

Pen's In Motion

Mini-5-Lesson Writing Course
by Billie A Williams © 2008



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*Pens in Motion*TM

Sometimes all you need is a little push, a little inspiration to get your writing off to a whole new level – or sometimes to even get it started at all. This is where this e-course will come to the rescue.

Test drive five lessons from my series of writing books designed to get your writing moving. We will explore lessons from:

1. *Writing Wide, Exercises in Creative Writing*
2. *Characters In Search Of An Author*
3. *Spice Up Your Writing, Write to Entice*
4. *Mystery, Muse and Manuscripts*
5. *Playing With Plays*

It's a short little course. One lesson a week, with personal responses to your work if you care to submit it for critique or evaluation.

You are under no obligation to continue or to do anything at all with the lessons you receive. If it interests you – please join our little circle of *Pens in Motion*. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Write like the wind!

Billie A Williams

*Pens in Motion*TM

www.billiewilliams.com

<http://printedwords.blogspot.com>

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## **Pens In Motion Course**

**Writing Wide - Lesson One**  
**December 2007**

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Greetings!

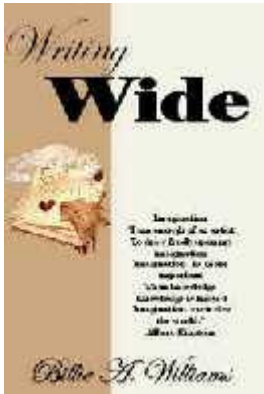
I'm so glad you decided to join us for some fun, informational and I hope inspiring creative writing challenges. I will be using three of my published books to pull these lessons from. Some of you are already familiar with my book *Writing Wide, Exercises in Creative Writing* - so rather than use the much familiar first chapter of this book I've chosen another - Corralling the Wild Stallion of Your Writing. I hope you will find it equally as entertaining. I hope that it will inspire you to stretch yourself - try new techniques and find your own internal editor when you need him/her.

Now let's get busy. But have fun and WRITE ON!

Billie

Corralling The Wild Stallion in Your Writing

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CORRALLING THE WILD STALLION

by Billie A Williams © 2007

Excerpted from and expanded

Writing Wide, Exercises in Creative Writing

ISBN 0-9710796-3-3

Filbert Publishing

Wimpy Verbs

Adverbs and Adjectives

Clichés

Metaphors

Similes

Prepositions

Redundancy

CORRALLING THE WILD STALLION

Reining in the Wild Stallion of Your Writing

by Billie A Williams © 2007

"He understood--Walt Whitman who laid end to end words never seen in each other's company before outside of a dictionary, and Herman Melville who split the atom of the traditional novel in the effort to make whaling a universal metaphor."

David Lodge, English Novelist

Lazy Old Nags and Wimpy Verbs (commonly called weasel words)

An old nag of a horse does not get much appreciation. He or she is slow, plodding, and not capable of carry a full load.

Wimpy verbs such as felt, feel, thought, and think are like the plodding old nag. They

cannot carry a vivid image.

Verbs must convey a very specific thought, emotion or action-that is what verbs do. To put it another way, Verbs should be ACTION words. When you are looking for wimpy verbs, remove the verb modifier. As in this sentence below: (Was is not a verb. It is a modifier/helper.)

Example: The deer WAS snorting. (Passive) reworked the sentence should read. The deer snorted. (Active)

It still gives the image/picture of what the deer looks and sounds like, but in the present tense, giving your story and immediacy, a show instead of tell, with action instead of wimpy "was being, or doing".

Locoweed and Prepositions

If a horse gets into locoweed it does what the weed implies, it makes him crazy confused and disoriented. If left unchecked he will drink water until he literally drowns himself.

Prepositions can make your writing confusing. They can stop the flow of the story you are trying to tell. The prepositions are the "over, in, under," of; "over the hill," "in the house," "under the weather." Did you notice the double error? Not only is the preposition "under" used but also the cliché that contained it. Usually, by omitting the preposition, the sentence automatically gains strength. Thinking "out of the box," becomes creative thinking.

For instance, Jane went in the house.

Compared with: Jane entered the house through the front door.

This sentence gives us more information and shows us where Jane is. Jane is not a ghost who walks in the house, she used the front door. No locoweed. No confusion.

Draft Horses and Adverbs

You will never plump up weak verbs by adding more weight with the overworked "ly" words. Some adverbs can enliven your work. However, for your prose to be effective you must put it on an adverb diet and use them sparingly. Rather like eating a piece of chocolate cake that hits the spot, or tastes deliciously satisfying. Would you really get any pleasure out of eating a whole chocolate cake with chocolate frosting in one sitting? Okay, so initially, it may make you feel pampered, but what about the over stuffed feeling, the feelings of guilt, the added pants size, would you really want to eat a whole cake?

An over weight horse cannot do the work of a sinewy steed. As with your cake, one piece is better than excess with the whole cake.

Try this example: She ate rapidly OR she gulped her food. He vacuumed his food.

The second and third sentences give you a picture of just how fast the person is eating. Where rapidly could mean many things to different people, you understand gulp, you

understand vacuumed. Those words paint a much more vivid picture of our eater. A draft horse is big and meant for work. Your sentences should be big with clarity and sharp active verbs.

Clichés are rather like an appaloosa horse

All those spots but only on his back half make him, excuse the pun, the butt end of a lot of jokes. As with clichés which are to be avoided because they give your writing an apologetic feel. It appears as though you were too lazy to look for a precise or exact word to fit the definition or point you wanted to make. Like the appaloosa's spots, they are all over half of him making him a spotted horse, but not really. To one person the appaloosa horse would be spotted, to another he would be a mixed up breed of a horse.

