

The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Circulation: 32172 writers, each of them creating a Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.

"Fiction Writing = Organizing + Creating + Marketing"

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- 1) Welcome to the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine!

Those of you who have joined in the past month (more than 200 of you signed up in December), welcome to my e-zine!

You should be on this list only if you signed up for it on my web site. If you no longer wish to hear from me, don't be shy -- there's a link at the bottom of this e-mail that will put you out of your misery.

If you need to change your e-mail address, there's a different link at the bottom to let you update your address on my system.

If you missed a back issue, remember that all previous issues are archived on my web site at:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>

What's in this issue:

The successful novelist needs good organization, good craft, and good marketing. In this issue, we'll talk about each of these in turn.

* Have you made some plans for what you'd like to accomplish this year? Do you know the one issue most likely to prevent you from checking anything off your list? Read this month's organizing column, "Targets vs. Goals."

* Even if you're writing well, you may be shooting yourself in the foot, if you forget one key concept. Do you know what it is? Check out this month's craft article, "Every Scene is a _____."

* Good marketing must be measurable. Otherwise, how would you know if it's good? There's a powerful tool you can install on your web site in minutes, and it's free. Are you taking advantage of it? Get inspired by this month's marketing column, "Why Google Analytics Rocks."

2) Organizing: Targets vs. Goals

It's traditional at the beginning of the year to define what you'd like to achieve in the coming twelve months.

That's a good thing and I highly recommend it. This week I'll be writing my own annual plan for the coming year.

However, I'd like to point out an area where just about everybody uses fuzzy thinking in their planning.

We don't control our future entirely.

Some things we can control, of course. But some we just can't. It's crucial to know the difference.

If you're looking for an agent, you have complete control over how many queries you send out. But you can't force an agent to agree to represent you. All you can do is make yourself an attractive client, send out those pesky queries, and hope that one of the agents sees how brilliant you are.

What we need are two different words, one for goals that we can control, and one for goals that we can't. As far as I know, we don't have those words. We could make some up, but I don't think that's necessary.

Instead, let's just define a "Goal" (with a capital letter) to be something we have control over, and let's define a "Target" to be something we only have partial control over.

"I will write 10,000 words every week" is a Goal.

"I will become the best writer in my critique group" is a Target.

"I will attend one major writing conference this year" is a Goal.

"I will get two editors at conferences to request manuscripts" is a Target.

"I will send out 20 queries to agents in March" is a Goal.

"I will sign with an agent by July" is a Target.

Goals are good. Targets are also good. But they're not the same thing.

You can make a list of Goals for the year that is 100% achievable. At the end of the year, if you haven't reached all those Goals, then you have a right to hold yourself accountable.

You can make a list of Targets for the year, but you just can't assume they're achievable. It's OK if they're a bit of a stretch. It's OK to aim for a spectacular year and end up with a merely great year. (For some people, the only way to achieve their best is to shoot for the impossible.)

But it's a mistake to confuse Goals with Targets. That only sets you up for self-flagellation at the end of the year, if you don't reach all your Targets.

An important point is that Targets usually depend on Goals. So set your Targets first. Then figure out what Goals you must meet in order to make your Targets as likely as possible.

Let's see how that works out in practice. Suppose one of your Targets is "I want to sign with a major agent this year."

If you're a first-time novelist, then you probably can't get an agent unless your manuscript is complete and polished. You also can't get an agent unless you pitch to at least one (and probably several).

So here are five reasonable Goals you can set in support of your Target:

- * I will complete my manuscript by the end of March.
- * I will hire a professional freelance editor to evaluate my manuscript, with a deadline to get the evaluation back to me by the end of June.
- * I will polish my manuscript to the best of my ability by the end of August.
- * I will send out a minimum of 10 queries to suitable agents in September.
- * I will attend a writing conference in September or October and pitch my work to two suitable agents.

Now if you hit all five of these Goals, there is no guarantee that you'll sign with an agent. But the odds of signing with an agent are vastly higher if you achieve all five of these Goals than if you achieve none of them.

Targets depend on Goals. But Goals don't guarantee Targets.

Here is a five-minute exercise that you can do right now to create a reasonable set of Targets and Goals:

What are your Targets for the coming year? A good Target is concrete, objective, and difficult. But it's not necessarily achievable. There is a part that depends on other people.

For each Target, set one or more Goals that depend on you alone. Goals should be concrete, objective, difficult, and ACHIEVABLE.

