



Middlesbrough Writers' Group

WRITERS' TIPS

Price at M.W.G. meeting 79p.

by post £1.00 from:

Cathy Baldwin, secretary,
'Maecenas', 4 Lark Drive,
Galley Hill, GUISBOROUGH. TS14 8HP.

MIDDLESBROUGH WRITERS' GROUP GUIDELINE SERIES.

PREPARING WORK FOR SENDING OUT

by

Eleanor Fairburn.

Our scripts get only one chance to make a first impression, so their presentation should look professional. The basic rules for submitting work to an editor are:-

1. Size of paper used should be A4. (Quality not very thin except for airmailing.)
2. Typewriter or word-processor ribbons should be good -- faint print irritates.
3. All spellings and alterations need checking before final copy. After that, no more than 3 neat corrections per page.
4. Handwritten submissions are only possible as Readers' Letters or, occasionally, in competitions where that has been stated. For really bad typists, final copies should be done by a professional.
5. All sheets of a typescript must have a) double spacing between lines b) good margins on all four sides, especially top, bottom and left side c) consecutive page numbers in top righthand corner and d) a title-sheet.

6. Title-sheets correspond to the cover of a book. They are for editor's information and, eventually, for Accounts Dept. and writer's payment. They carry the piece's title at the centre, in underlined capitals, and the writer's name or pseudonym underneath, after the word 'by'. Then, down near the end of the A4 sheet, on the left, writer's full name, address and telephone number. Opposite that, on the right, an estimate of the number of words in the piece: "Approx. xxxx words" -- editorial decision often rests entirely on length but editors do not have the time to count words.

7. Methods of counting (known as 'casting off' in printers' terms where the process is usually done by measurements) Find the average number of words per. line by counting all words in a dozen or so full-length lines and choosing the most recurring figure. Then count the number of lines per. page (even very short lines are estimated as full ones because they occupy the same amount of space) and multiply by the number of words. Finally, multiply this figure by the number of pages in the entire piece, allowing for half-pages.

8. First pages differ from all others in that they have fewer lines of type and much more space at top and bottom to allow for editorial notes re. illustrations etc.. Title is centred and underlined, with writer's name or pseudonym underneath. Main text begins several lines down so that there is really only half a page of text here. The opening paragraph is not indented but all subsequent paragraphs should be, by 4 or 5 spaces.

The condition of copy which has come back rejected is often crumpled or stained. Before sending it out again, spruce it up or even entirely re-do it so that the second (or even the twentieth) submission makes as good an impression as the first one.

E N D.

A WRITER'S LIBRARY

By Diane E. Taylor

INTRODUCTION The apprentice writer may easily be bewildered by an apparent flood of books (and magazines) all promising to be the one essential book which will teach him/her how to write an instant best-seller in ten easy stages. Truthfully, no single book is likely to do that, and the writer is more likely to end up out of pocket needlessly. There is no substitute for talent, hard work, and constant writing and reading.

With that cautionary note, there are a number of excellent books which will help the aspiring writer. They do not all need to be bought at once. Most will be available at no cost through the public library service, either for borrowing or for reference use. Costs can also be kept to a minimum by sharing with friends, or with colleagues at a writers' group. A careful watch at book and jumble sales can also yield up treasures.

The following list has been drawn up out of my own experience and that of other writers'. The only book the new writer requires is a good dictionary. All other books are optional, as and when the writer wishes to use them.

1. DICTIONARIES Start off with a cheap paperback dictionary if you have to, but aim for a better one as soon as possible. Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary is widely used, has a good number of entries, plus details of their meanings: it costs about £16 but will repay the investment. For more analysis of origin and meaning of words The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary is in two volumes and is very useful for the more experienced writer, but its price confines it to the library for most users.
2. SYNONYMS Cassell's Modern Guide to Synonyms and Related Words is a helpful step-up from a dictionary, in selecting words which can give a more exact or a more subtle meaning to those words previously chosen: this is not an essential book, but it is helpful. Also useful is the Readers Digest - The Right Word.
3. THESAURUS Roget's Thesaurus provides further help with meanings of words, and their alternatives. However, not everyone is able to work comfortably with the thesaurus method, so this is not recommended for the complete beginner unless he/she has gained experience first on a borrowed copy.
4. GRAMMAR AND ENGLISH USAGE There is a good selection here, many available in paperback, e.g. The Oxford Guide to the English Language, The Complete Plain Words revised by E. Gowers, and Usage and Abusage by E. Partridge.

