

How to Write Fiction?

(guide for novice writers)

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Introduction

In all my life, I wrote just three fiction literary works; all of them were feature film scripts in the genre of urban drama about inter-cultural relationships (none of them was sold and shot). I'm the person with mainly exploratory and analytical style of thinking; that's why since the childhood creative writing looked like a magic for me. From the very beginning, I searched a way to create high quality fiction literary works on regular basis, because it was considered as one of career paths. But I never could understand how to do it; especially, because I started thinking about writing fiction literary works before mass spread of Internet when I lived far away from world cultural centers, in a cold dull region where people were closed and tended to hide positive emotions. Finally, on the peak of life crisis in the mid of 2000's, I had come to understanding of the process. After this “discovery”, the interest to writing fiction has gradually disappeared. I will never do it again anymore. Probably, I have re-invented the wheel; but maybe, the writing process discovered by me could be useful for other people with analytical style of thinking who would like to try themselves in creative writing. In any case, all further details are based on analysis of my personal experience only; and this experience may be completely inapplicable to your situation. All legal notes listed further should not be considered as a legal advice (I'm not a lawyer). Be careful!

Collecting Material

So, what is the biggest problem for analysts when they try to write fiction? Creating texts. You sit before white piece of paper and don't know what to start from. If I have described you in the previous sentence, then my guide is exactly for you. But in fact creating texts is rather simple

process based on two activities: “translating” creative works of other authors to new historical/geographical environments and writing diary.

“Translation”

Choose 5-10 novels or film scripts you like and rewrite them for yourself with adapting every sentence of the original text to some historical/geographical environment that you know (which should be different from environment used in the original work). In the simplest case, it may be just the environment where you currently live. No original texts should be left in your “translation”. You may meet the term “adaptation” to describe this process, but I prefer to use the term “translation” to highlight that you should not have such target as “creating something unique”. In this process you should temporarily forget about “uniqueness”, forget about “creativity”, and forget about “ideas”. Just “translate” original texts line by line, line by line, line by line. (And yes, it will be rather dull routine work.) There are two goals in this process:

- to “imprint” multiple literary “templates” (storyline templates, dialog templates, character templates) in your mind (it will be useful in the future if your writing career will be successful and you will decide to create more works);
- to create material for the step of writing the first draft.

You may worry that the created text looks like derivative work and you may worry about plagiarism. And also, you may ask, how people with creative style of thinking skip this process in their work? Yes, it is derivative work, and yes, it is plagiarism. **But creators do not skip this process; they just perform it inside their heads (sometimes, intuitively without understanding what they do); even if they tell you the opposite! It is practically impossible to skip this process!** Analysts cannot do it intuitively; they need to do it on paper. However, it does not mean that this derivative work will stay in the final version of your novel/script; please, read further to understand how it will be eliminated. Writing 5-10 translations will take from you **1-2 years** depending on the size of chosen original works and depending on whether you do it part-time or full-time.

Diary

It is the source of unique material for your future literary works. If you never wrote diaries earlier, you may start today. The content of your diary may include almost anything, for example:

- descriptions of events that happen in your life;
- descriptions of situations from your past;
- descriptions of the world around you (both society and nature);
- scientific analysis of political, historical, or economical situations;
- your dreams;
- your philosophic thoughts;

- real dialogs between you and other people;
- all you heard in talks of other people;
- imaginary dialogs you have with people in your head;
- photos;
- videos;
- literary sketches;
- drawing sketches.

You will need to add records into your diary regularly (with creating new records almost daily at least) during 1-2 years before you will collect enough material. All collected material should be categorized by tags to simplify the search in the future. You may think that the term “blog” is more appropriate, but I prefer the term “diary” because the term “blog” assumes immediate publication of created material online. But I suppose, it is not the best idea if you plan to use the created material for the future literary work; moreover, diary (in contrast to blog) may contain a lot of intimate or crazy stuff which is senseless or dangerous to publish.

You started writing diary but you think your life is dull and every page in your diary is the same like the previous one? Well, there are three steps you should do in such case:

- it is good idea to start thinking inside your diary (in text!) why it happens;
- you may start “to break down” your regular life in smaller pieces that may be described in more details; for example, try to communicate with ordinary people living around you and to collect their life stories; you may discover that your old neighbor is a former officer of special army forces, an eternally drunk guy from the next street is a writer too, and your former sweetheart is a professional prostitute;
- or maybe, it is worth to cross the borders of your current life to look for something new; visit several cities/villages in surroundings, for example, as a first step.

Writing diary should be done simultaneously with creating “translations”.

Writing First Draft

So, 2 years have passed since you have started “translating” and writing diary; or maybe even 4 years if you have other interests in your life. Now you have 5-10 good “translations”, a lot of templates “imprinted” in your mind, and a lot of unique material in your diary. It is the time to mix all this together around common idea/topic that really “drives” you. But where to take it? In fact, it is easy too; there are four sources.

