

Dear Fellow Scribe,

My approach to working with other writers is simple: how can I help them with the creative process? I don't critique what they've done. I don't feel it's useful to the writer once I'm gone, unless I happen to be that writer's editor. What is useful is encouraging self confidence and providing tools to create more and better work. The creative process should be a joy (as well as work). Those with the courage to attempt it should be nourished as much as possible.

(Intro from latest writing workshop,
held in Auckland, New Zealand,
May 27-29 2009, part of ConScription.)

When I say someone with courage, I mean you. You wouldn't be looking at these pages if you weren't interested in writing. Not just writing, but writing you intend to hand to someone else to read. Trust me, the mere thought gives all of us the same combination of "wouldn't it be wonderful" anticipation and "oh, my, I couldn't, ever!" dread. Those feelings never go away. As for the dread? Your courage will see you through.

The good news? Ahead are all manner of rewards you didn't anticipate. Having someone so enthralled by your story they miss their bus stop. Having someone ask you why a character did this and not that, because they care. Having the next story rear up and grab you by the throat because, you know what? Writing -- writing and finishing and letting someone read your work -- is truly addictive.

Don't get me wrong. If you write for yourself, which is something I did for much of my life, be proud! How few develop the skills and patience to set ideas to words. How very few are willing to fix their dreams and imaginings in place, to make them real and tangible. Congratulations!

Everyone has stories to tell. Everyone has imagination. (Or should.) Writing, regardless of your final audience or intent, is a skill you learn and practice and constantly improve.

Go forth and write your stories!

Julie Czerneda

PS. I will be adding additional material to this part of www.czerneda.com as I do new workshops, so please check back.

PPS. If you've attended one of my writers' workshops and would like a copy of material that isn't here yet, please email me to let me know.

What you'll find here:

I've pulled together an assortment of things for you, choosing those I've found most helpful from my workshops. Some are instructions for activities. I prefer to have writers work in small noisy groups. It's more fun and the perfect way to practice talking about writing, which is a skill hard to develop sitting alone at a keyboard. (Email, text, posts, chat are writing about writing. Talking to someone is another beast altogether.) These activities can be done on your own, but if you have a chance to do them with a writers group or another gathering, give them a try. Email me if you have any questions.

The What if ...? Scenario

- If you've ever been unsure what science fiction is, this will give you a quick sense of the genre.
- This activity can help you quickly generate possibilities for your own stories from items of science or technology.

Key Elements of a Science Fiction Story

- If you're writing a science fiction story, and aren't sure where to start or are having problems, you may find this list helps you identify what your story might be missing or need.

My Character's Résumé

- You don't need to know all this for every character, but it's a handy tool to make sure you've at least thought these things through for your main ones.
- If a character feels stiff or uninteresting, try changing something from their résumé and see where it leads you. (Hint: habits and fears can be more useful to you than strengths.)

A Writer's Checklist

- Some straightforward basics I've found useful over the years.

Some Websites of Interest to Writers

- The moment you make a list like this, stuff goes out of date, so I apologize in advance for any dead links. These have been good for a long time, however.
- My criteria for a good and useful website for writers?
 1. Free. (Money flows to the writer. No one should ask you to pay to read or assess your work, with the exception of an accredited, professional editor if you go that route.)
 2. Positive. (Run from any site/blog/text that doesn't inspire you to write.)
 3. Professional. (Assess the credibility of what's said and how. Do your homework and research before you swallow any advice. Even mine ;-)

The What if ...? Scenario
(aka, the beating heart of science fiction)

1. Read through a popular science article. (I'm fond of the BBC science news features.)
2. If you prefer, do this with some friends. Writers need to talk to one another more.
3. Based on the ideas presented in the article, decide on a What if ...? question you could pursue in a science fiction story. Consider the following approaches. Feel free to combine them.
 - an extrapolation of this science into the future. What more might we be capable of doing or discovering from this starting point?
 - a speculation about another application of this science. Who or what else might be affected?
 - a speculation about a combination of this science with another aspect of science or society. How might this approach or information affect something else?
 - an extrapolation of the impact of this science, if successful, into the future. If this happens/works, what might be the situation in 50 years, in 100 years, and so on.

