

CREATIVE
WRITING
FOR TEENS

CARRIE DAWS

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

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LESSON 1: WHY WRITE FICTION?

Once upon a time, there lived a great truth-teller.

He knew story could reveal deep truths, truths people often did not want to look at for themselves. So He chose to put those truths into tales, which not only got the people listening but also remembering.

His name? Jesus.

If you look closely at the parables of the Bible, you'll see that Jesus rarely mentions God or the Temple. His stories are filled with ordinary people going on about their ordinary lives.

And so, Jesus's listeners paused to hear Him; they stopped to enjoy His stories. It was only after the truth was in their heads that they realized what they'd just experienced was more than they previously thought.

That's why we write fiction!

Nonfiction relates through logic. It involves the brain and invites the reader to follow a path of argument or assumptions.

Fiction invites the reader to involve their heart, their emotions.

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And when the reader accepts the invitation, picks up a novel, and begins to read, the writer has an opportunity to speak truth and to change the reader's heart.

Perhaps the question shouldn't be, "Why write fiction?" Perhaps it should be, "Why *not* write fiction?"

PICK UP A BOOK

Every time someone picks up a book, there's an unspoken agreement between the reader and the writer.

The reader wants to be entertained, to enjoy a good story, to live in a different place, or explore a different time. They want to escape their own life and experience someone else's.

The writer wants the reader to read all the way to the end of the story,

- to pay attention to the scenes and the characters,
- and to be immersed within the story.

The writer is the one with the most to lose.

If the reader's not happy, he just puts down one book and picks up another.

But, if the writer's book is put down, not only will that story not get read, but future books by this author

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likely won't get picked up. HAVE OTHER BOOKS ON DISPLAY.

If a reader is disappointed, he rarely just gives up on that single book; he frequently gives up on the author.

All the pressure is on the writer.

To win the reader over, the writer must think about the reader. The reader is the most important person for whom the author writes.

Writers CANNOT write for themselves. They MUST write for the reader.

Consider the answers to these questions:

What is the title of the last book you read by your own choice?

How long ago did you finish that book?

What kind of books (genre) do you most like to read? (e.g., classic, historical, adventure, fantasy, mystery, humor, mythology, realistic, etc.)

How often do you read a book outside of your favorite genre?

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Let's look at some books. I'm going to read the first page or two and then ask you some questions. Ready?

READ 1-2 pages from:

Classic: *Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson

Adventure: *Black* by Ted Dekker

Fantasy: *The Book of the King* by Jerry Jenkins and
Chris Fabry

1. Would you consider reading more of this book?
2. What is it you like best about the portion of the story you read?
3. Is there anything you didn't like? What is it?
4. Do you know when and where the story starts out?
5. How many characters have been introduced? Do you think you'd like any of these people if they were real?

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WEEK 1: YOUR ASSIGNMENT

This week, write a story. The story can be any genre you like and can be as realistic or fantastical as you prefer. Don't worry about how good it is or what might be missing—we'll work on that in the coming weeks. For this week, just write.

Here are the rules I want you to follow:

1. It must be at least 2-handwritten pages OR 1-typed page long. Longer is fine. If you've already written a story, you may pull one scene from that story to work on, but it still must be at least 2-handwritten OR 1-typed page long.
2. You should **ONLY** write on every other line, or set your computer Line Spacing to 2.0. You'll use these spaces in the lessons to come.
3. If you are writing, follow the red guidelines on **BOTH** the left and right sides of your paper. If you are typing, your margins should be set to 1.0" all the way around. You'll use these spaces in the lessons to come.

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4. Here's the rule that's easiest for the students and toughest on your parents, but it's important: **neatness does NOT count.**

Students—you have to be able to read your writing!

But parents—the goal this week is simply for your student to write. Do not consider neatness, grammar, or spelling.

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LESSON 2: CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Author and Publisher William Sloane said, “People are not the principal subject of fiction; they are its only subject. ... There is no such entity as a piece of fiction that is devoid of human beings or personifications; by the nature of ourselves and our lives there cannot be any such fiction. People *are* the story and the whole story.”

The Craft of Writing by William Sloane, pages 85-86

If fiction is to work, no matter how short or long your story is, you must have characters that are

- believable,
- in conflict,
- doing something,
- and growing from it.

Most authors put something of themselves in the characters they create. So we’re going to start by looking closer at ourselves.

I’ve got some questions and I want y’all to answer them. Ready?

1. What is your full name? How do you feel about your name?
2. What do you look like (i.e., height, weight, age, hair color, eye color, skin color)? Do you have a

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lot of physical characteristics of a particular culture? How do you feel about how you look?

3. Do you have any disabilities or medical issues? What is your general temperament (i.e., most often happy, sad, indifferent, angry, etc.)?
4. Are you a member of a particular faith or religion? Do you regularly go to services associated with that faith or read its foundational book(s)?
5. Do you volunteer outside of your home? What would you like to do if you could? Do you like to be around a lot people, with just a few, or be alone?
6. Where do you live (small town, big city, country, etc.)? Do you like living there? Would you rather live someplace else? When you have the choice, do you prefer to be outside or inside?
7. What talents or hobbies do you have? Is there anything you like to do that you aren't really good at, or something you are good at that you don't really like to do? What do you dream of one day doing?
8. Who do you live with? Do you visit family regularly? Do they live nearby or far away? What kind of place do you live in and car does your family drive? What kind of home and car

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would you like if money didn't limit your choices?

9. How much education do you have? Do your parents hold any degrees or certifications? Is college normal for your family, or rare? Are there any extra curricular activities that tend to "run in the family" like sports or politics?

NOW... let's think about the story of the 3 Little Pigs. Do you all remember that story?

1. Who are the Main Characters?
2. Think about their characteristics and personalities. Could these characters be real?
3. Let's focus on the third pig. What is his problem?
 - a. First, look externally, outside of the main character like an earthquake or a bully.
 - b. Now, look internally like wanting to be brave or not wanting to fight. Great characters will be fighting both themselves and something else.
4. What does he do? Great characters don't sit on the couch and whine about their problem. They make a choice and then act on it.

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5. So how is he different at the end of the story?

Think back to the questions we talked about in the beginning. You should answer many of those questions for your main character(s), and several of them for secondary characters.

In other words, the more important a character is to the story, the more of those questions you should be able to answer for them.

Some details you will hint at within the story but others will simply make you more comfortable knowing your character and deciding what they would actually do in the scenario you've set before them.

For example, in my story *Crossing Values*, the main female character HATED her name. She went by her middle name because she didn't even want people to figure out what her full name—and therefore her initials—were. That was a discussion she and the male leading character had in the story.

However, the fact that she hated being cold and loved being warm, I just gently put into the story by having her sit beside the fireplace as often as it was lit and she was in the room with it. Make sense?

When developing your characters, it's important to take the time to watch and listen to people. What kind of mannerisms do they have? How do they sit or

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stand? Listen to their speech patterns—almost no one talks in complete sentences all of the time.