Do you have any other Goals for the coming year (besides the ones you need to reach your Targets)?

Write down all your Targets and your Goals and post them above your workspace. Make it clear which Targets

depend on which Goals.

Look at your Targets and Goals every day before you start work. If you need to revise your Goals throughout the year, that's OK. It's fine to be flexible. If a great opportunity comes up during the year, change your Targets and Goals to include it.

A year from now, review your Goals first and then your Targets:

* Did you hit all of your Goals? If not, then figure out why. You may not have given yourself enough time. Or you may need to improve your work habits. Or it may be that your writing has a lower priority than other things in your life.

* Did you hit any of your Targets? If not, was it because you failed to achieve the required Goals, or was it outside of your control?

Planning your year doesn't need to be complicated. But it does need to be clear. You control your destiny with your Goals. You don't completely control it with your Targets.

Knowing that can help you keep your head straight on the long, long road to publication.

3) Creating: Every Scene is a _____

Sometimes I worry that my critique group hates me. Every month when we get together, each writer brings one scene to be critiqued.

Sometimes the writing is terrific. Sometimes it isn't.

But whether the writing is good or bad, one of the most common problems I see every month is with the scene itself.

All too often, things just happen, but nothing really changes. So the scene may be well-written, but it isn't important to the story.

That's usually a showstopper. Even if the writing is terrific.

A scene is the fundamental unit of your novel. Each scene needs to advance the plot. Each scene needs to be essential to the novel.

The surest way to make that happen is to require that each scene must be a story, all on its own.

A story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Between the beginning and the end, something changes.

Therefore, a scene needs a beginning, a middle, and an end. Between the beginning and the end, something needs to change.

Every scene. Every time.

In my opinion, if it doesn't have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and if nothing really changes, then it isn't a scene.

In that case, you either fix it or kill it.

Sometimes when I point this out in my critique group, I get back the answer, "This scene is just showing us who the characters are."

In my opinion, that's not good enough. Not nearly good enough. Not in modern fiction. Not in today's market.

It's not that I'm mean or narrow-minded. It's that modern readers are impatient and want scenes to move the story forward. Therefore, editors want scenes to move the story forward. Therefore, I teach writers to

move the story forward.

Every scene. Every time. Simple as that.

Yes, you can argue that there are plenty of exceptions in published novels. I'm sure you can find examples from Austen or Dickens or Tolstoy. I bet you can even find an occasional example in Tom Clancy or Danielle Steel or Stephen King.

So you may be wondering why I seem to be saying that you aren't allowed to "think outside the box."

I guess I'll have to go Zen on you here: On the day you know that there is no box, that will be the day you will be ready to think outside the box.

Until then, write every scene so that it makes sense as a story. So that it has a beginning, a middle, and an end. So that something important changes. So that it contributes to the larger story. So that if you took the scene away, the novel would be broken.

Now of course you may be writing a heartbreaking work of staggering genius in which you transcend everything I've just said. That happens from time to time. Sometimes it works. The examples you want to show me from Clancy or Steel or King prove that it can work in the hands of a master.

In that case, when you bring your scene to my critique group, I'll point out that you're doing everything "wrong" but the story still works. And I'll tell you it's fine. Run with it.

If it works, then it works.

But if the scene doesn't work, and if the reason is that the scene isn't a story, then fix it.

There is much more to say on this. I've said a lot of it in a very widely read article on my web site. You can easily find it by Googling the phrase, "Writing the perfect scene."

The first result Google returns is my article. Have fun!

4) Marketing: Why Google Analytics Rocks

When writers tell me about their latest, greatest, coolest, hottest, marketing technique, the first thing I ask is, "How do you know it works?"

Almost always, the answer I hear is, "You can't measure marketing!"

That's a lie. My response is: "You can measure a lot more than you imagine."

In the September 2012 issue of this e-zine, I talked about a number of general methods for measuring your marketing. This month, I'll focus on a free and powerful tool, Google Analytics.

The reason you want to measure your marketing is so you can try experiments to improve it. If you have no interest in improving your marketing, then you don't need to measure it.

There are three phases in any marketing strategy:

- * Attract
- * Engage
- * Convert

"Attract" means to pull in attention from possible customers. "Engage" means to hold that attention long enough so that the possible customer knows who you are. "Convert" means to make the sale.

Many web sites measure all three of these phases extremely well. If you're not measuring them at all, or not very well, then the odds are high that you can improve what you're doing dramatically by using Google

Analytics.