Ideas:

Key Elements of a Science Fiction Story

Using your “What if...?” scenario, outline a story which will express your ideas and/or concerns to a reader. Include the following components:

What if ...? This is the extension from the known you will have at the core of your story.

The Problem This is where you pick an imagined consequence to the What if to explore. (Plus a good story needs something for characters to face.)

Viewpoint character (protagonist) There should be a good reason the “what if ...” matters to this character.)

Expert witness This is someone who understands and expresses the science ideas. It could be the narrator, the protagonist, or anyone. But the reader should find the information source credible.

Tone As a starting point, choose what you wish readers to feel after reading this story.

Setting Science fiction is not restrained to any particular setting. Pick what works.

Consequence The answer this particular story provides to your “what if” speculation.

My Character's Résumé

Full Name: _____

Honorific: _____ Nickname: _____

Current Address: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____

Next-of-kin: _____

Address of Next-of-kin: _____

Current Employment: _____

Last Employment: _____

Reason for Change: _____

Special Skills/ Education: _____

Spoken Language: _____ Written: _____ Other: _____

Hobbies or Pasttimes: _____

Favourite Food _____ Drink: _____

Annoying Habits: _____

Particular Strengths: _____

Special Weaknesses or Fears: _____








In the author's world, where would this character shop for clothes? _____

A Writer's Checklist






Each and every writer has a distinct approach to writing. However, there are certain fundamentals which can be of help to you no matter how — or what — you choose to write. Here's a list of a few I've found to be important to me. Good luck!

Remember, the oldest advice is still the best. If you want to be a writer, *write!*

About writing

-  Save your work using more than one method and in more than one place.
-  Keep the presentation clean and simple. Readability matters, not design.
-  It is always best to show your readers some aspect of plot or character, rather than tell it.
-  Check the point of view as you write. The reader sees the story through those eyes and it can be very confusing to switch without notice.
-  If you don't need a phrase in order to move along your story, however eloquent, remove it. More is rarely better.
-  Put aside what you write and don't like, rather than just discarding it. Pull it out in a couple of weeks and reread. You may be pleasantly surprised.
-  Finishing what you write is the acid test. Make this your first target.

About being a writer

-  Look after your health. Your body really hates sitting in a chair.
-  Be patient, professional, and polite. Editors are busy folks. It is not uncommon to wait months for a reply. Remind them of your existence regularly (and nicely). Thank (in written form) those who've helped you or been interested in your work.
-  Be very careful what you post online. To be safe, assume anything you post will be read by editors. And posting a story in a blog or website is publishing it.
-  Keep track of details as well as facts about your worldbuilding, from names and addresses to dates you submitted material. (This includes keeping good financial accounts and contact lists.)
-  Find and treasure people who will read critically for you. If you are asked to return the favour, use those suggestions most helpful to you as a guide.

Some Websites of Interest to Writers (links last checked April 2010)

http://dpsinfo.com/awardweb/	Links to writers' awards for science fiction/ fantasy and much more. Make sure your publisher knows the awards for which you are eligible. Don't hesitate to submit your work yourself.
www.locusmag.com/Links/Portal.html	<i>Locus</i> magazine is the source of information in the SF/F (and often horror) writing industry. This page has links of interest to writers, readers, fans, researchers, and reviewers.
www.sfgwa.org/	Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. While only published writers can join SFWA, this site is an excellent resource for any writer.
www.sff.net	The place to look for author newsgroups and information. You'll be amazed who you'll meet there. Give it a try!
www.cherryh.com/WaveWithoutAShore/ (C.J. Cherryh)	You aren't alone. Look for blogs by your favourite authors. But be frugal with your time. Spend most writing, not reading about writing!
www.doranna.net/wordplay (Doranna Durgin)	A variety of links and market news.
www.writemarket.com	SF site links to sf and fantasy authors
www.sfsite.com/scribe/scribe01.htm	Google scholar is particularly useful, not only for content, but to help find the right words to put into any search engine when researching.
www.google.com http://scholar.google.com/	Information for authors, including market tips.
www.ralan.com/	A guide to publishers and writing services, with warnings about scams and other pitfalls.
http://anotherealm.com/prededitors/	

Courage is the writer's main virtue. J.M. Straczynski