We use clichés because they are so easy. They are the coward's way out. You need to use your creativity to come up with a better way to say the same thing. Clichés became clichés because they conveyed their ideas or sentiments so precisely. They became like commercial jingles, the first thing that pops into your head when you need to describe something.

Your writing will stand out if you invent a new way of saying the same thing without dragging that overworked lazy-man's-way-out clichés into your prose. Let the mother wonder if that is appaloosa foal, a paint, or pinto meandering away from her.

Redundancy-twins born in the horse world are rare

In your prose, redundancies should never occur. Repeating information should tell you that you have not given your reader an accurate and true description the first time. If you have to repeat a description, an incident's explanation, or dialog, even if you use a different set of words, it still means you did not do the job the first time. Its time to rework your story so that it reflects what you really meant to say.

Rewording the same message, repeating essentially what you've already said, insults your reader's intelligence.

Repeated information is not the only way that redundancies occur. Sometimes we use combinations of words that are redundant. These words add weight but not meaning to your work. Think of the use of sit down or stand up. You know that if you sit, you are placing your bottom on a chair or something similar, at the very least you are going down to do it. You cannot sit standing. Which brings us to stand up? Can you stand down? I guess you could stand down wind, but that is a whole other idea. Some redundancies are laughable in their quirkiness. Comedians use these to their advantage. However, you should not if you want your reader to take you seriously. Read your prose to look for these twin horses before someone spots them and no longer takes your prose earnestly.

All spotted horses are not Pintos, but all Pintos are spotted.

A spotted horse looks like he was caught in a paint fight.

Similes and metaphors can be creative if they enhance the imagery of your story. A simile compares two unlike things. Similes easily become clichés.

A **metaphor** claims one thing IS something else. Metaphors are less likely to be abused because they are more direct. A clumsy or inappropriate metaphor can weaken or destroy your story.

Simile: A Pinto horse looks like a beagle dog with his splotches of color.

Metaphor: A pinto horse IS the beagle of the horse family.

The writer must always be sure that the tone of the simile or metaphor matches the type of story he is telling. A humorous comparison in the form of a simile or metaphor would have an ill effect in a horror/suspense/thriller plot. Unless, your intent is deliberate with the intention of lifting the mood of the terror or tension you have created for your reader, you would not insert a humorous simile or metaphor. That usually is not your intention.

Then too always be alert for the mixed metaphor or simile. One type of reference in juxtaposition with another causes a mixed metaphor. Here is what I mean: In *Woe is I*, Patricia T. O'Conner uses the phrase "Volley of abuse," as a hail of bullets raining down on someone. The same phrase used thusly "the volley of abuse was the straw that broke the camel's back," is a mixed metaphor. We have volley, meaning fusillade of bullets and straw, there is no similarity there. The competing images drown each other out, she says. She illustrates with several more: "The silver lining at the end of the tunnel, or don't count your chickens until the cows come home." Good for a laugh, but they certainly will not do your story any good. It is usually more desirable for you to find a more creative or original way to say something than to use an "old horse that has been ridden hard and put away wet." How often have you seen or heard that phrase used? Cliché you say? Pasha! When you begin to memorize or at least engrain the six ugly nags in your memory bank you will see them "cropping up" everywhere. It is up to you to cut them ruthlessly from the herd of your story corral in order that you use only the most virile steeds, which will result in writing tight, eclectic prose.

EXERCISES:

1. Take a story you have been working on and ruthlessly pare out any wimpy verbs. (I have included a list to help you at the end of this lesson) Take them all out. Then go back through and make your story stronger. Change the verb to a stronger verb form whenever you can. Use a dictionary of synonyms or thesaurus to find better choices if you need to. At the same time, check for adverbs that may be adding word count but not meaning to your story. Your editor will thank you.
2. Look through one of your stories for similes. Can you restate the same sentence using stronger, original words? Weed out redundancies while you look for similes.

QUOTES:

"know the Atman (the spirit, the self; smaller than the smallest atom, greater than the vast spaces) as Lord of a chariot, and the body as the chariot itself. Know that reason is the charioteer; and the mind indeed is the reins. The horses they say are the senses; and their naths are the objects of sense "

The Upanishads, Hindu sacred treatises.

"*The man who is born in a stable is not a horse.*"

Proverbs

"*A fly, sir, may sting a stately horse and make him sin; but on it is but an insect, and the other is a horse still.*"

Samuel Johnson, English Poet, Critic and Lexicographer

"*The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.*"

William Blake, English Poet

WEASEL WORDS

Unnecessary words

About Actually Almost Almost like Already Appears Approximately

Basically Close to Even Eventually Exactly Finally Here Just

Just then Kind Nearly Now Practically Really Seems Simply

Somehow Somewhat Somewhat like Sort of Suddenly Then There

Truly Utterly

Revision, A creative approach about Writing and Rewriting Fiction by David Michael Kaplan

PREPOSITIONS

Aboard About Above Across After Against Along Amid Among
Anti Around As at Before Beneath Beside Besides Between Beyond
But By Concerning Considering Despite Down During Except
Excepting Excluding Following For Form In Inside Into Like
Minus Near Of Off On Onto Opposite Outside Over Past Per
Plus Regarding Round Save Since Than Through To Toward
Towards Under Underneath Unlike Until Up Upon Versus Via
With Within Without

THINGS YOU DON'T WANT TO INVITE TO YOUR WRITING PARTY

Adjectives and Adverbs

Active Actively

Actual	Actually
Real	Really
Total	Totally
Whole	Wholly

Redundancy

Full potential
Completely eliminated
Close scrutiny
Possibly may
Excruciatingly painful
Firm commitment
Exactly identical

AVOID USING

Back with/refer, reply, return, revert, and the like
Mutual with/and, between, both, two and the like
Old with /adage, cliché, maxim, proverb, saying, and the like
Past, previous, or prior with/experience, history, and the like
Record with/all-time, high, new, and the like
Separate with/apart, distinct, entity, independent and the like
Together with /combine, group, join, link and the like.