5. ENCYCLOPAEDIAS AND YEARBOOKS Pears Cyclopaedia and Whitakers Almanack are both useful yearly sources of information for checking up on facts.

6. MAPS AND ATLASES For checking on spelling of place-names, or reminding oneself of a geographical fact, there are a variety of maps. The Times Concise Atlas of the World, the Ordnance Survey series of maps, and also the A - Z series of street maps can all have their uses provided that they are used correctly. There are also specialist maps, such as those showing a region at a different point in time, useful for the writer of, say, historical fiction/articles. The meaning and origin of place-names is sometimes also helpful, e.g. Place Names of Great Britain and Ireland by John Field.

7. WRITERS TOOLS There are two very useful yearbooks which contain a mountain of facts regarding professional writing, covering topics such as agents, publishers and taxation. They are Writers' and Artists' Yearbook and The Writers' Handbook. Both are generally available in libraries. They are updated annually. There is a large area of overlap in the two books, so which one is used is very much a matter of personal choice. Some writers buy each in alternate years. Keeping up-to-date with changes in publishing, e.g. a medium-sized publisher being taken over by a larger, a new publisher or publication coming into existence, or the end of a publication, can be helped by reading some of the magazines currently available containing this sort of information, e.g. Freelance Market News, Writers' Monthly or Writers News.

HOW TO WRITE There is quite a market for this kind of book, some excellent, some poor. If in doubt, check that the publisher is a well-known one, and also check how many, and what type of books the author has already written. Helpful authors include D. Doubtfire, and John Braine. No single book can be whole-heartedly recommended here, as learning how to write creatively is very much up to the skills and needs of the individual. Which book, if any, to use here, therefore comes down to personal choice; the writer should browse through several before making any decision on which to buy, or use.

LASTLY, there are also books written to help writers working in a specialised genre. Examples include Writing for the BBC and books by H. Keating on crime-writing, Gordon Wells on writing articles.

INSTEAD OF HE SAID OR SHE SAID, THESE ARE SOME OPTIONS.....

ADDED AGREED ANSWERED ARGUED AVERRED BABBLED BLURTED OUT BREATHED
 BURST OUT BUTTED IN COMMANDED COMMENTED COMPLAINED CONCEDED CONFESSED
 CONTENTED CONTINUED DECLARED DEMANDED DRAWLED ECHOED ENQUIRED
 EXCLAIMED EXPLAINED GASPED GRUMBLED IMPLORED INVITED INTERRUPTED
 JEERED JOKED LAMENTED MAINTAINED MOANED MOCKED MOUTHED MUMBLED
 MURMURED MUTTERED OBJECTED OBSERVED OPINED ORDERED PARRIED PERSISTED
 PRATTLED PROCLAIMED PROMISED PROTESTED QUAVERED QUERIED QUESTIONED
 REJOINED REMARKED REPEATED RESPONDED RETALIATED RETORTED RETURNED
 REVEALED RIPOSTED SCOFFED SCORNE SCREAMED SHOUTED SHRIEKED SIGHED
 SNORTED SOBBED SNEERED SQUEAKED SQUEALED STAMMERED STATED STORMED
 STRESSED STUTTERED SWORE TAUNTED TEASED THUNDERED URGED UTTERED
 VOWED WAILED WENT ON WHIMPERED WHINED WHISPERED YELLED.

B L U E P R I N T F O R S U C C E S S .

MOTIVATION,ENTHUSIASM, ORGANISATION, WORDS, CURIOSITY, IMAGINATION,
 CRITISISM, OPTIMISM, CONCENTRATION, RESEARCH (NOTES).

SOME DON'TS, Be obscure,Talk about your ideas,Write 80,000words when editor asks for 55,000.,Throw away old manuscripts, Pester publishers, Introduce too many characters at once,Rewrite too much,keep it fresh, Listen to prophets of doom, Be beaten by rejection, Don't be timid,be bold, Don't bind your manuscript, but number all pages.

Some do's Keep a copy of your manuscript, Use a method of writing you are comfortable with, Remember nothing is new, just different ways of portraying the same old love story, Believe in yourself, Write every day if humanly possible, Read a lot in between writing your books, Be helpful and co-operative with your publisher, Be professional,keep to deadlines,presentation, Love your characters while writing about them, Watch for changing trends,only best selling authors can afford to be different.

Got your paper,paper clips,dictionary,pen or pencil,erazer,TIME & A CLEAR MIND.

ARTICLE WRITING.

Extracts from Gordon Wells' WORKSHOP '87 handout.

An article is an idea developed until it is interesting, unusual and amusing.