I'm not going to describe how to install Google Analytics here. It's simple to do and it's free. You can easily learn how by Googling the phrase "how to install Google Analytics".

Once you've installed it, you're ready to start measuring all three phases of your marketing program.

Measuring the Attraction Phase

"Attract" means to bring people to your web site. Measuring this is trivial, once you've installed Google Analytics. Login to your Google Analytics account.

In the left margin, you'll see five main tabs: Audience, Advertising, Traffic Sources, Content, and Conversions. Three of these will give you information on who you're attracting and how well. Let's look at each of these in turn.

Click on the Contents tab. You can see the following:

- * The total number of page views on your site.
- * How many page views you're getting for each page.
- * The pages on your site where people are entering.
- * The average time it takes to load pages on your site.

Click on the Audience tab. You can see the following:

- * The number of visits to your site.
- * The number of unique visitors.
- * The languages spoken by your visitors.
- * The countries and cities where your visitors live.
- * The number of your visitors who are new and the number who have visited your site before.
- * How often your visitors return to your site.
- * What browsers your visitors use.
- * What operating systems your visitors use.
- * What size screens they have.
- * How many of them are using mobile devices (you might

be shocked at how many people are looking at your site on a phone).

- * Exactly which mobile devices your visitors are using.

Click on the Traffic Sources tab. You can see the following:

- * The percentages of your traffic from various sources (search engines, referrals from other sites, direct traffic, social media).

- * The keywords people are searching for when search engines bring them to your site.

- * How often each keyword is searched per month.

- * Your average position in the search engine results for each keyword.

- * The click-through rate for each of your pages on the search engines.

- * The sources of your traffic from various social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, StumbleUpon, Tumblr, WordPress, Blogger, Squidoo, Reddit, Pinterest, and how many visits you get from each of these.

- * The landing pages on your site where visitors are arriving from social media.

If you are trying to get more traffic to your web site, then the info above gives you incredible insights into what is working and what isn't.

Once you know that, you can try experiments to increase your traffic. And you can measure the results of those experiments. Whether those experiments work or not, you learn something.

Measuring the Engagement Phase

"Engage" means to gain people's interest, once they've been attracted to your web site. Measuring engagement is also very easy within Google Analytics. Here are some ways you can do so:

Click on the Content tab in Google Analytics. You can see the following:

- * The average time visitors spend on each page of your site.
- * The "bounce rate" (the number of people who enter your site and then leave without looking at any other pages on your site).
- * The average number of pages viewed per visit.
- * The number of "exits" from each page. (An "exit" is when somebody leaves your site.)
- * The number of searches performed on your site (if it has search enabled).
- * The number of "events" that happen on your site (this gets a bit technical, but you can set up your site so that various user actions are tagged as events, which you can then track).
- * For any page of your site, you can display an image of the page with an overlay that shows what percentage of visitors to that page clicked on each link on the page. This is huge!
- * For any page on your site, you can see how people got to that page and where they went from that page.
- * A picture showing the basic flow of traffic through your site, from entry to the main pages to exit.

There are some other methods to measure engagement which we'll cover in the next section because those same methods usually apply to measuring conversions.

Measuring the Conversion Phase

"Conversion" means that you persuade people to do something you want them to do, such as buy your book or subscribe to something you offer. Measuring conversions are easy in Google Analytics.

Google Analytics lets you define "Goals" -- things you want your site visitors to do. Here are some typical Goals you might want to define.

- * I want visitors to stay at least 5 minutes on my site.
- * I want visitors to visit at least 5 pages on my site.
- * I want visitors to Like me on Facebook.
- * I want visitors to Tweet about my pages.

- * I want visitors to sign up for the RSS feed on my blog.
- * I want visitors to sign up for my e-mail list.
- * I want visitors to click the "Buy at Amazon" link on my book page (or the link to any other online vendor).
- * I want visitors to buy my book or other product direct from me.

Note that some of these Goals measure Engagement and some of them measure Conversion. I'm lumping them all together here because the way you look at the information is the same in either case.

You can define many different Goals using Google Analytics. Once you've done that, you can easily track how many people on your site reach any of those Goals.