These are taken from: *The Dictionary of Concise Writing*, by Robert Hartwell Fiske

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Billie A Williams



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Please feel free to submit your excersizes for comment if you wish. Send them to me at billie@billiewilliams.com and I'll get my comments back to you as soon as possible.

I hope you enjoy the exercises and look forward to the next installment which will be from *Characters In Search of An Author*, which is the second in this series of writing books.

Look for your next lesson in two weeks
January 7, 2008.

Have a great Holiday! Write Like The Wind!

Quick Links...

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[www.billiewilliams.com](http://www.billiewilliams.com)

[www.pensinmotion.com](http://www.pensinmotion.com)

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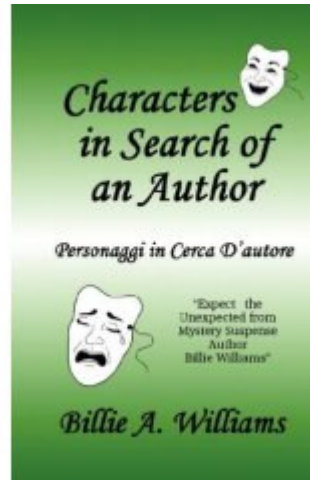
billie@billiewilliams.com

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# Pens In Motion

Lesson Two  
January 2008

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Characters in Search of An Author

[Introduction](#)

[Lesson Two](#)

Greetings!

Characters in Search of an Author, by Billie A Williams ©2007

Every story you've ever read or seen on the screen (television or movies) has characters who carry the presentation to the readers or watchers. Can you imagine a television show without characters? Of course not. Don't say *Christine*, The car IS a character. Did you find yourself believing it was alive and capable of doing what it did? That is an example of characterization that I hope my book *Characters in Search of an Author* will help you to develop.

Strong, noteworthy, believable characters, whether they are a car, a town or some composite of the people you know, the more you know about them before you start to write the better you'll be able to weave your story threads and interlace your plot for your readers. Your characters can play off each others weaknesses or strengths developing a deeper sense of story and connection between reader and character.

Here is a snippet from my book that I hope will help you discover some of what I am speaking about. Read on and then "Write Like the Wind"

Creating Characters That Live and Breathe and Your Readers Love

"We cannot judge either of the feelings or of the character of men with perfect accuracy, from their actions or their appearance in public; it is from their careless conversation, their half-finished sentences, that we may hope with the greatest probability of success to discover their real character."

Maria Edgeworth

CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR

(Personaggi in Cerca d'autore)

Billie A Williams

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Part I

Introduction

"Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds; and until we know what has been or will be the peculiar combination of outward with inward facts, which constitute a man's critical actions, it will be better not to think ourselves wise about his character."

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)

Why should I waste my time with all these character building forms, exercises and readings? Why can't I just dive in and write my story using whatever people I choose naming them as I go along. You can, but the list of reasons why you shouldn't is almost as long as the table of methods, ways and means for building a character

profile.

The short answer is consistency, believability, reliability, and keeping details straight not to mention the extra weight the right name for your character can add to the meaning of your story. Let's look at each of these reasons more closely.

Consistency: The uniqueness of this character, her personality or type, her physical description, where she lives, where she works, who are her friends and family right down to the kind of car she drives or doesn't drive and the reasons she doesn't. Without a profile, without some of the other devices for keeping your character notes straight, you may trip yourself up. Many a time I have been writing up a storm only to trip over questions like -What color were her eyes--How can she flip her pony tail if on page ten I gave her a short spiked hair do? A quick check of the character charts profile gave me my answer easily, sure enough, saved myself from having to re-read to find the character trait that could have messed up my chances for publication because of inconsistencies. There are other ways of a story being inconsistent but that of character is the most glaring.

Believability: Would this character say, do, react or behave in this manner as s/he's been developed so far? If you've done the profile, using zodiac signs and other character trait devices that you can see at a glance you are less likely to have your person do something that would be totally out of character for him or her.

Reliability: Again, you as an author can't force a character who is terrified of snakes into a room full of snakes to pick up a quarter someone dropped in that room. That is an extremely ridiculous example, but you get the drift. Your characters are not checkers or chess pieces, you have breathed life into them - they are real. They will only behave in a certain way given the personality you have developed for them - or at least, should have developed for them. By developing fully, well-rounded characters you give your reader a reason to love, hate, empathize with him or her. Minimally, you should create some emotional reaction between character and reader. A reader will snap a book shut which has no emotional bond or connection to pull her into the story. Think of your character building as CPR for your character's life.