Notice physical differences. Some people have one leg that is a little shorter, or they walk very fast.

Maybe they get stress headaches and are constantly stretching their neck or rubbing their eyes.

These little things put into a story brings a person to life and makes them relatable—turns them into someone that the reader wants to know more about.

One important thing to keep in mind: characters should be consistent.

For example, if someone tends to be fun and happy, only a great problem in their world will change this—and typically they will soon seek out the bright side of things and be fun and happy again.

Happy people do not stay sad. Grumpy people do not stay happy. Angry people do not stay patient. Be consistent.

NOW: FOUR COMMON PROBLEMS:

1. Every character is the same, and usually a lot like you.

It's normal for a piece of you to be in every character; it's not good writing for every character to be a lot like you.

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This is the principal of NY (en-ya)—Not You.

Every character cannot be you, and at least one character needs to be very different from you.

2. Every character is perfect. This is why we spent so much time thinking about ourselves. Every person has quirks, flaws, dreams, fears, and obstacles.

Make sure you give every major character some of these things in the story.

Make sure you give every minor character a couple of these.

Your hero could walk with a limp or the secretary could listen in on phone calls. Your quiet person could dream of saving the city when they can't even stand up to an overbearing co-worker.

3. Don't plan out the entire story and be resolutely stuck on the ending.

Constantly ask yourself, "What would this character do in this situation?"

The better you know your character, the easier it is to answer this question. This is what writers mean when they say the characters took over the story.

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4. Don't forget an occasional surprise!

A novel with no surprises has a greater chance of being put down.

Keep the characters within their character traits, but sometimes let them choose the opposite of what they would normally decide to do.

Let the guy who always rescues his lonely friend decide he's going to stay home tonight. Let the girl who always takes the bus to work suddenly decide to take a taxi.

Do something different then let your imagination guide you to the unexpected.

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WEEK 2: YOUR ASSIGNMENT

If you've been working on the computer up to this point, print your story out.

Read your story out loud. Yes, this seems silly, and yes, you may feel awkward, but you do not need an audience. Go into a room and close the door if you want to, but read out loud. Your ears tend to catch things that your eyes miss.

Grab your favorite colored pen to mark and fix what you hear and see (this is why you skipped lines and left margins).

As you read, add in more details for each character in your story using what you've learned and thought about. Make sure when the person is first mentioned you give us something to "see"—this can be a physical (like height or eye color) or something characteristic (like they are clumsy or frequently clear their throat).

Also, be on the lookout for these four common problems in character development:

1. Every character is the same, and usually a lot like you. It's normal for a piece of you to be in every character; it's not good writing for every character to be a lot like you. This is the principal of NY (en-ya)—Not You. Every character cannot be you, and at least one character needs to be very different from you.

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2. Every character is perfect. This is why we spent so much time thinking about ourselves. Every person has quirks, flaws, dreams, fears, and obstacles. Make sure you give every major character some of these things in the story. Make sure you give every minor character a couple of these. Your hero could walk with a limp or the secretary could listen in on phone calls. Your quiet person could dream of saving the city when they can't even stand up to an overbearing co-worker.
3. Don't plan out the entire story and be resolutely stuck on the ending. Constantly ask yourself, "What would this character do in this situation?" The better you know your character, the easier it is to answer this question. This is what writers mean when they say the characters took over the story.
4. Don't forget an occasional surprise! A novel with no surprises has a greater chance of being put down. Keep the characters within their character traits, but sometimes let them choose the opposite of what they would normally decide to do. Let the guy who always rescues his lonely friend decide he's going to stay home tonight. Let the girl who always takes the bus to work suddenly decide to take a taxi. Do something different then let your imagination guide you to the unexpected.

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IF YOU WANT TO GO FARTHER...

Think about a book you've read. Any book will do, but the more simplistic (written for younger children) it is, the harder this will be.

1. Who is the Main Character?
2. Think about their characteristics, personality, and moral preferences. Could this character be real? (If you are dealing with a character from fantasy or science fiction, ignore for the moment that their species doesn't exist or that human characteristics were applied to animals or other objects.)
3. What is the character's problem? See if you can find two dilemmas: one external problem like an earthquake or a bully, and one internal problem like wanting to be brave or not wanting to fight. Great characters will be fighting both themselves and something else.
4. What does the character do? Great characters don't sit on the couch and whine about their problem. They make a choice and then act on it.
5. What about the character changes by the end of the story? Do they find courage to face the bad guy? Do they realize they aren't as weak as they once thought? Perhaps they find more patience for a younger sibling, or discover that

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standing up for friends is worth the cost of facing a bully.

This week as you are around other people, watch them. Listen to how they talk, watch the way they walk, notice what they pay attention to as they go about their life.

GOING DEEPER: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

If you want to know more about character development, check out these resources:

Creating Unforgettable Characters by Linda Seger

The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Expression by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi

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LESSON 3: SCENE DEVELOPMENT

The Christian Writer's Guild said in its once offered Apprentice Course, "Much of the delight of fiction rests in its scenes. Two things your readers are most likely to remember from your novel or short story are your characters and any particularly rich, intense, or satisfying scenes."

Writing in Scenes (Part 1)

So, what is a scene? William Sloane's definition in *The Craft of Writing* is this: "a unit of event which has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and it contains nothing except characters in action."

Scenes are much more than just the location something happens. It is also the time (of day, of year), the characters involved, and all the people and things around them.

Stop and look around you right now. Let's answer these questions:

1. Where are you? Think about more than just being at a table in a church modular. Are you sitting up straight or lounging in a more relaxed position? Are you in a room alone, or with several others? What items are around you that you might interact with: a computer, a pencil, a light? What major pieces of furniture are nearby?

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2. Close your eyes. What do you hear? A clock ticking? Children playing? A vacuum cleaner? Now focus on sounds outside. Is a bird chirping? A car driving down the street? What else do you hear?
3. With your eyes closed again, think about what you feel. What are you sitting on or touching? Is it soft or hard? What is your skin picking up on? Are you feeling a breeze or are you sweating?
4. With your eyes still closed, focus on smells. Are air fresheners in your room, or is someone cooking or baking? Maybe a window is open and you can smell flowers or someone grilling.
5. Taste can be hard to incorporate into scenes, but let's practice it anyway. Are you currently eating something, or do the smells around you make you want to eat—or not eat? Maybe you just finished lunch and a taste lingers on your tongue? What would you eat right now if you could? Remember its taste and how it makes you feel when you know you will soon get to eat it.
6. Finally, think about your emotions. Are you happy, content, sad, or frustrated? What emotions have you felt in the last hour, and what do you do or look like when you feel these emotions. (For example, angry people may slam a door or a sad person might sigh and walk hunched over.)

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Let's take a look at a couple of passages. First, from Chapter 1 of *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens:

Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first distinct impression of the identity of things seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw, damp afternoon toward evening. At such time I found out for certain that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the church-yard; and that Tobias Pirrip, late of this Parish, and also Georgiana, wife of the above, were dead and buried . . .

