

Everyone has a book to unleash – do it

It's been said that within each one of us is at least one book dying to come out so that others may share in our life experiences. I tend to agree and try to encourage new, budding authors to keep at it no matter how monumental the task becomes. As the author of two published e-books set for release into paperback in 2005, the question I hear most often is, "Where did you start when writing your books?" My answer has never wavered: on page one, with no outline, no ending in mind, no title, and at times, no idea what was happening next until my pen hit the paper.

But not everyone writes the way I write, and each one of us is different in the way we approach writing down what we want to share with the world. W. Somerset Maugham, an English novelist and the author of the critically acclaimed "Of Human Bondage," said it best: "There are three rules for writing the novel.



**As I
see it**

Peg DeMarco

Currently, I'm helping a talented, young script writer develop his first script and some of the tips I've given him are:

1. Write about what you know. No, you don't have to visit Spain in order to use it as your setting, but do some research on cities in Spain, its history, geography, customs, food, music, etc., if you don't have firsthand knowledge.

If you know a lot about flowers, make your heroine the owner of a flower shop. If football is your passion, let the hero of your book be-

Unfortunately, no one knows what they are."

Maugham was right — there are no sure-fire ways to produce a novel, but there are some pointers that I thought I'd share with you.

come the hero on the football field. For those of you who want to produce a murder mystery, study up on forensics and read plenty of crime stories.

Horror stories are always popular, but aliens have become rather passé these days because they've been used too often, so think of something else if you choose to go in this direction. Vampires, however, are still going strong in the e-book arena. Science fiction writers have a bit of an edge here because they can write about anything as long as they exhibit good imagination, but they still have to do their homework so that their inter-galactic creature doesn't come up flat.

2. Write only when you want to and not under duress. No writer can produce good work if he or she is tired or just isn't in the mood. If you don't feel like writing on a certain day, don't. Determine when you do feel like writing, such as in the early morning hours or late at night.

If you find yourself sitting in front of your computer or typewriter with a blank page after 15 minutes, get up and take a walk or have a cup of coffee/tea on your porch. Relax. Sit down again after 30 minutes and try writing a few sentences. If it still doesn't come easily to you, pack your stuff away until tomorrow. It took me more than a year to write each one of my novels, and some nights I wrote a paragraph while other nights I produced 10 pages. Then it took years perfecting what I did write!

3. Make the dictionary and thesaurus your best friends. For instance, instead of saying, "She was a beautiful redhead," be-

come more descriptive by saying, "Her crimson hair, fiery as a setting sun on a darkened horizon, and fragrant with the scent of heather after an early morning rain, fell carelessly down her soft, ivory shoulders." Get the picture? Can you see her a little more clearly in your mind?

A book that helped me and one that I still treasure, "The Romance Writers' Phrase Book," by Jean Kent and Candace Shelton, is a terrific guide to help writers "say it with passion." It contains more than 3,000 descriptive phrases that can turn something mundane and common into something powerfully descriptive. It isn't limited to romance and can be used for any genre because it describes facial expressions, emotions, moods, voices, colors, body motions, etc.

4. Develop a thick skin and accept criticism gracefully. This is probably the most difficult thing to do because it's human nature to defend what we write and to shy away from having someone read it and then dissect it into a million pieces.

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You've poured your heart and soul into your novel and then, all of a sudden, someone is telling you that it's not good enough and needs to be re-written. Let me confess that I've killed many trees when I think about all the reams of paper I've gone through re-writing my manuscripts. But criticism isn't meant to hurt — it's meant to help — so rather than fight with your editor or throw up your hands in disgust, embrace criticism and use it to perfect your craft.

5. Believe in your work and treat it with respect. When you don't know how to spell a word, look it up — don't guess. Use spell check on your computer before you save every draft.

Refrain from using the same descriptive words over and over again.

Never use slang and refrain from using trendy phrases that may be passé a year from now.

Check your dialog by reading it aloud — is it clever and catchy or boring and dull? Re-read your work often and make your seal of approval count.

In my next column, we'll take the novel to the next step — finding an agent and avoiding the pitfalls of the publishing world. This might be a good time to dust off that half-written manuscript or that short story you started a few months ago and make a promise to finish it — now!

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