Keeping the details straight when you have two or more characters in your novel, with similar goals, or even opposite goals can be a challenge. Charting background information on them i.e, from the towns they live in complete with streets, stores, restaurants, places they frequent, or even go to once or twice during the course of the novel-your details need to be consistent throughout the story. Your time line of story history can easily become polluted by the time you trek across two hundred pages or more. You can take the hassle out of keeping these things straight if you jot them down as you go. You need to know who was privy to what information or you could easily have your sleuth solve a crime with clues he never had-your reader's will remember that faux pas. Keep tabs on those things as they appear by penciling them in on your original profile sheet - in different colored inks - one for character, one for place names, one for time-line or other information, helps in finding what you seek. I usually print out a character sheet for each significant character in my novel and put them in a protective sleeve so I can keep them near while I'm writing without chance they will become tattered. Any new information is jotted in as I go, keeping it handy if I need it again saves a bunch of back tracking. Slight of hand doesn't work with your reader. The old formula - "if you bring a gun out in chapter one - it better have shot someone before the end of the story," or your reader will

lose faith in you. The same is true of the opposite. If the clue never showed up, then it can't be used to solve the crime or conclude the book no matter what genre it is. Readers like surprises, twists in your story but not things appearing out of the blue to answer the story question at the very end.

If your character has green eyes in scene one, she better not have brown, or blue, or hazel anywhere else in the book unless it's deliberately done with colored contact lenses as a planned disguise.

If your character hoists a magnum to shoot someone, she better know how to use it and have both the physical and the emotional strength, to use it. Deliberately shooting someone takes a certain chutzpah. Not every personality type would be able to kill someone any more than a first time deer hunter can necessarily shoot the first deer she encounters. I would think a human life would weigh much more heavily on a normal person's conscience than an animal, thus the emotional fortitude of someone that would shoot someone must be shown before hand. Somewhere early in your story show your character using a lesser strength that your reader can later transfer to, or recall, even subconsciously that verifies your characters ability to do this. Your character will ring true later when this skill or trait is needed. Do this even if you have to back track to add the proof that your heroine would and could act in such a manner. Your reader will reward you for it by becoming a stanch fan tied to your stories.

Trust me when I say, if you spend the time to develop your character fully before you begin your novel, you will have solved ninety percent of your problems before you start. The writing will be that much easier for it. Even your character's name, as you will see, can have a profound impact on your story.

In *Careers for Your Characters*, Raymond Obstfeld and Franz Neumann say, "To create realistic, well-developed characters, you have to write with authority. Careers-enables you to describe their professional lives with the accuracy and details of an insider. It covers such things as professional jargon and buzz words, Educational requirements, salaries, benefits, perks, and expenses. Each profession's average daily schedule is shown and how job reality differs from public perception of the job. Obstfeld and Neumann list publications and web sites for further research into your chosen profession.

Patricia Cornwell's novels use the career of forensic pathologist. Cornwell is intimately familiar with the profession and it shows in her work. Others such as James Patterson, Dean Koontz, and John Grisham rely heavily on careers that they were involved in before they became writers. I'm not saying you have to be in any one type of profession to write about it with authority; you only need to research thoroughly to add authenticity to your work. It's not necessarily write what you know; more specifically write what you wish to know. Back it up with solid research and you will know it intimately. You can transfer that knowledge to your characters life and actions making them credible and reliable people.

Creating Character Emotions, by Ann Hood gives the author an in depth look at showing instead of telling character actions and reactions. "Sweaty palms, butterflies in the stomach. Pacing back and forth, show your character being nervous," she says using "--fresh images, words and gestures to evoke feelings in your fiction," will set you apart from the novice. How do you show hate-love-fear-grief-guilt-hope-jealousy and other major emotions Hood provides some insight and answers of how you

should put feelings into words?

Take a quick check in your own vault of experiences. Think back to a time when you felt any of these emotions. Record what your physical manifestation of the emotion was at the time. This will give you a very accurate means for showing instead of telling. What did you do? What were you feeling how did those feelings translate to physical. In other words, what were the physical expressions of your emotional state? Did your mouth become dry? Did you have an acrid taste in your mouth, a weakness perhaps that threatened to buckle your knees because you were so angry? Were you ever so scared your chest felt squeezed in a giant vice? How does happy feel? What does it taste like? Use all your senses to show in stead of telling your reader what it is you wish to convey.

"Fiction's traditional virtues--depth, empathy, intimacy --good writing must always be vivid, particular and surprising," says Rand Richards Cooper. "To render character emotions is probably the most important information you can use as a fiction writer," Hood says. Emotions affect every other element of fiction from dialogue and action to character development. Emotions lead us to more believable plot twists and turns, enhance dramatic tension, help illustrate themes and in short, they inform every aspect of our fiction.

When a reader asks you "How did you know?" When you captured the essence of the emotion for them so exactly in one of your characters because you rendered the emotion so well, so effectively and honestly that your reader believed you had read their mind, or been where they had been, you can feel you have told the truth through your character, made him/her believable and worth the reader's time and caring.

The Writer's Path by Todd Walton and Mindy Toomay will lead you through exercises in exploring fiction building that are worth your time. "Stories result from the action of characters. Put an interesting character in a dynamic situation, and you have the makings of a good story," says Walton and Toomay. The raw material for your stories comes from your characters personal histories. Developing their back-story will show you their motivation and agenda if you pay attention as we have said before.

By providing you with the bibliography, the forms I use when I begin a new novel, and information I've learned along the way I hope you will be able to skip the learning curve and jump into developing characters as large as life and novels that speak those truths that need to be told, if only to entertain and enlighten and hold your reader in your story's embrace.

Part I Exercise

1. Consistency and believability how do you develop this? One way is to give your character a career. What career would you choose? My character in *Small Town Secrets*, Chaneeta Morgan, is a cook who owns a café, is a volunteer firefighter and is the Town Chairwoman of her small town.
2. Emotions: Your own will tell you volumes and help you to shape your characters into believable people. How does your system react to Joy?