What do you find out in these three sentences?

Look for physical things you could see, as well as anything you might hear, feel, smell, or taste. Can you picture it? Is this a place you think this character wants to be?

Now let's look at a different place, from chapter 1 of the book *Dragonspell* by Donita K. Paul:

Climbing the sharp incline on her hands and knees now, Kale grabbed branches and jagged rocks to hoist herself up. She topped the embankment and rolled over the edge.

Guttural shouts greeted her arrival. Rough, hairy hands grabbed her arms

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and legs. A putrid smell filled her nose, and her mouth watered in revulsion. Her stomach lurched. Grawligs?

Kale had heard tales told in the tavern. Nothing smelled as bad as the mountain ogres. She saw dark hairy legs, a leather loincloth, tattered cloth hanging over a barrel chest, fat lips, yellowed teeth, a grossly flabby nose and tiny eyes, solidly black. Grawligs!

Again, what do you find out in these sentences?

Is this a place you think the character wants to be?
Would you go visit the grawligs if you had a choice?

Look at your story. Think about where it takes place, taking time to picture it in your mind. Make notes about sights and sounds and smells. If you haven't already, pick a time of day and a time of year. Use your margins and skipped lines to add in these details where you want them to go.

In the first paragraph or two, readers like to know three things:

1. Who is telling the story, or through whose eyes are we looking at the scene?
2. Where are the characters? This could be specific like 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC, or general like the French countryside.

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3. When is the story happening? Again, this could be specific like 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 24th, or general like the middle of summer.

Now think about the emotions flowing through your characters. What actions or body language can you add to the story to convey these emotions? Some ideas are:

Happiness—singing or humming, smiling, skipping instead of walking

Sadness—walking slowly, ignoring things like the phone ringing, tears

Anger—yelling, slamming doors, punching or throwing things

Fear—chewing on fingernails or bottom lip, hiding, startles at noises

Embarrassment—clearing throat, speechless, ears turning red

Surprise—gasping, grabbing a friend's arm, mouth falling open

Read through your story looking for these common problems.

1. Make sure each scene is told from only one character's viewpoint. Otherwise, your reader might get confused about what's going on.
2. Show me; don't tell me. Most readers do not want to be told things. They want to get pulled into the story to experience it for themselves.

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It's much easier to say, "She was angry!", but that's also a good way to bore your readers. Instead, find ways to *show* the emotions.

3. Resist the urge to explain. Don't show me a character who throws a vase across the room while screaming and then tell me she's angry.

Assume your reader is at least as smart as you are and that they can figure out the emotion.

4. Resist the urge to repeat. Sometimes an author will put a detail into one scene, and then a little later repeat that same information.

Or an author will have two characters having a conversation, and then have one of those two will go tell a third character what was just said.

Resist this tendency! Remember: assume your readers are smart and they will remember what you've told them.

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WEEK 3: YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Look at your story. Think about where it takes place, taking time to picture it in your mind. Make notes about sights and sounds and smells. If you haven't already, pick a time of day and a time of year. Use your margins and skipped lines to add in these details where you want them to go.

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Read through your story looking for these common problems.

1. Make sure each scene is told from only one character’s viewpoint. Otherwise, your reader might get confused about what’s going on.
2. Show me; don’t tell me. Most readers do not want to be told things. They want to get pulled into the story to experience it for themselves. It’s much easier to say, “She was angry!”, but that’s also a good way to bore your readers. Instead, find ways to *show* the emotions.
3. Resist the urge to explain. Don’t show me a character who throws a vase across the room while screaming and then tell me she’s angry. Assume your reader is at least as smart as you are and that they can figure out the emotion.
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will go tell a third character what was just said. Resist this tendency! Remember: assume your readers are smart and they will remember what you've told them.

IF YOU WANT TO GO FARTHER...

Practice using your senses. Sit still in a room and answer the following questions.

1. Where are you? Think about more than just being at a table in a church modular. Are you sitting up straight or lounging in a more relaxed position? Are you in a room alone, or with several others? What items are around you that you might interact with: a computer, a pencil, a light? What major pieces of furniture are nearby?
2. Close your eyes. What do you hear? A clock ticking? Children playing? A vacuum cleaner? Now focus on sounds outside. Is a bird chirping? A car driving down the street? What else do you hear?
3. With your eyes closed again, think about what you feel. What are you sitting on or touching? Is it soft or hard? What is your skin picking up on? Are you feeling a breeze or are you sweating?
4. With your eyes still closed, focus on smells. Are air fresheners in your room, or is someone

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cooking or baking? Maybe a window is open and you can smell flowers or someone grilling.

5. Taste can be hard to incorporate into scenes, but let's practice it anyway. Are you currently eating something, or do the smells around you make you want to eat—or not eat? Maybe you just finished lunch and a taste lingers on your tongue? What would you eat right now if you could? Remember it's taste and how it makes you feel when you know you will soon get to eat it.
6. Finally, think about your emotions. Are you happy, content, sad, or frustrated? What emotions have you felt in the last hour, and what do you do or look like when you feel these emotions. (For example, angry people may slam a door or a sad person might sigh and walk hunched over.)

GOING DEEPER: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Expression by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi

Story Engineering: Mastering the 6 Core Competencies of Successful Writing by Larry Brooks

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LESSON 4: WRITING DIALOGUE

“Dialogue is action. It is an integral part of scene and an important means of revealing character. ... Dialogue must keep moving forward.”

The Art and Craft of Novel Writing by Oakley Hall

“Fiction in its purest form consists of one scene after another, with nothing between. So if scenes contain nothing but characters in action, dialogue will form a significant percentage of what you write.”

The Craft of Writing by William Sloane

In order to write well, you have to know the rules of grammar.

I know some of you are groaning. It’s okay. I don’t really like it either! But, it’s part of writing a great story. If it helps any, we’re not actually going to do any grammar practice.

BUT a good author knows his weaknesses and works to improve his skills—even with grammar. So you need to consider where you are weak.

Do you know the rules for capitalization? Do you know when to use a comma, a semi-colon, and a colon? What about hyphens or ellipses?

Make a copy of the rules for the punctuation you have the most trouble with and keep it close to you when you write.

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Some words also cause confusion. They may be similar in spelling or close in meaning, but they are not interchangeable.

Common word mistakes include *lay* and *lie*, *sit* and *set*, *who* and *whom*, *affect* and *effect*. Identify any words you have trouble with and see if you can learn the differences. When you write, keep a sheet near you with your trouble words listed and how they should be properly used.

From time-to-time, grammar rules change. As a student, you need to learn what your English textbook says so you can pass tests including the CAT/5, ACT, and SAT. Those tests simply cannot keep up with the ever-changing standards, and to score well, you need to give them the answers your textbook has taught you.

But, as a writer, you need to know what the current standards are so you can apply them to your stories. The guideline for book writers is the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS).

Currently in its 16th edition, it updates roughly every 10 years, give-or-take two or three years. The book is about 1,000 pages a little pricey, and full access to the website (chicagomanualofstyle.org) requires an annual subscription, but in the online Help section, you can find a summary of the major changes of the latest update. (The 16th Edition came out in 2010.)

