


The essential resource for writers since 1887

ON THE COVER

24 How to keep your story moving with simple actions [Step by Step]

Giving characters simple actions and gestures can work wonders in your fiction, doing everything from adding sensory details to creating tension.

BY BETTY WILSON BEAMGUARD

 writermag.com: For resources to learn more and a writing exercise.

13 A free self-study plan for budding short-story writers [Get Started]

Good writers learn from good examples. Here's a self-study program to get you started.

BY ERIKA DREIFUS

14 Father, son get a book out of a fresh idea [Breakthrough]

When an 11-year-old had an idea for a computer book, father and son ran with it—all the way to publication.

BY PETER SELFRIDGE

15 The fine line between fact and fiction [Off the Cuff]


Under pressure to create narrative drama, some nonfiction writers manipulate the truth and risk the reader's trust.

BY RALPH KEYES

18 Less inspires more [2005 Sylvia K. Burack Scholarship winner]

The winning essay in this year's scholarship contest finds surprising instruction and inspiration in a book on modern architecture.

BY MARION MAENDEL

 writermag.com: For guidelines on entering next year's essay contest.

20 Murder on the Cape

Maria Flook seeks deeper meanings in the dark corners of life on Cape Cod, and stirs debate with her blending of fact and fiction.

BY SARAH ANNE JOHNSON

26 15 sidebar editors will love

In querying magazine editors, sidebars can be the sizzle that helps sell the main course. Try our menu of 15 kinds of sidebars.

BY JOHN K. BORCHARDT

28 Avoid common 'plotheoles' [Step by Step]

Basic plotting errors can sink your novel. Our seasoned road crew shows you four types of plotheoles and how to repair them.

BY HAL BLYTHE
AND CHARLIE SWEET

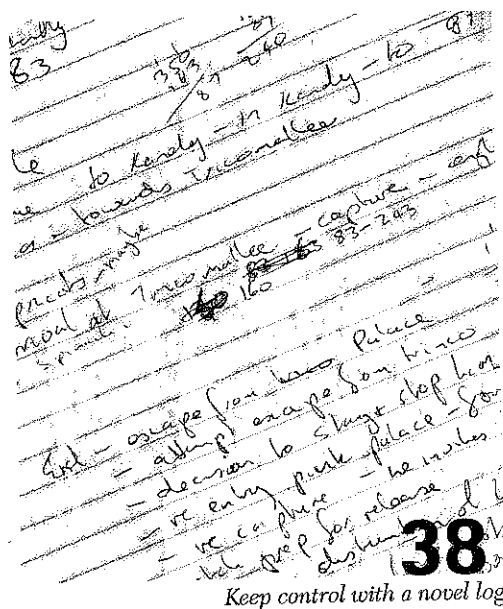
32 25 best Web sites for writers

Our writer has been busy surfing the Net for good writing sites. Come see his "buried treasure."

BY STEVE CROSS



Read our winning scholarship essay



Markets

51 *Prairie Schooner* [Literary Spotlight]
This month's spotlight is on the venerable literary journal *Prairie Schooner*, describing its tone, preferences and contributors.
BY GREGG ROSENBLUM

52 Think small and prosper [Market Focus]
Independent publishers seek out literary and "noncommercial" books, and many are open to unagented writers.
BY JORDAN E. ROSENFELD

55 Small publishers
This month, our annual guide to publishers, plus helpful tips from editors at Discovery House Publishers and Leisure Books.
COMPILED BY BETH BAKKUM



Clockwise from above: Mortimer Levitt, Bel Kaufman, P.D. James, Frieda Arkin and Art Buchwald.

80 and older and still writing



Maria Flook: An eye for telling details

Nancy Crampin

Etc.

The Writer is a two-time winner of the Folio Magazine Editorial Excellence Award

Send us an e-mail
Customer service/
subscription questions
customerservice@kalmbach.com

Dear Writer questions
jreich@writermag.com

General queries and
submissions
queries@writermag.com

Letters to the editor
letters@writermag.com

Queries for book and
product reviews
jreich@writermag.com

Order back issues of *The Writer*
Back issues are available for \$5.50 each, plus shipping and handling (two-issue minimum). Browse the contents of past issues at www.writermag.com/wrt/html/issues/index.html. To order, call 800-533-6644 (outside the U.S. and Canada, 262-796-8776, ext. 661), weekdays 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Central Time.

34 Still writing after all these years

Advanced years don't mean an end to a productive writing life. Just check out our author panel.

BY LEWIS BURKE FRUMKES

38 Novel log can rein in unruly first draft [Step by Step]

Nagged by meandering plot threads, inconsistent characters? A logbook can keep you on track.

BY JILL ABBOTT

writermag.com: For examples of how other writers track their novels.

42 Training for the big 'race' [Get Published]

Better start your stretching: An agent offers useful tips for getting your promotional plan in shape.

BY ANDREW ZACK

48 Get yourself unstuck [Writer at Work]

How a veteran novelist learned to jump-start stalled stories by getting posterior *out* of chair.

BY WILLIAM G. TAPPLY

writermag.com: For a *Before and After* sample from his novel.

DEPARTMENTS

6 Editor's Notes

7 Letters

8 Take Note

The increasing popularity of audio books, the discovery of an unpublished play by Jack Kerouac—plus other literary notes, a warm-up exercise for writing groups, Dear Writer, and information on contests and conferences.

45 WriteStuff

A look at *78 Reasons Why Your Book May Never Be Published* and *14 Reasons Why It Just Might* by Pat Walsh, plus some brief reviews of other new writing books.

62 Classified advertising

66 How I Write

For bestselling novelist Jacquelyn Mitchard, fiction means finding meaning in ordinary lives.

writermag.com: For more on Mitchard's routine and writing journey.