Click on the Conversions tab. You can see the following:

- * The total Goal completions for each of your Goals.
- * (Optionally) the estimated dollar value for each of your Goals, if that makes sense.
- * Which pages your Goal completions happened on.
- * The most common paths visitors followed in reaching each Goal completion.
- * A graphical image showing schematically how people arrived at various Goal completions.
- * If you have an online store on your site, you can get detailed information on each product's performance.
- * The percentage of Goal completions from each of your various sources of traffic (search engines, social media, referrals from other web sites, direct URL input).
- * The number of "assists" in Goal completion from those same sources of traffic. What's an "assist?" If somebody originally came to you from social media and then came back the next day or week or month and completed a Goal, then social media gets credited with an "assist".
- * A graphical image showing all the assists along the path to Goal completions. This is truly amazing. You can easily see whether social media is leading to Goal completions. There is no longer a reason to say that "you can't measure social media marketing." Of course you can.
- * The time lag in days between an initial visit to your

site and a Goal completion.

* The number of interactions along the path to Goal completions.

Google Analytics gives you critical knowledge on what works and what doesn't. That knowledge is power.

It may be that what you'll learn is that your actual marketing efforts are a shambles. Is that bad?

No, that's typical. In that case, the good news is that you have enormous room for improvement. A little imagination and study will suggest many ways to improve. Google Analytics will tell you if they work.

You don't have to blindly trust your editor or your agent or your publicist or your marketing guru or me about whether Marketing Method X works. You can test it and measure the results.

Imagine that you spend one hour every week looking at your data and running experiments. In a year's time, you could radically improve each of the Attraction, Engagement, and Conversion phases of the marketing on your web site.

Try Google Analytics for one month and you'll never again tolerate that lie, "You can't measure your marketing!"

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

I'm currently working on a new edition of my novel DOUBLE VISION, to be released in e-book format. I'm also revamping both of my web sites. Some days it feels like my head is spinning.

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping three years ago. For the last couple of years, it's been the hottest selling fiction-writing book in the Kindle store.

You can find out all about WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES here:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info/wffd>

If you've already bought the book and like it, I'd be delighted if you went to the Amazon page and clicked the Like button at the top:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blinks/wffd.php>

I've also been gratified at the response to my flagship software product, "Snowflake Pro," which makes it fast, easy, and fun to work through the steps of my wildly popular Snowflake method for designing a novel. You can find out more about Snowflake Pro at:

<http://www.SnowflakeProSoftware.com>

I normally teach at four to six writing conferences per year. I am currently booked to teach at only two this year, which should giving me a bit of breathing room.

Why don't I teach at more conferences? Because teaching is an incredibly demanding blood sport and it sucks a huge amount of energy out of my tiny brain. I prefer to put my absolute best into a few locations than to muddle through at many.

I will be teaching a mentoring group with no more than ten students this March at the Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference in central California. Details here: <http://mounthermon.org/event/122>

If you'd like me to teach at your conference in 2014 or beyond, email me to find out how outrageously expensive I am.

If you'd just like to hear me teach, I have a number of recordings and e-books that are outrageously cheap.

Details here:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info>

6) Randy Recommends . . .

I don't take paid ads for this e-zine. I do, however, recommend people I like.

I'm a huge fan of Margie Lawson's courses, both the ones she teaches in person and the ones she sells on her web site at

<http://www.MargieLawson.com>

Margie is a psychologist who applies what she knows about human psychology to writing fiction. I believe her material is brilliant. Check her out on her web site!

I've also become a fan of Thomas Umstattd's terrific uncommon-sense thoughts on internet marketing. You can read Thomas's blog at:

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

Thomas and his team are especially skilled at helping authors create a powerful web site using WordPress blogs. I am a huge fan of this approach, since it gives the most bang for the buck in an author site. Find out more about this at:

<http://www.AuthorMedia.com>

I'm watching Thomas's latest venture with interest: The BestSeller Society. I don't know enough to have an opinion on it yet, but wanted to mention it because Thomas is a bright guy who usually has smart things to

say. More info on it here:
<http://www.bestsellersociety.com>

Please be aware that in this section I ONLY recommend folks who have never asked me to do so. Tragically, this means that if you ask me to list you here, I will be forced to say no.

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 159 times the price. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2013.

Extremely tasteful postscript: I encourage you to e-mail this E-zine to any fiction writer friends of yours who might benefit from it. I only ask that you e-mail the whole thing, not bits and pieces. Otherwise, you'll be getting desperate calls at midnight from your friends asking where they can get their own free subscription.

Of course you should not forward this e-mail to people who don't write fiction. They won't care about it.

At the moment, there is one place to subscribe:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

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Download your free Special Report on Tiger Marketing and get a free 5-Day Course in How To Publish a Novel.

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