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You might be wondering why they make changes. Great question! Here are some of the reasons for updates:

1. People are always creating new words and technologies. When the iPhone and iPad became popular, writers needed to know how to capitalize them if one of these words started a sentence or was part of a title.
2. People are always changing or adding to the meanings of words, which might require a change in capitalization or punctuation rules. For example, with the advent of mobile phones, “text” went from being only a noun, to being a noun and a verb.
3. When the US Post Office standardized abbreviations for all 50 states to two capitals letters without periods (i.e., MT for Montana), the CMOS changed their rules to make this acceptable in manuscripts as well. They also recently included a preference for the abbreviation for the United States to be written US instead of U.S.

Besides these common sense reasons, they make other changes that often leave people bewildered.

For example, when a color word appears before a noun (like blue shirt), this forms what is called a compound adjective.

The current standards in the CMOS say it should be hyphenated like this: blue-shirt.

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Don't be surprised if that changes again in the next edition.

If you have a library, see if it has a copy of any edition of the CMOS. Browse through it, looking for one or two rules that you've been doing differently.

NOTE: Journalists and newspaper writers may not utilize the CMOS. American newspapers tend to be governed by the Associated Press Stylebook, which differs in many areas from the CMOS.

And online publications may use the Yahoo Style Guide or other such manual created specifically for web users.

Additionally, many countries have their own guides, which you may need to be familiar with if you ever write for an international audience.

And most publishers also have their own manual of style. If you are going to try to be published one day by a traditional publisher, the manual goes in order of priority like this:

1. Niche specific styles
2. Publisher MOS
3. CMOS (last updated 2010, except where the dictionary is newer)
4. Merriam-Webster Dictionary
5. Christian Writer's MOS (for things directly related to religious content)
6. Elements of Style (last updated 2014)

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One of the best ways to learn dialogue is to pick apart another author's writing. So, I'm going to give you four examples and point out the weaknesses. Then you make it better. Ready?

1. *"You want me to meet you at 3a.m. in the morning?" he chuckled.*

This sentence shows two common problems: redundancy and improbability. First, *3:00 a.m. in the morning* is redundant. The abbreviation *a.m.* tells us it's *in the morning*, so unless you have a character that routinely repeats himself, you should delete one or the other. A couple other common redundancies are:

He shrugged his shoulders. (What else would you shrug?)

He nodded his head. (What else would you nod?)

Second, have you ever tried to talk while chuckling? Someone may say something and then chuckle, or vice versa. But these two things do not happen at the same time.

Yes, I know high school writing classes teach you to be creative in the tags you use after sentences, but modern editors merely want "he said" or "she said".

You can always add another sentence telling us he chuckled as he shook his head, but don't use it as your tag.

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- 2. The phone on the countertop in the kitchen rang shrilly. I looked at it a moment before deciding I would get up to answer it. I placed my bookmark in my book before shutting it and putting it on the end table beside me. I stood and walked across the room to the counter. Picking up the receiver, I said, "Hello?"*

This is very detailed, and in most situations considerably more than we need to know. Think about it this way: if a phone rings and my character answers it, then he obviously stopped what he was doing and crossed the room.

Unless crossing that room is critical to your plot, it's unnecessary to say. Remember: assume your reader is smart enough to figure those things out.

- 3. "Hello, Mary," said John.
"Hello, John," said Mary.
"How are you?" said John.
"I am fine, thank you. How are you?" said Mary.
"I am fine. Nice weather we are having today," said John.
"Yes. The sun seems particularly warm," said Mary.
"Have you had a chance to read the newspaper?" said John.*

This has a couple problems going on. First, it's B-O-R-I-N-G! Yes, people really do greet each other and habitually ask how each is doing.

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

But, when you write dialogue for a book—skip the small talk. Unless the small talk is critical to your story (i.e., two people who know each other very well are trying to waste time while they wait for a ransom call), delete it. Your readers will be glad you did.

Second, it has a lot of tags. Particularly when you only have two people talking, you can delete most of the “he said” and “she said”. Start out by identifying who’s talking, and assume your readers are smart enough to follow your pattern.

If the dialogue goes on for awhile, or if a third person enters the scene, then you may need to give your reader more clues as to who is talking.

But get creative by adding actions. You could do something like this:

Mary shielded her eyes from the sun as she looked up to see who was speaking to her. “Oh, hello, John.”

4. *“Sam, I would like you to go clean your room before going out to play.”*
“Yes, Mother, but may I go tell Philip that I will be delayed about one hour?”
“Certainly you may go do that. Thank you for asking me first.”
“You’re welcome, Mother.”

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Would you talk like that? Would any of your friends or friends' mothers? No. This is not modern American speech, so it shouldn't be written for an American audience.

This is where writers must find a strange balance. On the one hand, we must know proper grammar so we can use it; however, as the author, we are allowed to bend, or even break, the rules—when we have a good reason.

Also, if you listen to some of the conversations that happen around you, almost no one actually speaks in full, coherent sentences.

And if authors wrote dialogue the way most people speak, it would be very difficult to read and understand.

So, we must compromise. We must write how people *think* they sound.

Write most dialogue in complete sentences, but occasionally add in a fragment or interruption.

As you look at the dialogue in your story (or to adding dialogue to your story), keep these things in mind.

1. Dialogue should give the reader more information than he had before. It must move the story forward.
2. It should not include any small talk or repeat anything the reader already knows.

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3. It should give the reader an indication of the relationship between the characters—do they like or even know one another?
4. Each character should sound like the character you created them to be and not like every other character in your story. Do they have little education? Then they will probably speak with a lot of slang and won't use any big words. Look back at the lessons on Character Development if you need help.

This week, you need to take your story and read it aloud. Again, you do not need an audience and you may go in a closed room by yourself if you want. Reading your story out loud is very helpful when it comes to dialogue.

Here are a couple additional guidelines to keep in mind as you read:

1. What is *not said* is as important as what *is said*. Keeping the reader moving through your story is often as simple as giving them enough to know something is about to happen, but not spelling it out for them.

For example, think about two main characters who are angry at each other. They could be glaring at each other across the dinner table or going out of their way to ignore each other without either one ever saying, "I'm angry with you."

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2. Don't let one character talk for more than three sentences. Or, if you do, break it up with an action like the wind blowing their hair into their face, another character rolling their eyes, or a waitress bringing more water to the table. Something so the reader's mind doesn't drift out of the story.

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WEEK 4: YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Which grammar rules cause you the most problems? Rules for capitalization? Commas? Hyphens? Look them up and write down or print out a list to help you.

Which words do you commonly get mixed up? Lie and lay? Effect and affect? Sit and set? Others? Write them down along with the rules for properly using them.

This week, you need to take your story and read it aloud. Again, you do not need an audience and you may go in a closed room by yourself if you want. Reading your story out loud is very helpful when it comes to dialogue.

