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First Things First: Writing Strategies

Marilyn L. Grady

Writing: The Discovery Method

Remember all the years you spent earning the academic credentials for your current position? Consider what you are expected to know and be able to do to fulfill your job responsibilities. For those who are expected to write for publication, what part of your credential-building academic experiences was dedicated to preparing you as a writer? The English majors among us would seem to be likely suspects for deep, rich, writing backgrounds. However, in collecting non-scientific data on this assumption, I am not convinced the English majors spent enough time writing while earning their credentials. So, those who have chosen academic career paths are forced to “discover” writing in order to meet scholarly productivity expectations.

A curious book by Goldsberry is worth reading. The author is a professor of English at the University of Hawaii, a Michener Fellow, and an instructor at the Maui Writers Retreat. *The Writer’s Book of Wisdom: 101 Rules for Mastering Your Craft* reflects Goldsberry’s 25-year quest to collect “the best advice” for writers. The book, based on the premise that all writing is storytelling, is divided into three sections: Approach, Language, and Craft. The rules apply to all types of writing.

The 25-year development process makes the book an easy read. The “revise, revise, revise” approach is evident in the brevity and succinct presentation style. Brief excerpts of the rules include the following.

Writing is More Craft than Art—“Writers write. More importantly, they write along a learning curve and improve with each word. . . . Study the craft by doing it. Write. Everyday.” Rule 2, p. 17.

Produce Multiple Drafts—“Anne Lamott refers to the first draft as the down draft and the second as the up draft, because you get it down then fix it up. . . . Writers early in their careers will need many more than three; ten is advised.” Rule 19, p. 51.

Don’t Overuse Negatives—“Test your negatives. If you can revise them into positives, the text will project more light than darkness and will actually energize your readers.” Rule 40, p.95.

Be Brief—"Hemingway's first editor at the *Kansas City Star* gave him this style sheet: 'Use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs. Use vigorous English. Be positive, not negative.' Hemingway later referred to that list as 'the best rules I ever learned for the business of writing.'" Rule 45, p. 105.

Write Like You Talk—"... for quality writing is to give it voice. . . . Read your work aloud." Rule 55, p. 128.

The rules provide instruction, motivation, and inspiration. Those who take the time to read this book may enhance their writing that occurs in the name of "publish or perish."

References

Goldsberry, S. T. (2005). *The Writer's Book of Wisdom: 101 Rules for Mastering Your Craft*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books.