

The Writer Within -- Embolden Your Writer with a Plan

Article Four: Let Me Look into That – Part Two

By Janice Alonso

Now that you've enriched your idea with related information and considered different ways in which it can grow, you next need to decide "what to make of it." How you'll showcase your idea is vital for you to know before you begin the writing process. The way in which you present your idea to the reading world will direct how you'll structure your story.

During the research stage your writer within will place his/her fingerprint on the story. Think of your idea as the lump of clay in a potter's hands. Once the artist has selected his material, he alone will shape it into its final form. Thousands of writers have written mystery stories.

Thousands of musicians have written love songs. Thousands of actors have portrayed zombies. But how you as the writer shape your idea will set your completed work apart from the many stories this idea has generated before. Remember, this is *your* story and what *you* chose to do or not do with the idea and its related components will make it uniquely *yours*. So, now is the time if you haven't done so already to decide on your message, audience, and form. Knowing these things will not hamper your creative spirit; in fact, they will strengthen and clarify the actual writing process when you arrive at that stage.

The message is the "point" of an idea. Your message is what gives your story its direction, cohesiveness, and takes your reader to the final destination. When you sit down to write, this message will be your road map. Every example, fact/information, character . . . whatever you choose to expand your idea will take you to that end. Remember in school when your teacher wrote comments such as, "Not relevant," "You're going off on a tangent," "Does not belong," and my personal favorite and one I saw too frequently, "Do you have a point here?" These are the things editors will be thinking as they read your manuscript. They will not take the time to jot down their insights, but the impression has been made on their minds. In this researching stage make sure everything you choose goes back to your original idea. Even if you LOVE a particular joke, personal experience, or character, if it doesn't have a specific purpose for the advancement of the story, don't include it. Tuck that little treasure away for another day.

Next, who do you envision as your audience? What group specifically are you trying to reach with this idea? Your intended readers determine how you will write your story when you begin the actual writing process, so now is the time for you to find out about this group. Your reader's age, experience level, and vocabulary range will lead your writer within as he/she makes word choices, builds sentence structures, and chooses examples to develop the story. Use part of your research time to read other things that appeal to and are read by this audience.

Once you decide on your message and audience you should next consider what form you want your story to take. Will your story be a work of nonfiction or fiction? An essay or personal experience? A novel or short story? A romance or sci-fi? Whatever choices you make will further narrow the direction you'll take. Your selection of form will provide your story's length or word count. Once you have selected the form, if you are not familiar with that genre's guidelines, you'll want to do so now. Make sure you reacquaint yourself with these "requirements" and see if this is the best fit for what you have to say.

Finally, a writer's market guide will provide you with specific places you'll want to submit your manuscript. Most of these markets have restrictions as well. These editors have taken the time to provide you with guidelines and information, *and* they expect you to follow these guidelines to the letter. When I am ready to create that first draft, I have several markets in mind of where I'll be submitting that story.

All the information you gather and the structure you select for your story during the researching stage will not squelch the free spirit you have eagerly waiting to begin writing. I want to repeat: *it is because most beginning writers go straight from the idea to the computer that they wander astray.* Don't shortchange your writer within by omitting the researching stage.

Step Four: Take the an you have infused with supporting information and write down the message, intended audience, form, and several possible markets for developing your idea.