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Check for these common problems:

1. Redundancies: Carefully look for places you repeat what you've already said.
2. Tags all say "said".
3. Delete boring, unnecessary parts of all conversations.
4. Write like people speak—but in complete sentences. Add in at least one fragment or interruption.

IF YOU WANT TO GO FARTHER...

If you can go to the library, see if it has a copy of the Chicago Manual of Style. Browse through the pages to find five rules you didn't know.

Focus on conversations going on around you. Make notes of what you hear. Consider these questions:

1. What words are they using? Do they use a lot of slang or contractions? Does anyone use words you don't know the meaning of?
2. How many speak in complete sentences?

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3. How many people tend to interrupt others? And how many will let someone finish what they were saying before speaking?
4. Does everyone spend about the same amount of time speaking? Or can you identify some who dominate conversations and others who say very little?
5. How many move their hands a lot while they speak? How many do you notice stand very still, and how many others move around?
6. How common is it for people in conversation to look each other in the eye for the entire dialogue?
7. What else caught your attention?

GOING DEEPER: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The Everyday Writer: A Brief Reference by Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors

Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation by Lynne Truss

The First Five Pages: A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile by Noah Lukeman

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LESSON 5: FICTION GUIDELINES

“There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.”

William Somerset Maugham

Some people new to writing fiction want to know the rules. What exactly do publishers want to see? How can I be sure I will make it into print?

The truth is this: there are no guarantees or rules. Readers are fickle and difficult to predict, even for publishing houses that have been printing books for 100 years.

But you can keep several things in mind that will improve your chances.

1. READ

It’s been said that good writers are good readers, and great writers are great readers.

Many authors write because they love to read. They love books. They value story.

This is beneficial in at least two ways. First, some things in writing can only be learned by reading. As you see great technique repeatedly in book after book, it becomes a part of how you think, and thereby how you write.

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What do you like to read? You may find that it is similar to what you like to write. If so, you are not alone.

Most authors write what they like to read themselves, which leads to the second advantage to reading.

By reading some of the most popular fiction and top-selling authors within your favorite genre, you'll begin to pick up on the types of stories readers currently want to buy.

So I challenge you: read. Keep a list of the books you read this year, and maybe challenge yourself to read more next year.

Join (or create) a book club that will have you reading books outside of what you would normally choose; variety is good!

2. GRAMMAR & VOCABULARY

Last week we talked about learning the rules of grammar. This is important for many reasons, but it's also critical to keep in mind that the rules you will learn in high school or college English are not necessarily the ones you need to know for fiction writing.

Remember: rules change and it is the writer's job to keep up with the rules.

In addition to grammar, expanding your vocabulary needs to be a priority!

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I know! This is one of my least favorite exercises because it can feel useless. What is the point of learning a new word that no one uses, particularly since it's so hard to remember it in the rare moment that you can utter it? I get it.

But, if you work consistently on this, over time, some of those words really will sink into your brain and sneak into your writing.

3. WRITING & THE BUSINESS OF WRITING

Finally, fiction writing can be divided into about seven sub-sections:

- plot,
- structure,
- scenes,
- characters,
- dialogue,
- voice,
- and themes

Many of these we've covered in this course and some I skipped. However, if you are going to write fiction with a mind toward publishing, you need to understand all of these.

And if you think you want to write fiction as a career, then you need to be learning about the business side of writing, which includes, contracts, taxes, marketing, social media, websites, and much more.

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One easy way to get consistent doses of learning the craft of writing can come from blog posts and magazine articles written by experts in the field.

Many writers take the time to pour what they've learned, often the hard way, into other writers simply because they love writing and reading that much.

So if you want to get serious about writing, check out some great blogs about writing. Find one of two that you like, and, with your parent's permission, sign up to receive their blog posts or newsletter via email, or follow them on social media.

COMMON WEAK AREAS

This week we are going to work on some of the common weak areas in writing.

1. Common words. This is why you need to work on your vocabulary. Common words make our writing average. Or sometimes even boring. Powerful words up the excitement or the tension. They draw the reader into the story.

For example: critical instead of important, or downcast instead of sad.

How else could we say, "He sat."?

2. Lazy verbs are similar to common words. They just sit there like a lazy dog lying in the sunshine.

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What's something more exciting than, "She walked down the sidewalk."?

3. Negative words can give your story a sad or depressed feeling, and many readers won't want to sit through 200 or 300 pages of that.

Sometimes a negative word makes more sense or is necessary, but it's easy to fall into the habit of using a lot of them. Try to rewrite negative words into positive ones and see if it improves the story.

How else can we write, "He was a naughty child."

4. Find vague words and replace them with better descriptors. Vague words don't tell the reader much and can distance them from the story, so you want to look for them and be more exact. Whenever possible, be precise in your writing.

Examples of vague words include: many, few, frequently, rarely, and thing

There is a general rule in writing that you only tell the reader what the person telling the story would know. BUT if you mention an animal or something else that you can identify more clearly—you should, even if this knowledge is outside of the POV character's knowledge.

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For example, say your character walks down the street and is confronted by a large dog. Tell us what kind of dog this is, even if your character doesn't know.

5. **Passive voice.** Technically speaking, passive voice is when an object is doing its action to the subject of the sentence or paragraph.

This puts the reader comfortably on the couch watching the action instead of participating in the action. It puts distance between the reader and the story—and therefore is easier for the reader to put down your book! So, we must guard against passive voice.

Consider the difference between these two sentences:

Sally would have played the game if she could,
but she didn't know how to roller-skate.

Sally wanted to play the game, but she didn't
know how to roller-skate.

The first one just tells us information, but the second one draws us in, helps us to care about Sally.

One easy way to look for passive voice is to look for helping verbs, particularly outside of your dialogue. Sometimes you will legitimately use a helping verb, but often you can rewrite the sentence and make it better.

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6. Adverbs. Adverbs are another tricky area. They can fulfill important functions within a sentence, but frequently they are just extra words.

Casual writing, like blog posts or journal entries, will allow you more freedom in using adverbs, but book publishers are looking for “tight” writing—which means no extra words.

And that means you need to look through your story for adverbs and see how many can be eliminated.

Sometimes you can just delete the adverb and move on.

Sometimes you need to replace the adverb and verb with a stronger verb, like this:

Adverb with weak verb: The rabbit ran very quickly down the lane to catch up with the turtle.

New verb: The rabbit raced down the lane to catch up with the turtle.

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WEEK 5: YOUR ASSIGNMENT

This week, work on the common weak areas.

1. Find five common words you used and replace them with more powerful words. Thesaurus.com is a great help in this and I tend to keep it open when I write.

A good resource for common words is here:
<https://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/common-words.htm>

2. Identify five lazy verbs (like “be” verbs and common verbs found on the list above) and replace them with more powerful action words. (Again, use thesaurus.com to help you.)
3. Find negative words and see if your story sounds better if you rewrite them in positive ways.

