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WARMING UP: TEN EXERCISES FOR FICTION WRITERS

By Dr. Erika Dreifus

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Would you expect to wake up one morning and successfully run a marathon without any preparation? Would you think it reasonable to sit before a piano and—with little or no practice—play a concerto? Probably not. Why, then, do so many people seem surprised to discover that the will to write isn't always enough to overcome the blank screen or page? Doesn't it make sense that, like athletes and musicians, writers might benefit from training, too? And that includes warming up—with exercises.

Writing exercises are similar to other warm-ups. They get the required "muscles" moving. They introduce you into the rhythm of the activity—gradually. And as in other fields, they can often prove energizing and sustaining themselves. Start writing a scene for an exercise and you may find hours have passed and an entire new section of your manuscript has evolved.

Such exercises and prompts can be especially helpful at the beginning of a project. Let's say you're just starting to sketch out the characters for a story or a novel. But today you find yourself staring at a screen or pad of paper that is stubbornly, resolutely blank. Responding to one of the following questions will not only get you actively writing, but it may also help you learn something new about your character(s).

1. What is this character's name? "Joe" won't do. We need to know if it's Mr. Joe or Dr. Joe or Reverend Joe. If Joe is the full first name. What's Joe's middle name. His last name. Any stories/history behind his name.
2. Where and when did the character begin elementary school? Describe that first day.
3. Make lists of the character's "favorites": books, movies, foods, etc. Be specific.
4. What does the character do on a typical Wednesday? A Sunday? Provide a sample datebook entry if you wish (or if the character would keep a datebook!).
5. Who is the love of this character's life?
6. Have someone else propose a toast in this character's honor.
7. What languages does the character speak, read, or write? Write a scene in which s/he overhears a conversation in an unfamiliar language.
8. Describe an illness the character (or someone close to the character) has suffered.

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9. How would this character spend an ideal vacation? (Perhaps sketch out an itinerary.)
10. What one question is this character most afraid of being asked—and how would s/he answer it?

Even if the particular scenes or details that first emerge don't seem relevant or don't survive into the story or novel manuscript, you won't have misspent your time. Such information deepens your knowledge of your character(s), which can lead to richer writing later on. And you've been writing, rather than confronting that empty screen or page. Warm-ups work in multiple ways for writers, too.

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Dr. Erika Dreifus is a writer and writing instructor in Massachusetts. She edits the free monthly newsletter, "The Practicing Writer," and is the author of "The Practicing Writer's Primer on Low-Residency MFA Programs" and "The Practicing Writer's Directory of Paying Short Story Markets." Visit her website at <http://www.practicing-writer.com> .

Reasons Why Interactive Fiction In Games Has Grown

By Joe Goertz

Back in the days, the games came with only very basic writing to get the user by until the game play had started but today's gamer requires so much more from their games that they choose. This is where the interactive fiction genre has come into play. For many, this has been the best there is in excitement and thrills for their time in the games.

The ride that this kind of writing is able to produce makes certain that the player has a much better time in respect to the other games that are operating on the same premise. The players enjoy a large amount of control over the outcome of the game and also how the story will play out. This means that so much is in the hands of the player that will give them the power over the whole game and maybe make the whole experience a bit more exciting.

Interactive fiction is just like the name sounds. It is fiction that has more than one ending and can change throughout the course of the story. This is a highly popular genre these days and is a small throwback to the early days when the paperback companies were making books that had several endings to please the reader dependent upon which way the reader chose to go. This was a popular model for writing back then but the genre faded for a while until the fantasy role playing games came into existence. With the introduction of these games the genre was resurrected so to speak.

The need for fiction that could bend and move with the player became high and the demand started to far outweigh the supply. Writers the world over scrambled to make it to the market before the bottom fell out, but the end has yet to come. Publishers of books and games alike are actively seeking writers who can create stories and full books in the interactive format. The topics are vast and the writer is more than free to create as long as it will fit into the format that is set.

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Interactive fiction has grown into a huge market and is making a splash with a lot of the game companies. Many of the video games are now being bulked with this form of writing to give the player more control. This has become highly popular with the younger generation of players who like to know that the game will change each time they sit down to play. The real trick is to keep the player interested and if you can manage that then you have an instant hit on your hands.

These days, the games almost have to have the interactive fiction installed to go anywhere in the market. This is even true of the many sports games that are now being released. The games work follows the life of the player and the character with the story making it more interesting to keep playing even though the player has won the game overall.

Read more from Joe Goertz at:



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