hears a crashing noise. The boy comes into the kitchen and announces, “The vase is broken.” Rhetorical Purpose: avoid saying who broke the vase.

Consider these parallel constructions: “The book received an award. The book sold millions of copies. The book was written to inspire people all over the world.” Rhetorical Purpose: keep the focus on the subject “the book” and maintain parallel structure.

Consider the following construction: “J.S. wrote a wonderful book, but she was criticized for...” Rhetorical purpose: keep the focus on the subject and her/his having been subjected to someone else’s actions (i.e., the act of criticizing in this case).

Finally, note the following sentence: “Bal-



loons will be placed outside the door to indicate the location of the party.” Rhetorical Purpose: focus on the action rather than the actors/agents (i.e., it does not matter who will place the balloons but rather that they will be placed there).

Given these rhetorical purposes, why is the passive voice so often criticized and edited out?

I HAVE A FEW IDEAS:

- Early in their education, many writers/ students are told never to use the passive voice.
- Many times, the passive voice is not used with a rhetorical purpose in mind but rather simply for variety.

- Oftentimes, people cannot distinguish the passive voice from sentences constructions that have no power or strength (though many of the latter are actually written in active voice).

Note: The passive voice necessarily includes VERB TO BE + PAST PARTICIPLE. The “to-be” form will depend on the verb tense. The main verb is always a participle. The agent (of the action) may or not be present.

- e.g. is considered
 was seen
 was being used
 would be built
 had been described
 will be regarded
 has been seen •



Patricia Friedrich is Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge, 2016), the award-winning *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-compulsive Disorder* (Palgrave, 2015), and several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.



WRITE FOR WRITE ON!

You love reading *Write On!* Now write for it!

If you're interested in being a *Write On!* contributor, pitch your one-time feature articles (2,000 words) to Features Editor Erin Bartels @ erinbartelswrites@gmail.com or your regular column idea (750–1,000 words) to Managing Editor Stephanie Knipper at sknipper@fuse.net.