A good resource for negative words is here:
<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/wordlist/negativewords.shtml>

4. Find vague words and replace them with better descriptors. Whenever possible, be precise in your writing.

Examples of vague words include: many, few, frequently, rarely, and thing

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5. Look for passive voice by locating all your helping verbs. As often as you can, delete the helping verb and change the verb to a stronger one.
6. See how many adverbs you can eliminate from your story.

The last thing you need to do is read your story out loud one more time. Listen as you read for words that don't sound quite right or phrases that are difficult to say. If you have trouble reading them, assume your reader will too.

When you are happy with every word, you are ready to make your final copy! If you've been working on a computer, you can simply print it out and turn it in, but if you wrote it by hand, it's time to make a fresh new copy without all your edits.

IF YOU WANT TO GO FARTHER...

Check out some of these blogs, or do a search for great blogs about writing. Find one of two that you like, and, with your parent's permission, sign up to receive their blog posts or newsletter via email, or follow them on social media.

Grammar Girl:

<http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl>

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Steve Laube Agency:

<http://www.stevelaube.com/blog/>

Wordserve Water Cooler:

<http://wordservewatercooler.com>

Alton Gansky:

<http://www.altongansky.typepad.com>

Jerry Jenkins:

<http://jerry-jenkins.com/category/blog/on-writing/>

The Write Life:

<http://thewritelife.com>

GOING DEEPER: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Self-Editing for Fiction Writers: How to Edit Yourself into Print by Renni Browne and Dave King

The First Five Pages: A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile by Noah Lukeman

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LESSON 6: GETTING PUBLISHED

“The fact that I’m a Christian has a total impact on what I am doing as an artist.”

“Brooks,” a singer/songwriter quoted in *Fearless Faith*
by John Fischer

As if writing isn’t hard enough, getting something into print adds a new dimension of difficulty. Authors who want to see their book published must make many decisions, only a few of which we’re going to cover this month.

One of the first things an author who wants to be published must decide is whether they are going to write for the Christian market or the secular market. This may sound like an easy decision, but it’s more difficult than most think.

In the secular market, pretty much anything goes. But, you’ll lose some Christian readers because they can’t trust the standards of some publishing houses.

The Christian market has guidelines, though, on what it finds acceptable reading. Some publishers are more picky than others, so finding the right publisher is always the key.

In general, if you want to write for the Christian market, some limits will be expected by both your publisher and your readers.

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Christian bookstore owners tend to operate as gatekeepers. They carefully screen all books before they consider offering them for sale. Even in the case of national chain Christian stores, many local branches also have readers that must approve books before they can grace the store shelves.

Think about things that wouldn't be appropriate within a church service, for example cussing. Christian publishers do not want any potentially offensive language in their books because many Christian readers do not want to read such language. Sounds simple, right?

What if you have a character that goes into an inner city, or a prison, or a public high school? Some amount of bad language is normal in those places, and writers who sanitize the language within the book will be blasted by readers for not writing accurately or for the story not being realistic.

But then again, think of all the people in today's world who cuss. If you cannot include any offensive language, must you then cross off all these people as potential characters in all your books forever? You can work to find creative ways around such limitations, but this is an aspect of the market that you must understand.

Another grey area is theological beliefs. Most Christian readers these days do not object as quickly to low morals and poor behavior within a character as long as it is clearly identified as sin and by the end of the story it is resolved within biblical guidelines.

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It is also important to know, though, that your personal beliefs will affect both Christian bookstore owner's and Christian book buyers' decision to purchase your books.

For example, an agency blog I follow recently reported that one very popular author announced one day that he believed that ultimately everyone will be in Heaven, regardless of whether or not they confessed Jesus as Lord. Christian bookstores across the country began refusing to sell his books, and Christian readers began refusing to buy them.

Once you've identified whether you are going to write for the Christian or secular market, then you have to decide what kind of publisher you want to find. You have a plethora of choices. I cannot cover them all as hybrids are popping up all over the place, but here are the basic categories:

TRADITIONAL PUBLISHERS:

These are typically the well-known publishers like Random House or Zondervan. For the most part, they only accept manuscripts from agents, they do not ask the author to pay for any part of the costs associated with getting the book published, and they pay the author an advance before the book is published and royalties afterwards. Most bookstores will accept the books without too much hassle.

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The Big 5 are:

1. Hachette Book Group—was owned by Time Warner until a French company acquired them (includes Faith Words, Little Brown & Company, Forever Yours Romance)
2. HarperCollins Publishers—US, publishing arm of NewsCorp which includes Fox News (includes about 50 imprints including Zondervan, Thomas Nelson, and all Harlequin lines including Love Inspired series)
3. Macmillan Publishers—This is their American name; their German name is Holtzbrinck Publishing Group. (includes NO Christian imprints, but a lot of commercial and school books)
4. Penguin Random House—now a British company, merged with German Random House in 2013. This is their American name; they are really Pearson/Bertelsmann. (includes Waterbrook/Multnomah, Doublday which is a lot of Catholic stuff, Penguin Praise which is a newer imprint)
5. Simon & Schuster—US, publishing arm of CBS Corporation (includes Free Press, Pocket Books, Scribner)

There are other somewhat major publishers that operate like the Big 5, but are family or independently owned.

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Baker Publishing Group—which owns Bethany House
Tyndale House Publishers
Harvest House

And some are owned by larger organizations, like

B&H Publishing is owned by Lifeway Christian Resources
Guideposts is a non profit organization
NavPress is owned by the Navigators
Moody Publishing is owned by The Moody Bible Institute

SMALL PRESS PUBLISHERS:

This is where the publishing world gets murky. Small press publishers used to be considered traditional publishers that output fewer books and gave small-to-no advances. Because they were smaller, they tended to be more willing to take risks on new authors or difficult-to-sell genres like poetry.

However, this is changing as publishers are fighting to remain competitive with the self-publishing industry. It's becoming more common for these small press publishers to look a bit like subsidy publishers, yet most bookstores will still accept books from these publishers without problem because they know some controls are still in place.

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SUBSIDY PUBLISHERS:

These publishers do not buy manuscripts like traditional publishers do. They simply work with the author to get the book into print.

The author pays for all the costs, but the publisher will add his own imprint and will help the author with editing, graphics, and distribution. Once the book is on the market, the publisher pays the author royalties, much like traditional publishers. Whether or not books are openly accepted by bookstores depends, in part, on the reputation of the publisher.

SELF-PUBLISHING:

This is another highly murky area in the publishing world. It includes everything from the person who writes, edits, designs and markets completely on their own, to the person who hires out much of this but maintains total control of the process.

Even some larger publishers are coming up with their own subsidy or self-publishing models, yet most of these books will still be rejected by traditional bookstores. Generally, royalties are paid directly from the bookstore to the author.

Overwhelmed? That's okay! Publishing is a tough world.

Finding the right publisher is all about the research. You not only need to find a publisher that is reputable

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and will do a good job to help you make your book its best, but you need to find one that actually publishes the genre you write.

