

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 making 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 in front of screen or white piece of paper and don't know what to start from. If I have described you in the previous phrase, then my guide is exactly for you. 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.

Writing "translations"

Choose 5-10 novels or film scripts you like and rewrite them for yourself with adapting every phrase in 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", "creativity", and "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 created 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.

Writing 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, the following:

- 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 with people that you “speak” in your head;
- literary sketches (incomplete quickly written pieces of creative texts with a size from one line up to several pages that almost anybody can do by inspiration regularly);
- photos;
- videos;
- 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. 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 online. (Sometimes, you should even try to style your diary in the format of creative work to avoid problems if other people will ever read it.)

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. And gradually, implement results of your self-analysis in real world.
- You may start “to break down” your regular life into 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. Even if you are still dependent on your parents, or if you work in low-paid job, I think, you have enough money to travel around every human settlement and every natural curiosity in your region (in the radius of 1000 km, or so). If you are really in the bad financial situation, then you should start building friendly relationships with hitchhikers, truck drivers etc, it will help you a lot.

Writing diary should be done simultaneously with creating “translations”. And yes, it may happen that “translated” stuff will start merging with your real life. So, you should choose works for “translation” very carefully!

How these methods of collecting material have been discovered?

In fact, I wrote all my fiction literary works in the same way as creators do, by inspiration. But after completion, I started to analyze everything I did and have found that almost every part of these works can be tracked either to some situation in my life (real or imaginary), or to some piece of literary and cinematographic materials I have read and watched in the past. However, all these situations and all these pieces of artistic materials were intuitively retold and mixed by me in my literary works in an absolutely unexpected manner that made them very far from original.

Later, I have read in one popular science article that the only that human brain can do is just repeating previous experience and remixing it multiple times, which confirmed my guess that it is the only way to collect material. But it is not “serious”, and if you need more solid scientific basement for these assumptions and methods you need to dig in neurophysiological research papers or perform such research by yourself. For me, all I have “discovered” was enough to repeat creative writing process by will in the same way as I do my regular job.

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 very far. 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. It 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. (Later, if you have entered the professional literary career, it may be your producer or publisher.)
- **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 per 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.

The process of mixing collected material does not contain any magic steps. If you will try to analyze your regular life, you will easily understand that for getting from any point A to any point B you just need to perform a set of communications and actions that may be easily classified into several hundreds or several thousands standard types. This classification applied to the collected material (or invented with using collected material as basement) allows to do the same on paper: you will just take appropriate parts of text from the material and insert them into imaginary route from point A to point B on pages of your literary work. Points A and B in your literary work may be some ideas you want to deliver to mass audience, some real geographic points, some situations etc.

Polishing

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% unique; 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 set of literary works may be up to 3-5 years!**

Marketing and sales

If you worked on your diary really hard, you should not have any problems in this part. You don't need to email your work to “somewhere” and wait months for an answer. Through the connections built in the process of writing diary you will have already several rich persons, several entertainment professionals, and maybe even several “stars” in your contact list. The only you need to do after completing the final draft is to make several phone calls.

If by the time of completing final draft, you have decided that creative business is not for you, then your diary will help you too. Through connections built in the process of writing diary you will be integrated already into some communities of alternatively thinking people: for example, political minorities, religious minorities, professional and novice scientists, mountain climbers etc. And the only you should do in this case is to publish your literary work for free in appropriate social media groups and Internet forums, or promote it with physical copies printed by yourself at some festival or another public gathering of your community. You have a chance to become underground cult writer in such case.

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 if you do it 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 in many cases.) Note, that currently some computer operating systems perform automated default backup of data from your local drive into cloud controlled by company that created the operating system. And these backups sometimes can be undeletable in fact! (It may be cheaper for the company to store data eternally than rebuilding search index on deletions.) So, all you write on your computer may be logged for years by some corporation, and may be used against you in case of legal conflict.
- 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 too.
- 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.
- If you devote too many pages in your diary to some particular persons (like your neighbors including their children, for example), and it will be ever known, then in some jurisdictions it may cause severe legal problems for you.
- In some countries, people who roam around and ask too many questions may be easily arrested and imprisoned. It is good idea to have part-time journalist job or degree of social researcher for such situation, it will explain your behavior. Also, find a good lawyer in advance.
- 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.) That’s why, it is

good idea to relocate to another city or far away to the wild nature in the very beginning of your writing attempts to avoid conflicts with your previous circle of contacts.

However, I would estimate the total probability of risks in writing fiction as comparable to the 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!

Side benefits

If your writing attempts were not successful (or just were not successful enough), you may use skills gained in this period of your life 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 peaks of training in different periods of my life I worked with 120 kg of weight and ran 15-20 km regularly), then it may improve your health and personal life too;
- the habit to analyze human behavior and social issues will open for you doors to social sciences, and maybe, even to political world, if you have appropriate interests and biography.

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

Technical recommendations

You may use software version control systems to backup all your literary stuff daily: either on your own remote server, or just on your local computer; never use public software repositories due to the reasons explained above. Ideally, you should have three copies of your works: one on your computer, another on external drive, and third on the drive stored in bank safe deposit box. As I remember, any modern data storage device sold on the mass market can survive for no more than 10 years. So, having printed copies of your literary stuff instead of using second external drive may be more reliable solution. To see difference between versions of your documents in the software version control system, you should use some flat format: plain text or *.fodt, if you use LibreOffice. Also, there are many software tools (free and paid) for writers that may include version control features; you may find them by yourself.