

Nine Steps to Writing a Novel You Can Sell

By Hillel Black

1) Be a story teller. You would be amazed at the number of writers who do everything but. Often novels come as character portraits or memoirs written as fiction. Absent is any attempt at suspense, any motivation for the reader to turn those pages. As the novel unfolds, the story invariably begins to tread water and then sinks beneath the waves. The reader does not sit on the edge of his or her chair, but instead retreats into a glassy-eyed coma.



2) An oversimplified definition of a good story. Not two cats on a mat meowing at each other or two dogs yawning but a cat and dog growling and spitting and about to launch into heated combat. Conflict, suspense keep the reader reading. Again so often ignored by writers.

3) Premise. You should be able to sum up the story in one sentence A woman police lieutenant and hostage negotiator must establish contact and overcome a faceless tormentor who is determined to make her a hostage of fear. Nora Roberts, High Noon. An act of violence shatters a small town and the daughter of the judge sitting on the case should be the state's witness but cannot remember what happened - or could she. Jodi Picoult, Nineteen Minutes.

4) Sympathetic character. You want to portray a character the reader roots for.

5) Equally important, it helps if you can devise a character who is villainous, evil, bad, someone the reader hates but cannot get enough of. My favorite was Hannibal Lecter. When he arrived on the page, I was always hooked.

6) A love story always helps. They do not have to go off into the sunset. But it would be nice if they get into the same bed. Sex is good. Love is better. Sex and love is best.



7) Surgeons go to medical school, lawyers go to law school. All you need to do is go to Amazon or the bookstore or the library. Read, read, read and think about what you are reading and why the novel works for you.

8) Writing is not something most people can dash off. Morris West, a best-selling novelist, could and did write his novels in his head but most people need paper and pen or a computer. It is an arduous but an enormously satisfying task.

9) Before you begin, write a multi-page outline of the novel. A great example of a superb story teller and novelist who does just that is Ken Follett. Read **WRITING THE BLOCKBUSTER NOVEL*** by ALBERT ZUCKERMAN, his esteemed editor and agent. You will learn how Follett does it.



Hillel Black is a free lance editor of over 20 NY Times best sellers. He is the author of seven books of fiction and nonfiction, including an Edgar award nominee, and has a wide acquaintance in the agent community. He is also a member of the Consulting Editors Alliance.

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