What physical manifestations say joy or whatever emotion you want your character to display?

3. Think of three actions for your character for escaping a dangerous condition. Write at least one solution each for the following.
 1. His/her car is stalled in a zone posted as a flash flood area; it's raining cats & dogs.
 2. Avoiding a person who is out to get him/her and either beat her up/give him a summons to appear in court or steal his Green Bay Packer Jacket.
 3. Getting out of a burning building when s/he can't reach the door and the windows are way at the top of the walls of a warehouse.

Quick Links...

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## Spice Up Your Writing! Write to Entice.



**Pens In Motion - Lesson Three  
January 2008**

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in this issue

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[Spice Up Your Writing Lesson](#)

[Exercise](#)

Greetings!

Thanks for sticking with us for lesson three. Here we will use ordinary spices to perk up your writing with the idea of moving it from the slush pile to the accepted pile on an editor or agents desk. There are some things you can do to add some zest to your prose. Let's see what that might be.

Spice Up YOur Writing Dedication

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To all the people who have a book in them just waiting to be written. Especially to my **Word Mage Writing Group** for their unwavering support, generosity with their time and commitment and the kindness you always show to me and to each other. May your blessing exceed your generosity and caring.

**Spice Up Your Writing! Write to Entice**

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## Spice Up Your Writing Lesson

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#### BEGINNINGS TO THE WORK DAY

#### THE MASTERS

JACK KEROUAC - used to light a candle at the start of his writing session and extinguish it at the end.

WILLA CATHER - read a passage from the Bible

SOMERSET MAUGHAM - donned a certain hat

STEPHEN KING - starts his day with a glass of water or tea, a vitamin and turning on the stereo. He finishes his day by placing a statue of Rocky the Squirrel from the cartoon Rocky & Bullwinkle on his work for the day.

*"The cumulative power of doing things the same way everyday seems to be a way of saying to the mind; you're going to be dreaming soon."*

*If you need to get unstuck out of a rut "A simple change can surprise your system and provide a burst of creative inspiration,"*

Quotes from NAOMI EPEL author of *The Observation Deck*

## CHAPTER ONE

### BEE BALM - THE HOOK, BEAUTY AND ATTRACTION

#### Bee Balm:

Its fragrance attracts bees. Its Beauty attracts the eye and the butterfly. Its smell intoxicates, hooks the gardener, visitor, casual stranger to come closer, linger a while.

That is what, ideally, your first sentence, but for sure, your first paragraph should do to your reader. It should attract your reader like bees to bee balm, give them the nectar they seek.. Bees suck nectar with their long tubular tongue, Butterflies use their feet to taste-Think of your reader as a voracious cross between butterfly and bee. Give them something to suck on, to immerse themselves in.

Go to your bookshelf and pull a few favorite books from it. Or go to the library and pull a few good books or classics to study the openings. What brings you inside? What calls to your insatiable sweet tooth? What nectar of the gods makes you want to wade in with both feet?

#### EXAMPLES:

I'm tempted to use Stephen King as an example here because he is so good; but he's been used so much let's look to new lights to illuminate the bee balm of hook.

Jude Deveraux *The Mulberry Tree*

"He needed me." What a great first line. Is it a statement, an excuse, a plea-what is it the reader begs. "When ever anyone-usually a reporter-asked me how I coped with a man like Jimmie, I smiled and said nothing." But she just said, he needed her, so why-what secret is she holding back, the reader wants to know and why would a reporter ask in the first place. What was this Jimmie-tyrant or slave owner or-one wonders. Ms. Deveraux has hooked her reader.

James Patterson, *Honeymoon*

Begins with a prologue-don't skip it or introductions when they are in a book as they lay the ground work for what's to follow.

"Things aren't always as they appear. One minute, I'm totally fine. The next, I'm hunched over and clutching my stomach in sheer agony. What the hell is happening to me?"

He goes on to describe the intense and horrific feel of dying via - what? Poison, gunshot, knife wound? Is he dreaming, once again the Bee Balm pulls the ever searching butterfly (you may substitute reader) in for a look see at what's unfolding.

Let's try Michael Crichton, *State of Fear*.

"In the darkness, he touched her arm and said, 'Stay here.' She did not move, just waited. The smell of salt water was strong. She heard the faint gurgle of water.

Then the lights came on, reflecting off the surface of a large open tank, perhaps fifty meters long and twenty meters wide. It might have been an indoor swimming pool, except for all the electronic equipment that surrounded it.

And the very strange device at the far end of the pool."

Right away the reader wants to know what are these people doing? What is this swimming pool that isn't? Water, electronic equipment, my hackles bristle-water and equipment sounds like experiment-are these people scientists thieves, spies involved in espionage-the title *State of Fear* flashes across my mind and I have to read further.

Michael Connelly, The Harry Bosch Novels - *Trunk Music*

Has an interesting beginning. One that slowly pulls the reader in but takes a leisurely written first page, as we ride along with Harry Bosch to the scene of a crime in LA. But he pulls us in because first, we want to know about the music he hears-"It came to him in fragments of strings and errant horn sequences, echoing off the brown summer-dried hills and blurred by the white noise of traffic carrying up from the Hollywood Freeway. Nothing he could identify, all he knew was the he was heading toward its source." He goes on to describe the scene he approaches with squad cars, detective cars, yellow crime scene tape "used by the miles in LA," and a uniformed giant with a Billy club (baton) with the black acrylic paint scratched away to reveal the aluminum beneath. "Street fighters wore their battle-scarred sticks proudly, as a sign, a not so subtle warning. This cop was a head banger." Then he gives the cop the name "Powers". The reader needs to know - what is it that happened here calling for all the attention of the police and detectives? Is this cop Powers part of the problem or the solution? What is the music Harry Bosch hears?