Would you ask a car magazine if they are interested in an article about the migration of cardinals? Would you send an essay about the best paint colors for kitchens to Sports Illustrated? One of the quickest ways to irritate a publisher or acquisitions editor is to submit a book that doesn't fit with what they choose to publish.

One great way to get started in finding the right publisher for your book is to pick up a copy of the Christian Writers' Market Guide (or Writers' Market Guide if you choose to publish outside the Christian market). Updated annually, this book includes information from publishers around the US – from their mailing address to their advance and royalty payments to tips about what they are looking for. And it includes book, periodical, and specialty publishers, listed alphabetically and topically.

The problem is that the publishing industry is always changing, and the book begins to be out-of-date before it even hits store shelves. So, once you identify several publishers that may be interested in your book, you must continue to do your research by looking them up online. That is where you will find your most current information, including books or topics they are looking for and if the contact person has changed.

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QUERIES

Perhaps the two things even veteran authors struggle to write well are queries and proposals. They must be succinct yet full of all the best elements of your book because they sell the book to editors much like movie trailers sell a movie to you.

Some editors and publishers prefer to receive a query letter; others prefer to go straight to the proposal. This is one of the pieces of information you'll need to discover when you research publishers because queries and proposals are quite different.

The most basic goal of a query letter is to get the agent, editor, or publisher interested enough in your story to ask for more. So you want to spend a lot of time writing this, and edit it as well as you edited your story. And do your absolute best to keep this to one, type-written page with one-inch margins printed on plain paper.

Here are some guidelines for writing a great letter:

1. Always address it to a specific person unless the writing guidelines from the publisher tell you otherwise. This communicates immediately if you've done your research. And be sure to spell the person's name correctly! You may want to call the publisher and simply verify your information is correct.
2. Your opening paragraph should be the hook for your reader. The agent, editor, or publisher will

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not care to know anything about you until they care about your story.

3. Follow the hook with a brief synopsis of your book. This should read like the back cover description—full of words that will convince your reader that they must read this book. And all those lessons on reducing adverbs and such? They don't really apply to back cover descriptions.
4. Next, explain why you've chosen this particular person to submit your book to. Again, you are showing that you did your research. Communicating you've looked at their author or book list and have carefully read through their guidelines is important.
5. Finally, agents, editors, and publishers want to know about your platform. This is a BIG word in the publishing industry, but basically refers to how many people are listening to your message. Have you written and published any other books, and if so how many books have sold and how many reviews do you have. What social medias do you have an active, professional presence on (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.) and how many followers do you have on each. Do you have a blog, and if so, how many comments do your posts receive? Do you have a newsletter, and how many people are signed up to receive it? This is where publishing becomes a numbers game—very frustrating to authors because the general

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public doesn't understand things like reviews and liking an author on Facebook are highly valuable.

6. End with a little bit about yourself. Those in the publishing industry don't care how old you are, if you have ten siblings, or love soccer. Besides platform, they want to know professional credits. Did you graduate from a writing college? Have you been published by a prestigious paper or magazine? Are you a regular contributor to an online website with thousands of readers? If not, don't worry about it. Just be honest because if they are interested in knowing more, they will research you.

PROPOSALS

In some ways, a proposal is like a long query letter, but it greatly expands the information you provide and requires even more research. Within the writing guidelines, agents and publishers will typically tell you exactly what they want to see, and meeting their requirements generally takes fifteen-to-twenty pages.

In addition to all the information included in the query, proposals cover your audience. Agents and publishers want to know that you've thought about who you are writing for and have narrowed it down from "everyone" to a specific audience.

For example, my fiction books are written for 25-45 year old women who like to read but have busy lives.

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They have a lot of technology (cell phones, eReaders, etc.) and are comfortable using them.

Proposals also include books currently on the market similar to yours. Here, publishers are looking for three things.

1. First, there's a market for what you write.
2. Second, you know what that market looks like and who your competition is.
3. Third, your book has a different twist from what's currently available so it will be easy to sell.

Another key component of proposals is your ideas for promotion. Here publishers want to see that you are willing to help them sell books. Sometimes an author will have a connection that the publisher doesn't, particularly in local markets.

For example, the publisher may have a relationship with the people at Lifeway Stores Corporate Office, but you can stop at your local Lifeway Store and cultivate a relationship with the store manager. That relationship can mean the difference between your book only being available in the Lifeway Stores online bookstore, and your book getting a little space on the bookshelf for your family and friends to buy it locally.

If your book is nonfiction, publishers want to know the complete Table of Contents.

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Whether you write fiction or nonfiction, they want to know the approximate length of your book, even if it is not finished.

And, they will want a large section of your book so they can read your writing style and get an idea of how much they will need to invest in editing before offering you any kind of contract. Usually, they ask for the first couple of chapters or the first fifty pages.

I know that's a lot to take in. Both queries and proposals have a profound impact on whether a book makes it to market.

Some authors want to skip this part of the process, begging agents and publishers to read their book and let it speak for itself. The problem is that publishers need to have a plan and they want authors willing to help them sell books.

You must always keep in mind that publishing is a business, and publishers must make money in order to stay in business. Authors get frustrated when publishers refuse to take a risk, but publishers must be good stewards of what they've been given just like the rest of us.

The most difficult part of queries and proposals is often the book description, or back cover copy. One great way to learn to write great descriptions is to read them.

Pick a genre—any that interests you—and go to your own bookshelves or to the library. Choose ten-to-

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twelve books and just read the book descriptions. What do they have in common? How long are they? What draws you in and makes you want to read the book?

Another tricky part of book descriptions is that you need to be able to write them in different lengths. Most common is between 150-500 words, but I've also had to submit some as short as 70 words.

THE NEXT STEPS

Once you write a book, you cannot simply sit back and wait for the royalty checks to start rolling in. Not only will readers expect you to continue writing more books, but they will want to feel like they know you. They will want to connect with you and find out more about you. The best way to do that: websites, blogs, and social media.

Marketing a book is very different from writing a book, and the smart author makes learning to market a priority. One thing that comes highly recommended among marketing experts: a website.

You need what's called a "landing page"—a place people can go to find out about you, your books and other things you've written, and where else to find you on the web. You'll need a way to tell people where to buy your books as well as a place they can contact you if they have questions.

Some authors also include a blog with their website. If you do some research, you'll find that opinions vary

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widely on how useful a blog is in selling books. Nonfiction authors can display their knowledge and begin to set themselves apart as experts within their field of writing. Fiction writers tend to struggle more with blog topics. Whatever you decide, the key to a blog is consistency because readers want to know you are reliable.

Many different types of social media exist, but the current top choices are Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn.

GoodReads is an online book club that is also very popular among readers. An author could easily spend all their writing time on social media, so you need to be selective.

It's usually best to pick the one or two that you most enjoy, but as you post and talk with people, keep in mind your goal: to interact with your readers.

A lot of great information is available to you on what to do to set up your platform and interact with your readers. People like Rob Eagar and Shelley Hitz offer a variety of information on the web for free, as well as services for a fee.