This month at writermag.com

- Has e-mail taken the place of letter writing? We posed this question in a recent newsletter; readers respond in **Web Only**.
- Starting in late August: *Writer* subscribers will have access to our online database of 2,500+ markets in **Market Listings**.

Some books in this issue were provided by Harry W. Schwartz Bookshops, Milwaukee: www.schwartzbooks.com

Cover photo of Jacquelyn Mitchard by Patricia Kelly

The Writer (ISSN 0043-9517, USPS No. 474-330) is published monthly by Kalmbach Publishing Co., 21027 Crossroads Circle, P.O. Box 1612, Waukesha, WI 53187-1612. Postmaster: Send address changes to *The Writer*, 21027 Crossroads Circle, P.O. Box 1612, Waukesha, WI 53187-1612. Periodicals postage paid at Waukesha, WI, and at additional offices. Canadian Publication Agreement No. 40010760.

Our cover quote: In his prize-winning short story "A Small, Good Thing" (*Ploughshares*, Summer/Fall 1982), Raymond Carver uses simple actions and small gestures to move a tragic story forward to a poignant and surprising ending. In the process, the chasm between a simple baker and a distraught couple is at least partly bridged. For more on how to put small actions to work in your fiction, turn to page 24.

keep the fun of Bond, I realized I couldn't spend a year with his exact female equivalent.

A page in my logbook is headed: *Words to describe James Bond*. I circled the words that described Morgan, my protagonist. The list included:

- lusty
- sexist
- sophisticated
- cold
- fighter
- promiscuous
- ruthless
- single
- heroic
- irresistible

I also had written the word *temptation* followed by a question mark. I wanted Morgan to feel sexual temptation, but unlike Bond, I wanted her to resist.

I wrote more notes on *Bond then and now*. Bond is the product of the 1960s sexual revolution. I wanted a new character. What if Morgan were married? From Elizabeth Bennet to Bridget Jones, women's stories end when they get their man. Could I get away with a *married* female Bond?

3. Point of view

Traditionally, thrillers are written using multiple points of view. You can create suspense and menace, for example, by presenting the villain's point of view.

Morgan, a strong character with a sassy inner voice, encouraged me to explore first person. But this wasn't a literary novel, and by reading my list of chapters I could see that first person placed too many limitations on the plot. In addition to naming the chapters, I had listed the cast, setting and goal for each. Since Morgan was absent from one of the chapters, the first-person point of view was unworkable.

My log revealed another prob-

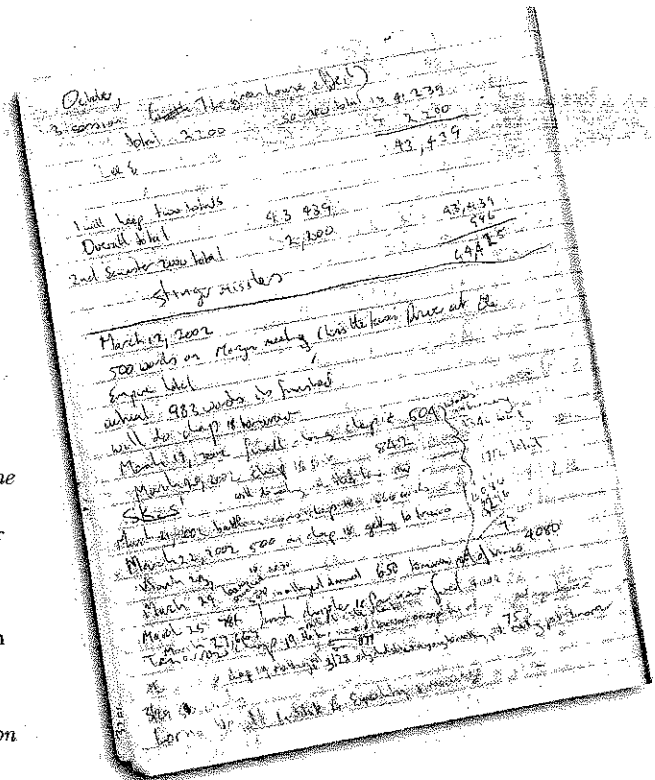
lem. In Chapter 1, a first-person description of the bad guy bogged down. I switched to third person limited. Here are my notes:

March 2: Morgan describing Jacko, 1st Person

What is it with bald guys and the comb-over? I mean, does Jacko think I'm going to describe him to someone as the guy with hair? Bald can be sexy, but the dozen strands of oily hair?

May 26th: More notes on 1st Person

Reads like a stand-up routine. Too much emphasis on Jacko's hair. Bugged down. It's a thriller, remember.



Workout

ONE: Start your logbook

Decide how many words you'll write each day for the next two weeks. Be realistic: at least 50 words, no more than 2,000 (recommended: 500-1,000).

Designate a notebook exclusively for your current novel. At the beginning of each writing session, jot down the date and: *Today I will write 500 words of the scene where ...* Write the 500 words (elsewhere). Just let words come; don't censor or edit. This is a first draft.

Once your goal is reached, you can keep writing but always stop in the thick of it, when you still have more to say (provides motivation to return to the work next day).

End the session back in your notebook with: *Tomorrow I will write 500 words in which ...* Add any additional ideas or questions that occur to you.

At the end of two weeks, tally your words. Read over the jottings. Are the characters coming alive? Are you developing a vision of your novel? Do scenes flow from one to the next?

TWO: Create a character log

Head a page in your notebook with a character's name.

List words to describe him/her.

Print and read a chapter. Do you want to add words? Remove words? Does the character's backstory fit with these words?

—Jillian Abbott