Now lets take a look at one or two of the classics, what is it that makes them so enduring-what, how do they hook the reader?

*Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott

"Christmas won't be Christmas with out any presents," grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

The first sentence is a tug at your heart strings, whether woman or child, no presents at Christmas-unthinkable you need to know more.

### *Gone With The Wind*, Margaret Mitchell

We begin with a picture of our heroine, Scarlett O'Hara. Her beauty. We want to see her aristocratic life, but it's the second paragraph that grabs the reader.

"-But for all the modesty of her spreading skirts, the demureness of hair netted smoothly into a chignon and the quietness of small white hands folded in her lap, her true self was poorly concealed. The green eyes in the carefully sweet face were turbulent, willful, lusty with life, distinctly at variance with her decorous demeanor. Her manners had been imposed upon her by her mother's gentle admonitions and the sterner discipline of her nanny; her eyes were her own."

Then we begin to wonder what secrets those eyes will reveal as we watch from our perch on the tip of Margaret Mitchell's pen.

I can't leave this topic without looking at my three favorite authors.

### Patricia Cornwell, *Trace*

"Yellow Bulldozers hack earth and stone in an old city block, that has seen more death than most modern wars, and Kay Scarpetta slows her rental SUV almost to a stop. Shaken by the destruction ahead, savaging her past.

"Someone should have told me," she says."

This beginning is loaded with questions. Between the Yellow Bulldozers, earth and stone, we are tempted to think cemetery because we see the words more death than modern war-where else? But we're thrown by "the old city block," and why would or should someone have told her-Kay Scarpetta. As you continue you are plunged deeper into questions, plot, reasons and the definitions of the main character. "Where you used to work when you were young and full of hopes and dreams and believed in love, well-" We need to know-used to work? No longer young? Why come back, and more questions crowd in and beg to be answered.

### Mary Higgins Clark, *My Gal Sunday; A Crime of Passion*

"Beware the fury of a patient man," Henry Parker Britland IV observed sadly as he studied the picture of his former secretary of state. He had just learned that his close friend and political ally had been indicted for the murder of his lover, Arabella Young."

As we continue we get seeds of Henry Britland's life at the moment. The questions from his pampered wife. We know where we are and many circumstances of the person accused of the murder and more. We are invited to be in privy to the lives of aristocratic indulgence.

Questions-oh yes, tons of questions.

Do you see a pattern here? When an author peaks your curiosity-when questions jump out in the mind of the reader-the need to know grabs us on the author's hook and we are tethered for the journey.

Everything you read tries to snag you away from the myriad of other distractions with which you may be inundated. Children's stories, if they're good are no exception, in fact they are a greater challenge for the writer - the good part is the naturally inquisitive nature of the young.

Frances Hodgson Burnett, has a power, a magnificent grace with her words that draws the reader. *The Little Princess* tugs you in and bets you to lose yourself in the adventures of a delightful little girl, but it all began earlier with *The Secret Garden*. "When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle everybody said she was the most disagreeable looking child ever seen"

Why, we want to know and how does one look disagreeable? Hodgson Burnett, continues and supplies those answers, but then the reader wants to know why a child so young could, would be sent away and why she would be allowed to get away with being such a disagreeable child - and why then was she sent to her uncle in the first place.

You Try: Now let's try one on our own.

"Life offers you a thousand choices and this is what you choose," Alexa said throwing her hands in the air in defeat. (This is our first sentence for each - what follows in each category will be the second, and subsequent sentences)

--Does that pull you in? What questions do you want answered right away?

If we continue on we could turn this in to:

A. Comedy,

B. Mystery,

C. Romance,

or any genre you want to write.

Let's try:

A. (A Comedy) She bent down and retrieved the chicken suit. Slipping first one foot then the other into the yellow and white costume, marabou feathers tickled her nose and breathed into her mouth with every breath.

"Hey, you wanted to cater children's parties, so you get to be the chicken," Cathe said giggling at Alexa's struggle with the feathers and wings that wouldn't move like arms are supposed to.

"But I wasn't planning to be a billboard sign standing on the corner of Edenton's busiest street handing out flyers to motorists who are paused at the stoplight. I feel like a nut."

Cathe cocked her head and raised an eyebrow, "and-" she said with a shrug.

(A Mystery)

B. Alexa bent over the body to feel for a pulse. The yellow chicken suit was smudged with mud, the feathers matted with the dark red stain around the knife standing perpendicular to Garrison's chest. "I told you it was too dangerous," she whispered. Her badge glinted in the sun that was swiftly sliding down the skyline. She reached for the radio on her shoulder. "Officer down, in the alley at Wells and Gossamer," she spoke her voice uneven, detached from the personal angst she was feeling.

C. (A Romance)

Alexa watched as Jerard drove his bucket of rusting Chevy into the driveway of the parking lot beside the building. He had been her high school sweetheart before they went their separate ways. She to Harvard law school and he went to the University of Minnesota on a football scholarship. They had stayed in touch all those years, there was no romance left, and now he needed her. Alexa slid her hand across the leather embossed name plate on her desk. Becoming a full partner in the prestigious law firm of Bacon, Taylor and Mercedes had been a hard won feather in her cap. Some football player, turned rock singer just didn't fit in her plans at the moment. The intercom buzzed, "Jerard Klew here to see you," the secretary's voice laced with derision and rudeness announced.