They, and others like James Scott Bell, Michael Hyatt, and Donald Maass, can not only offer you good books to learn more but also point you to other credible sources of information for becoming a better writer if you want to make publishing a career.

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

WEEK 6: YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Think about the constraints of the Christian market. Would you want to write for it? What difficulties do you think you might have with it?

Imagine a character about your age who wasn't raised in a Christian home. Maybe his parents divorced or died in an accident, or maybe he was raised by a single mother in a rough part of town. If you were writing for the secular market, what might he look like, talk like, or do in his spare time? How would this have to change if you were writing for the Christian market?

Now work on your back cover copy. Pick a genre—any that interests you—and go to your own bookshelves or to the library. Avoid Amazon for this because I want you to choose books that have been printed by reputable publishers.

Choose ten-to-twelve books and just read the book descriptions. What do they have in common? How long are they? What draws you in and makes you want to read the book?

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

VAGUE AND WEAK WORDS TO AVOID

Adjectives: describe nouns

Adverbs: describe verbs, frequently end in “ly”

Infinitives: adding the “to” to a verb, for example “to walk”

all/always – make absolutely certain it really is ALL or ALWAYS before you say so

almost – usually you can be more precise

amazing – this tends to be an overstatement, and telling instead of showing

aspect

area

case

consideration

currently – if the sentence is in the present tense, it is current. Adding this word is redundant.

degree – usually you can be more precise

every – make absolutely certain it really is EVERY before you say so

factor – usually you can be more precise

just – this word can almost always be eliminated

need

never – make absolutely certain it really is NEVER before you say so

next – if you are telling events in order, then we know the next thing you tell us happened NEXT.

not

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

often – usually you can be more precise

only

perfect – this tends to be an overstatement, and telling instead of showing

situation – usually you can be more precise

so – this word can almost always be eliminated

that – if THAT is being used to identify something, you should be more precise. Otherwise, this word is an extra word and can almost always be eliminated.

then – if you are telling events in order, then we know the next thing you tell us happened THEN.

unique – this tends to be an overstatement, and telling instead of showing

very – this word can almost always be eliminated

wonderful – this tends to be an overstatement, and telling instead of showing

He began.../She began... Adds extra words that aren't necessary. If someone began to walk, they really were walking, so say that.

How about.../What about.../I'm about to... Adds extra words that aren't necessary or adds uncertainty.

I believe... We know you do if you are writing it, but this phrase adds uncertainty. Be confident.

I feel... You don't FEEL an opinion. Make sure that the word FEEL is used for physical conditions, actions, and emotions. *I feel sick. I felt her forehead. I feel sad.*

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

COMMONLY MISSPELLED WORDS

A

absence	address	apparent
accommodate	advertise	argument
achieve	advice	athlete
acquire	among	awful
across		

B

balance	beginning	breathe
basically	believe	brilliant
becoming	benefit	business
before		

C

calendar	cemetery	coming
careful	certain	competition
category	chief	convenience
ceiling	citizen	criticize

D

decide	develop	disappoint
definite	difference	discipline
deposit	dilemma	does
describe	disappear	during
desperate		

E

easily	equipped	existence
eight	exaggerate	expect
either	excellent	experience
embarrass	except	experiment
environment	exercise	explanation

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

F

familiar	foreign	friend
fascinating	forty	fundamental
finally	forward	

G

generally	grammar	guidance
government	guarantee	

H

happiness	heroes	humorous
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I

identity	independent	interruption
imaginary	intelligent	invitation
imitation	interesting	irrelevant
immediately	interfere	irritable
incidentally	interpretation	island

J

jealous	judgment	
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K

knowledge

L

laboratory	library	losing
length	license	lying
lesson	loneliness	

M

marriage	medicine	minute
mathematics	miniature	mysterious

N

naturally	neighbor	noticeable
necessary	neither	

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

O

occasion	often	optimism
occurred	omission	original
official	operate	ought

P

paid	persuade	prefer
parallel	picture	prejudice
particularly	piece	presence
peculiar	planning	privilege
perceive	pleasant	probably
perform	political	professional
permanent	possess	promise
persevere	possible	proof
personally	practical	psychology

Q

quantity	quiet	quite
quarter	quit	

R

realize	reference	restaurant
receive	religious	rhythm
recognize	repetition	ridiculous
recommend		

S

sacrifice	similar	studying
safety	sincerely	succeed
scissors	soldier	successful
secretary	speech	surely
separate	stopping	surprise
shining	strength	

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

T

temperature
temporary
through

tough
toward
tries

truly
twelfth

U

until
unusual

using

usually

V

village

W

weird
welcome

whether

writing

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

NEGATIVE WORD LIST

A

abysmal	annoy	appalling
adverse	anxious	atrocious
alarming	apathy	awful
angry		

B

bad	belligerent	boring
banal	bemoan	broken
barbed	beneath	

C

callous	collapse	crazy
can't	confused	creepy
clumsy	contradictory	criminal
coarse	contrary	cruel
cold	corrosive	cry
cold-hearted	corrupt	cutting

D

dead	deformed	dishonest
decaying	deny	dishonorable
damage	despicable	dismal
damaging	detrimental	distress
dastardly	dirty	don't
deplorable	disease	dreadful
depressed	disgusting	dreary
deprived	disheveled	

E

enraged	eroding	evil
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CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

F

fail	feeble	foul
faulty	fight	frighten
fear	filthy	frightful

G

gawky	grim	grotesque
ghastly	grimace	gruesome
grave	gross	guilty
greed		

H

haggard	hate	horrible
hard	hideous	hostile
hard-hearted	homely	hurt
harmful	horrendous	hurtful

I

icky	imperfect	injure
ignore	impossible	injurious
ignorant	inane	insane
ill	inelegant	insidious
immature	infernal	insipid

J

jealous	junky
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L

lose	lousy	lumpy
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M

malicious	misshapen	moan
mean	missing	moldy
menacing	misunderstood	monstrous
messy		

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

N

naïve	negative	nondescript
nasty	never	nonsense
naughty	no	not
negate	nobody	noxious

O

objectionable	offensive	oppressive
odious	old	

P

pain	petty	poor
perturb	plain	prejudice
pessimistic	poisonous	

Q

questionable	quirky	quit
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R

reject	repulsive	rocky
renege	repugnant	rotten
repellant	revenge	rude
reptilian	revolting	ruthless

S

sad	sickening	stinky
savage	sinister	stormy
scare	slimy	stressful
scary	smelly	stuck
scream	sobbing	stupid
severe	sorry	substandard
shoddy	spiteful	suspect
shocking	sticky	suspicious
sick		

CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS

T

tense
terrible

terrifying

threatening

U

ugly
undermine
unfair
unfavorable
unhappy
unhealthy
unjust

unlucky
unpleasant
upset
unsatisfactory
unsightly
untoward

unwanted
unwelcome
unwholesome
unwieldy
unwise
upset

V

vice
vicious

vile
villainous

vindictive

W

wary
weary

wicked
woeful

worthless
wound

Y

yell

yucky

Z

zero