

Advice for Writers

by Paulette Callen

If you are an established writer, you certainly need no advice from me.

If you are a new, just-starting-out writer (and that doesn't mean YOUNG...you can start writing at any age), I do have some advice (if you are writing fiction). In order of importance:

1. **READ!** Read everything you can get your hands on. And if for some reason you missed the classics, read those first.
2. **JUST DO IT!** The only way to write is to write. I've met a number of people who say, "I'm going to write a book when I retire," or "I know I have a book in me. When I am ready, I will write it." No, you won't. You will not suddenly write something as long, as difficult, as time consuming and painful as a book. Not if you have not been writing all along, exercising that muscle, practicing your craft. Yup. Sounds trite. But true.
3. **FIND A WRITERS' WORKSHOP.** If you can't find a workshop, then find writers who are better than you to read and criticize your work. Constantly. If you do not need a writers' workshop, then you probably aren't reading this website. If the first workshop you join doesn't feel right, be honest with yourself. Is it that you just can't take criticism? Or is it not the right workshop for you? If it is not the right workshop for you, try again, till you find the right one. Don't give up.

If you are not writing fiction, all I can tell you is get a good working knowledge of grammar and punctuation. You'd be surprised how many people don't have it. The education system has failed you. After that, seek out the advice of writers in your field.

After you have written your novel, and a million people have read it and commented on it, and you have revised it and it is now perfect, the hard part starts. You have to do a mailing to all the agents in the world who handle the kind of book you just wrote. You can find lists of agents in books and on the web (and pay attention to what they want you to send...none will want the whole book until they request it. Follow their instructions.). This is tedious, often expensive, administrative work. Keep in mind that you will probably get 30 or more rejections for every bit of interest shown. If you don't find an agent, pay attention to why they have rejected you. Some will offer comments. Some won't. Maybe you have more work to do. Or, maybe you have to now tackle a mailing to independent, smaller publishers that do not require agented submissions. Again, this is tedious, but if you don't do it, you won't be published.

Good luck. Keep writing.