- **Break borders of your world.** You may start travelling. You can do it simultaneously with writing “translations” and diary or after that. In the process of travels, you will gradually come to some limitations (financial, physical, legal, political etc) that will not allow you to

move further even if you really want to make the next step. Here is the first source of idea that may mix your diaries and “translations” together into single literary work.

- **Find leading coauthor.** If you have a friend/relative/partner who influences you a lot, then you may just “write for her/him”. This person will guide you through the process by giving you fresh ideas and validating your writings on the fly.
- **Use writing process to resolve your life obstacles.** If you got into unresolvable life obstacles (it happens several times in life of every person) then you may use this situation as a the main topic for your work. You will resolve these obstacles on paper if you cannot do it in real world. Maybe it will help you to pass the difficult period easily.
- **Or just wait for one amazing day.** I mean a day when you are in great positive mood and full of ideas. In such case, you may write the first draft of a novel or film script for 24 hours if all materials are ready. Almost every person has 2-3 such days every year at least.

Note, that material collected for the previous 2-4 years should be enough for writing several novels or film scripts united by some common theme.

Polishing

So, now you have the first draft of your first literary work completed. What to do next? Polish, polish, and polish it. You may find a lot of guide books explaining nuances of styling and grammar. I will not give you advices here. Search by yourself! In the process of polishing, you should also carefully eliminate all similarities between your work and all works of other authors that you used for creating “translations”. For reaching this goal, you should create “translation” from “translation”. It will make the final version of text almost 100% original; only stylistic or genre details will look like taken from other sources. This step may take months. So, the total amount of time spent from the moment of reading this guide up to completion of your first literary work may be up to 3-5 years!

Risks

Here is a short list of risks you will meet in the process of writing fiction. If anything looks terrible for you, then you should never use this guide anyhow.

- Even if you did all I listed above during 3-5 years, you may come to zero result or low-quality result. Well, it just means, that writing is not for you at all. Do not think about it anymore; try yourself in another business.
- “Translation” of texts which are not in public domain (even for self-learning) may bring you into legal/financial problems if these “translations” will be ever published online by accident or by will. (You should understand that “translating” copyrighted works is illegal by itself.) Note, that currently some computer operating systems perform automated default backup of data from your local drive into cloud controlled by operating system company. And these backups sometimes can be undeletable in fact! So, all you write on your computer will be

logged forever by some big corporation, and may be used against you by legal authorities in case of legal conflict. (The technical details of automated default backups were not checked by me; this information is based on articles I have read in the past. You may re-check it by yourself.)

- Even if you have used for “translations” some texts which are in public domain, then if this fact will become known for the mass audience, it may ruin your career in professional writing.
- In the process of writing, you may start resolving your issues and issues of your family/friends on paper instead of resolving them in real world. Obviously, it is not a good idea and it may bring your personal life to catastrophe.
- You may start (unconsciously) to interpret human behavior like behavior of literary characters. But human are not characters; it may bring you into big problems.
- You may start practicing risky behavior in the same way as your characters and characters of other authors do; for example, consuming substances, communicating with wrong people, estimating your physical abilities non-adequately etc.
- **And finally, you may really go mad.** Or you may start looking like completely mad person for people in your close circle of contacts, even if you are still healthy. With all appropriate consequences. (In fact, it is a good topic for a research in neuroscience to understand what happens in a brain of person after several years of attempts to write fiction.)

However, I would estimate the total probability of risks in writing fiction on the same level as amount of risks in mountain sports. In other words, everything is not so terrible as it may look at the first sight. If you have happy family with one or more kids already, then I would not recommend you to try yourself in writing fiction; it may destroy your and their lives. But if you are 13-30 years old and have a lot of free time, then you can try!

Possible Side Benefits

If your writing attempts were not successful (or just were not successful enough), you may use skills gained in these attempts in other fields. For example:

- skills of working with large amounts of texts will open for you doors to such professions as translator, editor, journalist, publisher, software developer, technical writer, popular science writer, teacher of literature etc;
- connections built through extension of the circle of contacts may bring you into different entertainment businesses and to managerial positions in other businesses;
- consuming of substances may decrease your intellectual abilities with simultaneous improvement of your communication skills and sexual life;

- if instead of consuming substances you decided to dive into “serious” sports, as I did (on the peak of training in different periods of my life I worked with 120 kg of weight and ran 15-20 km), then it may improve your health and personal life too;
- the habit to analyze human behavior and social issues will open for you doors into social sciences (and maybe even into political world, if you have appropriate interests and biography).

So, everything may turn out for you really well, as you can see.

Technical Recommendations

I’m software developer in my professional life. So, I can give you some technical recommendations which come from the software development world. Mercurial version control system and online software code repositories may be used to backup all your literary works; you don’t even understand how useful it may be if you plan to work on your literary projects during several years. (Git version control system is more technical and more suitable for software code; so, skip it.) To see difference between versions of your documents stored in the version control system, you need to store them in flat format; if you use LibreOffice then check *.fodt format.

Also, there are many professional tools (free and paid) for novelists and screenwriters that may include version control features; you may find them by yourself.