

## The Writer Within – What Kind of Writer Are You?

### Article Nine: How Will You Write?

*By Janice Alonso*

On first thought *how* you write may seem like a needless consideration. But just as you need to know the why, when, where, what, and who of your writing, you need to have a solid plan as to how you will transform an idea into a full-blown story, article, or book. I will share the two approaches I use.

The first one is a detailed outline. In nonfiction I begin with a “bare-bones” one that has three main parts: an introductory section with the idea I’ve chosen to write from, an examples section with points to illustrate the idea, and a conclusion section that states the message. I write this outline from end to beginning, meaning my original outline for “Turtle Steps”

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may have looked something like this:

III – Slow and steady wins the race

II – Personal and professional examples

I – Personal experience of turtle and butterfly garden

You may ask, *why would you write your outline in reverse order?* My answer: *I need to know what my destination will be.* Most writers have the first piece of the puzzle . . . an idea . . . so they know how to begin. I feel it is equally as important to know the end. This unclarity of where a piece is headed is what causes most writers to falter or a piece to fizzle out before completion. The writer doesn’t know the point of what the finished piece is about and as a result begins to wander aimlessly. Where you finally park your reader may be worded differently, but it will still be your intended destination. Look back at my *intended* destination in the above outline. Now, let me give you my actual takeaway for “Turtle Steps” after the piece was ready for submission:

“When we lift our plans to God and then set about on a steady course,  
we’ll always reach our destination.”

This is the same message as stated in the preliminary outline. In the conclusion of the polished piece, however, it was reworded to fit the slant of my story.

Once you have your starting point (the idea), and your ending point (the message), it is easier to fill in what belongs in the middle. In the final column of this series, “Putting It All Together,” I will go into detail about how I fleshed out the outline and the actual process I used for writing “Turtle Steps.” I will take you from idea to final copy using that piece.

I use a second approach with fiction. It is a combination of an outline and stream-of-consciousness. For the outline example as it applies to fiction, I’d like to fall back on the old: boy meets girl, boy falls in love with girl, boy loses girl, boy initiates steps to win girl back, boy takes final dramatic action to regain girl, boy regains/does not regain girl and the story comes to an end. Fiction’s structure looks like this:

I – Exposition

II – Rising Action

III – Climax

IV – Falling Action

V – Resolution

Some authors write in detail each part of the above outline; some even preplan down to how many chapters their book will have and exactly what will happen in each chapter. I do not. I let my imagination flow from my mind directly to the computer. I have an idea . . . usually several ideas I’ve thought through completely, playing out different scenarios in my mind. But when I sit down to write that first draft, I honestly go for it. Admittedly, I’ve caused myself much heartache and needless revision because of this approach, but I feel too constrained when I’ve tried to work from a detailed outline. I do feel, that because of my background in teaching writing and literature, I have a good sense of what goes into writing a short story/novel. Also, having published many short works of fiction has taught me what does and doesn’t work and given me the confidence to stretch my creativity with each new endeavor.

So . . . when I write nonfiction I use a detailed outline . . . when I write fiction I write with a structure in mind but do not use a detailed outline. Because fiction is so complex, you'll find thousands of books and theories about how to approach writing your story. I suggest you research several of these approaches and discover what the "writer within" you prefers.

*Step Nine: Read about and experiment with several writing approaches, write every day, and sign your name to it.*