Jerard sauntered in and plopped the chicken suit on her desk. "Here it is, I want to sue the jerk," he said slamming his body into the chair across from her desk sprawling his long legs wide, his arms bent and hung on the back of the chair.

*Arrogant*, crossed her mind as a description of his behavior as she felt the electricity of his gaze undoing her composure as he always did.

Questions-Oh I'm sure you could come up with better beginnings than I've offered you. Don't stop with mine - do some of your own.

**Exercise**

~~~~~

EXERCISES:

1. Pull five of your favorite books from your shelves or the local libraries shelves. Sit down and copy word for word, the hook- the sentence, first paragraph or what ever you think provides the hook. Until you are teeming with questions to ask the author - ask yourself what is it that is pulling you in to read more of this particular book?
2. Do this with at least five books to get the feel for it.
3. Then write your questions and read to see if they are answered and how long before the author answers them-how did the author give them up. Were they all at once or sprinkled nearly through the whole book?
4. Now write five of your own hooks.
5. Then use one of them to write the first paragraph or page of a story, if you feel so inclined continue until you run out of words to apply to that particular hook and then start again with the next.

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# Mystery, Muse, and Manuscript

by Billie A Williams



*“A well-composed book is a magic carpet on which we are wafted  
to a world that we cannot enter in any other way,”  
Caroline Gordon (1895 – 1981)*

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By Billie A Williams

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# CHAPTER ONE

## THE MYSTERY OF WRITING A MYSTERY

There is no mystery about writing a mystery, but there are some things to observe if you want to write a compelling mystery. To qualify as a mystery your story must have certain ingredients; suspense, a crime, a secret, a detective and an orderly resolution.

Certain requirements are peculiar to the mystery genre such as; clues, red herrings, tying up loose ends and a myriad of questions you must be ready to answer: forensics, ballistics, police procedures in the area you are planning to set your mystery – be aware that every state is different and individual cities differ in how their police departments work. You should also have an idea of how the judicial system works and knowledge of investigative procedures.

Researching to authenticate your story is paramount. It's all in the details. Not necessarily Michener-like details but make your setting come alive. *In Writing the Modern Mystery*, Barbara Norville says "Mysteries follow strict guidelines. They introduce the action quickly."

If you begin with the murder, the body being discovered, your reader wants to know whodunit, whydunnit, howdunnit, you have immediate dramatic conflict, which is an essential ingredient of any story. She also says you need to play fair with your reader, just as you must have an orderly resolution, no out of the blue coincidences are allowed. It must be a believable solution created by the cause and effect through lines of your story.

Think of a mystery as a way of examining the dark side of human nature, a means to explain the perplexing questions of crime, guilt and innocence, violence and justice. The oft repeated phrase, "By killing, the evil killer rips a jagged hole in the fabric of society," and your tale begins as someone calls for help and your protagonist/hero/sleuth answers that call.

Mysteries come in many genres and subgenres. *The Marshall Plan for Novel Writing*, by Evan Marshall lists over twenty of them. Other books list fewer, but in short you could say that every genre could be turned into a mystery. You have the cozy whodunit Agatha Christie or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle style, or the hard boiled private investigator and the classic puzzle. There are also police procedural, action/adventure thriller, and espionage, the psychological and romantic suspense genres.

### **A MYSTERY IS:**

**Suspense:** What happened, who did it, why? Events that interrupt or block your sleuth/hero's orderly resolution of the crime.

**A crime** – It must be a crime of some consequence, usually a murder in modern mysteries. It becomes a mystery when solving the crime is the central issue of your story rather than it being something rambling around on the edges as a secondary issue.

**A secret-** Margaret Lucke in her book *Writing Mysteries*, says "...the heart of the mystery is the secret." And the writer tries to keep the reader from discovering the secret before he allows the sleuth to reveal it. Knowing the secret (the who, why, how) before

you begin writing gives you control over your story. The killer leaves foot prints. In my book *Writing Wide*, I explore the various aspects of these footprints/clues and how to keep the killer's separate from the other characters in the story. Tracking down footprints/clues is your plot for your story.

**A Detective-** When your sleuth takes on the challenge and the moral burden to root out evil, to assign guilt, and to impose good, your story begins. "The creation of complex and believable characters is essential to the writing of a successful mystery," Sue Grafton says in her introduction to *Writing Mysteries*.

James N. Frey, *How to Write a Damn Good Mystery* adds that "...three dimensional dynamic characters, which create a complex, believable plot for you, if you let them, fuel the mystery with menace, suspense and dramatic conflict." A big part of creating character is motivation.

**Orderly resolution**, which we discussed above must be, believable and follow logically out of the clues and characters of your story.

Next we will explore the "How to Create Compelling Characters," since characters make the story.

*"Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart."*

*William Wordsworth*

Writing Prompt/Exercise:

1. Go to a store, a garage sale or some shopping mall. Browse sale items and have a brief chat with the seller. Draw up a character sketch for that person and create a short story or a longer piece about the character using some of the items he/she had for sale as important items in a mystery.
2. Your favorite author is writing the forward for your upcoming book. What will it say?
3. Write the word destiny on a piece of paper – either brainstorm clustering thoughts that come to you about destiny or begin a mystery with destiny as your title. You could also explore the meaning of the word through one or more of your characters in your current works in progress.