Write about what you know, plus research.

Illustrations are an asset; photographs and line drawings. Use a short, snappy title and a short opening paragraph of 25-30 words to grab the attention of the 'passing reader'. Articles should be packed with facts in a logical sequence and readable with - accurate, clear writing with short words and sentences.

Market research is essential if you are to sell.

First choice; magazines you know; weekly mags; county mags which attract less contributions; trade/hobby mags; 'Freebies' and new titles with fewer articles in stock.

To study a magazine; Flip pages to get the 'feel'; study advertisements to identify the readership; identify regular contributors, you cannot compete with them; check for paid letters; note commissioned/speculative features, inspired guesswork, and typical subject matter.

Study in detail a typical feature article in 'target' mag. Count words; check paragraph lengths; check sentence lengths; check for long (=hard) words; total word count. The right length is essential. Write your article with a similar structure and content treatment but a different subject.

N.B. You are writing to please the editor, not yourself.

Use a professional presentation with a cover sheet.

Always enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope.

WRITING ARTICLE OUTLINES

Heather Bennett

Editors often say they prefer potential contributors to contact them with ideas first, rather than to send complete manuscripts. New writers may be puzzled by this advice, not being sure how to present such ideas to an editor.

Probably the best way is to submit an article outline to the editor, set out as in the example given on the next page. This has several advantages over sending the finished piece.

1. If it is successful, you know before you begin writing that you have a guaranteed sale at the end of it.
2. It saves unnecessary work. If the editor doesn't like the idea, or has recently accepted one on a similar theme, it saves you having to rewrite the complete article later to suit another market. It is very easy to adapt an outline.
3. If the editor likes the subject but would prefer a different approach, he can tell you before you write the whole article, which saves you having to do a re-write later on.
4. It usually guarantees a quicker response. Your article outline fits into a standard envelope and will be opened and dealt with more quickly than an unsolicited contribution.
5. It saves money. Posting complete features is an expensive business. An outline costs no more than a second class letter.
6. It lessens the trauma of rejection. If an editor rejects your outline, it's only an idea he's turning down, after all, not something you've sweated blood and tears over.
7. Editors normally accept or reject articles by letter, but they often telephone to discuss an article outline with you. This means you will be told exactly what is required for the proposed article, of course, but you can also often sell the Features Editor the idea of a follow-up or second article.

A word of warning - don't give too much away in your outline, so that an in-house journalist can complete the article just as well as you. Your aim should be to whet the appetite, not provide a complete menu with such detailed recipes that someone else can produce the meal just as well as you!

(HOW TO WRITE AN ARTICLE OUTLINE)

OUTLINE FOR PROPOSED ARTICLE

NAME:

ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE:

SUBJECT:

EXPECTED LENGTH:

DATE BY WHICH ARTICLE CAN BE COMPLETED:

HEADLINE/TITLE:

MATERIAL: Three short paragraphs (about five lines in each), showing how the article will be constructed, the main material to be used and the overall angle to be taken. Some writers think it best to make the first sentence of each paragraph the one they will use to introduce each of the sections in the finished piece of writing, as this allows the editor to see something of their written style.

OTHER MATERIAL: List briefly any other material you will use such as case studies, examples, illustrations or quotations.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Give a brief indication of anything else which may be relevant. Some writers include here details of any special qualifications they may have to write the feature, but for a first approach to a magazine, it is probably better to write a separate covering letter.

A FINE ROMANCE IS HARD TO FIND.

Extracts from the editorial department of Mills and Boon Ltd, Romance section, 15-16 Brooks Mews, London W1A 1DR.

The Editor seeks manuscripts for publication in the womans' Category Romance market of between 50-55,000 words long and concerned with the development of true love (with a view to marriage) between lady, 17-28, and gentleman 30-45 (must be rich and/or powerful). Exotic location preferred, happy ending essential.

We believe that the so-called formula is only the beginning, and that originality, imagination and individuality are the most important qualities in a romance writer.

We look for a genuine love story combined with freshness and originality of approach. Sincerity and belief in the characters as real people communicates them to the reader.

The story need not be complicated - in fact a simple tale introducing only a few characters besides the hero and heroine is often very successful.

The dialogue should be completely unstilted. A would-be writer should be aware all the time of everyday patterns of speech, and try to make the characters as true to life as possible.

Equally important is the background against which the story is set. It is vital that this should be as accurate as research allows, although there is no substitute for an author's personal knowledge of a particular background. An inaccuracy can spoil a reader's enjoyment of a scene.

This care must be extended to small details, and customs.

