

You're Inviting Writer's Block When You Don't Spend the Time To Plan Your Book Carefully

You just completed a writing course. Perhaps you just graduated from college. Or your career has finally ended and now that you've reached retirement you're free to pursue your long-awaited dream of writing. You can't wait to rush to the computer and at last get started.

Slow down. You don't want to join the many hopefuls who face a blank computer screen only to sit and stare, their typing fingers paralyzed...their grand ideas shattered by the glassy scowl and forbidding glower of that empty screen.

Well before you place yourself in that position, you have some major decisions to make. What is it you want to write? How do you want to present your thoughts? Will fiction or nonfiction work best? All of that sounds rather elementary, doesn't it?

It is, but these are essential exercises if you want to avoid an author's greatest nemesis - writer's block. I firmly believe that careful planning is the best "medication" to help you avoid that dread disease.

Fiction or Nonfiction?

As you begin developing your idea, a key consideration is whether you choose to write fiction or nonfiction. You have something you hope to pass on to your readers. It is probably something very specific taken from the deep well of your life experience, family history or career. The latter is very popular among retired writers. Can it best be presented in a strictly factual context or will a fictitious setting better serve what you choose to write? Ask yourself whether your writing tends to be more journalistic or more fanciful in style.

If you are leaning toward fiction, can you flesh out a first-rate plot? Do you have the sensitivity and the insight to fine tune characters and settings? Are you able to create dialogue that reflects the nature of your characters and their relationships to others in the book? If the answers are both honest and positive, then you can decide among the many subgenres of fiction. Will you write a novel, a mystery, a series of short stories?

When you embark on the nonfiction route, the decisions you face differ somewhat. It is important to determine whether the topic you choose is timely and whether there is a substantial audience interested in that topic. Make sure your knowledge of the subject is fully up to date. Many retirees, for example, don't stop to think that the world they knew in their working years has progressed to new levels.

Head to the library or the Web. Do your research carefully. Make no assumptions that you are fully knowledgeable on a specific topic. Always remember that the key to writing successful nonfiction is content.

Searching for Ideas

Many people have only a general idea of what they want to write about. Some are more fortunate and are eager to tackle a specific subject or issue. Possibilities abound everywhere. Start by looking right within your own homes or among your circle of friends and acquaintances.

Perhaps you have a unique sibling...or even a unique relationship with a sibling. That can be the nucleus of a fascinating book or article. You may have some special ideas about parenting, developed during your years of raising a family. Have you experienced the trauma of a serious illness in the family? How did you and the other members cope? Your home and your family can generate a number of different ideas. Look carefully, and you will discover them.

Similarly, the workplace can offer endless possibilities, particularly to a retiree. From the technical side of your job to interactions with fellow workers, from ethical workplace issues to managerial skills, all of these and more are grist for your writing mill. Hobbies, sports and other pastimes are excellent subjects to consider. You can place articles in the many magazines that are devoted exclusively to these subjects if you choose not to write a complete book.

Whether you are twenty-some, a baby boomer or a senior, your life has been filled with endless numbers of interesting events and contacts that can provide excellent starting points for writing either fiction or nonfiction. You've visited unique locations, met unusual characters, attended fascinating events...all of these are there for the calling. Summon up those memories, and get your computer's keyboard chattering away.

Idea Resources

There are many helpful resources to stimulate your mind, and assist you to zero in on the best choice. Considered the freelancer's bible by many, *Writer's Digest* is an 1175-page compendium, revised annually, that lists 50 categories of consumer magazines and 60 types of trade journals. Whether you are planning an article or a book, it is an invaluable tool to trigger ideas as you range through subjects from Animal Lovers to Women's Periodicals in the consumer section and from Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations to Veterinary Medicine in the trades.

A number of other helpful directories are available in your library's reference room, and of course, browsing subjects on the Internet's major search engines offers you an overwhelming selection of ideas.

So toss aside the excuses and roll up your sleeves for several hours of concentrated research. Be sure to file away every idea that interests you for use now or in the future. There's a very strong likelihood that after your initial exposure to the wonderful world of writing, you'll be hooked, and want to do it again and again.