

Excuse Abuse

(From an Article Published in Word Press January 2010)

By

Steven R. Roberts

Many writers are Wanna-B's because they have a story or see stories all around them and don't know where to start writing. In the two writers clubs and writing workshops that I run, I tell Wanna-B's there is no secret beyond putting fingers to keys. However, I don't recommend they start on the story until they think through a few basic elements about the project.

First they need to give some thought and type their understandings of the six items below. It is important to actually see the answers on the page, not just assume they have a clear understanding in their minds.

- Decide on your writing goals – Family Record, a book to Gift and Sell Locally, a book to Sell Broadly, including people you've never met.
- What is the intended type of story and writing genre – Fiction, Non-Fiction or Creative Non-Fiction, Children's Book, Family Saga, Mystery, etc?
- Think of at least three stories you might write before you decide on the one you are going to write as your first effort.
- Think through the overall arch of the story? For example, is it an "n" - starts good, goes to pieces, comes back, ends badly, an "r" – starts good, goes to pieces, comes back to end in a bang, a "w" – starts good goes to pieces, comes back... The idea is that every scene, every word needs to support or forewarn of the overall theme and outcome of the story.
- Most books are written in scenes, especially fiction, so you need to outline the story and list the scenes you will need to tell the story.
- The main characters need to be described along with their goals and emotional state. What do they love? What do they hate? What do they fear? This can keep you consistent on little things like a characters looks as well as important things like his hot buttons and goals.

Now you are ready to write. The preliminary work has allowed you to think through the project and hit the text running. No more excuses! Type and think as fast as you can. Don't interrupt your thinking to look up a fact. On the first draft don't worry about the name of a particular street, how far it is to drive from Las Vegas to Dallas, the name of the puddle-jumper airline that flies from Miami to Fort Myers. Leave these items blank for the first draft and look them up later.

We all know how important it is to start the book with a very clever opening, one that draws in the reader and foretells the theme of the story. Forget that for now

and bang those keys. Once three or four pages have been typed you will want to establish momentum by setting writing goals such as, writing six hours a week, at your bedroom desk, 2000 words a week. With the average novel somewhere around 75,000 words this schedule will complete the first draft in 38 weeks. If that pace does not meet your goals it can be sped up or slowed down. Of course, you should know the rule of thumb in the industry is that writing takes one third of an author's time while rewriting, fact checking and editing take about two thirds. At this rate, and adding time for cover design and printing, your book will be ready to come out of the closet in a little more than two years after you hit that first key.

Further, if you answered the initial question with the goal of writing for publication and commercial success you will most likely need to add a couple more years to allow for an agent and publisher to discover and exploit your genius.

Let's recalibrate for a minute to give better encouragement to Wanna-B's having trouble typing that first word and that first page. It is not unreasonable to assume that you may have sufficient passion and insight into your story to write 3,000 words a week. At this rate, your first draft, possibly shorter than average, at 60,000 words, could be finished in about 14 months. If you then decide to self publish you can add as little as six weeks. There you are after all these years, a first time author holding your first book in less than 16 months.

Now quit giving yourself excuse abuse and start writing. It is one of the most enjoyable journeys you will ever take.