**Writing a book and writing a play intended to be performed by a group of high school students or a community theater group is a whole lot different than writing the novel. The things that you could show/tell in a novel do not necessarily transfer to stage or screen. A car chase is slightly impossible (not totally impossible) in a stage play (it could be played by film on a back drop -- but normally this is not feasible). I intend to explore how we adapt a book to the stage and/or screen. Check back for the first installment of "So You Want to Adapt Your Novel to the Community Theater Stage."**

## **WRITING PLAYS**

### **Chapter I**

*"I saw that a scene could be complete and whole without words because a play isn't about words, it's about people doing things and speaking is only one of the things they do."*

Roger Hall

A play has to be built, according to Hall. He says you encourage plays to evolve slowly from one idea to another. I like the way he explains it. It is so different from writing a novel or short story that there is no comparison other than both evolve, grow, become what they are meant to be. We sometimes say a book we read was a hundred times better than the movie. Ask yourself why? Could it be that some things defy portrayal on the big screen or stage?

The basic elements of drama you can think of as ACDC; **A**ction, **C**onflict, **D**ialogue, **C**haracter. No where have I read that narrative, fits into the makings of a play. It's rather like the WSIWG of your word program. What you **say** is what you get. (substitution say for see) Writing a play and adapting one from an already published novel are two branches of the same tree. Your eye and ear have to be to the stage - to the action on that stage. The premise is the same. "You begin with a seedling of an idea and nurture it carefully before asking it to bear the fruit of a mature tree ." Hall reminds us.

I believe in order to learn how to write a play you must immerse yourself in the world of the theater. You must see and feel the dramatic format that you apply and why certain choices are better than others for what you are trying to portray.

The emphasis is on **A**ction, **C**haracter, **D**ialogue, **C**onflict the same as in a novel but without the extra verbiage of narrative. With playwriting you have to develop a greater awareness of human behavior, the intricacies of personal relationships and why people act the way they do to each other and to their environment. Your character's reactions are your play. The way they react to their environment, other people, and the world are the primary concerns of drama.

**TRY THIS**

Write a one page scene with action, describing only those things you can see (not feel, or sense, or hear). In this scene you will have no dialogue. Don't worry about using the stage directions you probably are aware of. Just construct a scene, with sound if you prefer--but no spoken words--It can be any where, any time frame or period, containing as many people as you can fit on your stage. Show don't tell will be come acutely obvious as you do this exercise. Try it



## Does It End With This Short Foray Into Learning About Writing?

I certainly hope it doesn't. In this very brief 5-week course we have explored –  
>The Wild Stallion of our writing – from; *Writing Wide, Exercises in Creative Writing*.

>How to develop your characters that your readers will love- from; *Characters In Search of An Author*

>We used the magic of kitchen spices and metaphor to find thyme (time) to write. – from – *Spice Up Your Writing! Write to Entice*.

>How to put a little mystery in your writing no matter what genre you write- from; *Mystery, Muse and Manuscript*

>And finally what part dialogue plays in the overall craft of your writing – especially fiction – from – *Playing With Plays*.

Marketing and promotion, non-fiction writing for name recognition or branding are a few other topics a writer who wants to make a name for his/or herself needs to explore. Where do you find what you need to do that? How did you find this course? Word of mouth, a group you belong to, a book, a blog, a course? Did you do a Google search? Barnes and Nobel University has free courses that can be a great help. Yes, find them at the Barnes and Nobel bookstore link online.

Never stop searching for new ideas to make your writing stand out. Read all the good books you can find on the craft of writing, not merely in your own genre but in all those that you can. It will enrich your writing and help you explore to see what else you might try, as well as help you succeed in writing.

### **Exercise:**

- 1.) Do a Google search for your name. Make note of how many links Google was able to find for it. Now look at a couple of those. Click on the link to see where it may take you. Hopefully, one of them will take you to your website or blog

(You do have one don't you? [There are many free ones – websites or blogs – you could try <http://www.tripod.com> or <http://www.yahoo.com> for a couple places for free websites which also will link you with blogs – or you can do a separate blog at <http://www.blogspot.com> ] There are many more this is just the tip of the ice burg.

- 2.) Do another Google Search for one of your favorite authors. How many links were there? Compare this to your own. See where they lead you on a couple of those links.
- 3.) Can you think of some way to get your name in some of the places that your favorite author got H/Hers? For instance if one of the links is to a listmania list maker on Amazon, can you get them to list you as being similar to that author or in some other capacity?
- 4.) Decide today to do one thing toward marketing yourself or your book, even if your book is not finished yet.
- 5.) Write at least three pages a day on your works in progress. Make a commitment – write a contract with yourself if that makes it more serious to your subconscious mind. Write it down! Write your intention, your goal down. There is power in the written word and your subconscious can't tell the difference between reality and a wish – Your intentions are your dream—help your subconscious work on ways to make that happen. Write them down and make them happen. Remember, “if you can conceive it, and believe it —YOU CAN ACHIEVE IT.”

Good Luck and always Write Like The Wind.  
Billie

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These books are available from the publisher, Amazon.com or your favorite bookstore, though they may have to order them if they do not have them in stock. When you do buy the books, if you would like an autographed book plate to stick in them just send me an email at [billie@billiewilliams.com](mailto:billie@billiewilliams.com) and I will be happy to send you one – I will need your snail mail address to do that.

*Mystery, Muse and Manuscript, Playing With Plays, and Marketing Your Manuscript* are works in progress that I hope to have in the publishing queue very soon.

Feel free to send me comments, questions, work from the exercises that you want feedback on or just a note whenever you feel you would like to.  
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Thank you for participating in these short lessons.

*Billie A Williams*

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Ancient Secrets September 2008

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A novel of Sorcery, Jealousy, legends and adventure in the darkest regions of the Valley of the Kings in South Africa's jungle heat.