

Children's Book Insider

The Newsletter for Children's Writers

At Presstime:

Publisher Seeks Accurate Historical Fiction for Middle Grade and YA

White Mane Kids, an imprint of White Mane Publishing, publishes historical fiction for middle grade and young adults that incorporates accurate historical information into fascinating stories. Schools are a big part of the publisher's market, so many titles contain an educational resources section designed to assist teachers in the classroom, which includes a glossary, additional background on the time period or topic, suggested topics for discussion, lesson plans and student activities. Especially interested in stories involving the Civil War, Colonial times and the American Revolution, African American history, and World War II, though other historical eras are also of interest. Sample titles include *Hope in New York City: The Continuing Story of The Irish Dresser* by Cynthia G. Neale; *A Rose at Bull Run: Romance and Realities at First Bull Run* by Maureen Stack Sappéy; *Lottie's Courage: A Contraband Slave's Story* by Phyllis Hall Haislip. Authors must download and print the Proposal Guidelines form at www.whitemane.com/submit-book-proposal/, fill it out and submit it with their manuscript. The Proposal Guidelines form asks authors to include information like a statement of purpose (why the topic is important and how your book adds to existing works), marketing ideas, and a sample dust jacket paragraph that would highlight your book's hook. Submit materials with SASE to Attn: Acquisitions Department, White Mane Publishing Co., Inc., 73 W. Burd St., P.O. Box 708, Shippensburg, PA 17257.

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Publisher Seeks Educational Books with Nature Themes

Windward Publishing, a division of Finney Company, publishes picture books, chapter books and middle grade material with nature themes. Though the company leans toward nonfiction, fiction will be considered if it has a strong educational focus. Recent titles include *A Daddy Longlegs Isn't a Spider* by Melissa Stewart, illustrated by John Himmelman (picture book); *Through Endangered Eyes: A Poetic Journey Through the Wild* by Rachel Allen Dillon (ages 8 and up); *Space Station Science* by Marianne J. Dyson, illustrated by Dave Klug (middle grade). Submit a query letter describing your manuscript, background, and qualifications. Attach a brief (one page or less) overview, table of contents, introduction, and at least three chapters. Also include a short description of the proposed market for your submission. Picture books may be submitted in their entirety with a cover letter containing author and market information. Send with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Submissions Editor, Windward Publishing, Finney Company, 8075 215th Street West, Lakeville, MN 55044.

Call for Experienced Authors to Speak on Censorship

The Springfield, Missouri public library system is looking for authors who either have had a book challenged or banned, or an author who has some educated opinions about the pressures and challenges of writing sensitive material and the issue of censorship. They are hoping to do in-person or Skype visits with the authors who have thoughtful, educated opinions about these issues during Banned Books Week in September. The scheduled times for interviews are 5-9 pm on Sept. 27; 5:30-9 pm on Sept. 29; and 5-9 pm on Sept. 30. The interviews, and the authors' books, will be heavily promoted. Any interested, qualified authors should contact Kathleen O'Dell, Community Relations Director, Springfield-Greene County Library District, at kathleeno@thelibrary.org, or call 417/616-0564.

August 2011

At Presstime:

Children's Book Insider makes every effort to verify the legitimacy of small and new presses and literary agents before printing information in "At Presstime." However, authors and illustrators should always proceed with caution when approaching publishers or agents with whom they are unfamiliar, and read contracts carefully. Go to <http://is.gd/9ta64> for a free copy of our Special Report, [How to Determine If a New or Small Press is Legitimate](#).

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New Agents

Kathleen Rushall is a new agent at **Marsal Lyon Literary Agency** (www.MarshallLyonLiteraryAgency.com). She's open to all areas of young adult literature including fantasy, historical fiction, science fiction, dystopian stories, and contemporary fiction. She particularly likes well-researched historical narratives, edgy or paranormal plots, humorous voices, and dark mysteries. Kathleen is open to unique, quirky picture books and all genres of character driven middle grade fiction as well (especially multi-cultural or boy-driven MG). For all manuscripts, character development and voice are essential. Kathleen also represents select nonfiction and is interested in parenting, cooking, crafts, business, alternative medicine, women's interest, humor, pop culture, and some how-to. For electronic submissions, please send a query letter to Kathleen@MarsalLyonLiteraryAgency.com and write "QUERY" in the subject line of the email. For fiction hard copy submissions, send a cover letter, 1 page synopsis of your work, and the first 10 pages of your manuscript. For hard copy nonfiction submissions send either a cover letter and your complete proposal including a chapter outline, sample chapter, and market analysis. Address to Kathleen Rushall, Marsal Lyon Literary Agency LLC, PMB 121, 665 San Rodolfo Dr. 124, Solana Beach, CA 92075. In all submissions, include a contact phone number as well as your email address. If interested in your work, you will receive a call or email. If not, the agency will respond via email. (Accordingly, do not send a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) and do not send any pages or materials you want returned.) Response time is 1-4 weeks for queries and 4-8 weeks for sample pages and manuscripts.

Melissa Jeglinski, Agent/Submissions Coordinator of The Knight Agency, writes: "**The Knight Agency** is interested in both young adult and middle grade fiction. With six agents actively seeking great talent, we have a wide variety of genre interests and preferences including romance (both historical and contemporary), sci-fi/fantasy and paranormal, witty coming of age stories and heart-wrenching issue books. Our web site, www.knightagency.net provides detailed information about each agent but overall we are looking for strong voices and stories that are entertaining and unique. We ask that you send a query letter to submissions@knightagency.net and include the first five to ten pages of your project in the body of your email as we do not open unsolicited attachments. Our current turnaround time on queries is two to three weeks. We look forward to receiving your exciting, fresh ideas."

In February 2011, Lauren Ruth joined **BookEnds** (www.bookends-inc.com), as a fulltime literary assistant. She will soon have her master's degree in book publishing. In fiction, Lauren is looking for literary fiction, romance, women's fiction, chick lit, young adult, middle grade, mystery, historical fiction, and steampunk. On the nonfiction side, she's looking for memoir, parenting and family, relationships, food and lifestyle, business, popular science, popular culture, and popular psychology. Lauren blogs at www.slushpiletales.blogspot.com. To query BookEnds, please send the query in the body of the email to lruth@bookends-inc.com. She responds to queries in four weeks.

Online Short Story Contest for New Writers

Short-story-time.com, a free web site where children can listen to stories and poems read to them by other kids, while reading along themselves, is holding it's second Short Story Writing Contest. Open to any writers ages 18 and over, entries must be in English, original, unpublished, and not submitted or accepted elsewhere at the time of submission. SST reserves rights to publish all submissions on the web site in print, video and audio formats credited to the author. Entries can be up to 1500 words, fiction or nonfiction, appropriate for children up to age 14. No gore, violence or sexual content. There is no entry fee and no restriction on the number of stories submitted by authors. Deadline for entries is October 1, 2011. Entries can be read online. Visitors to the website can vote on the entries and are encouraged to leave comments. Online voting and comments will be taken into consideration, but winners will ultimately be decided by the webmaster's panel of judges. Winners will be notified by November 15, 2011. Three cash prizes will be awarded: **First Place** - \$150 plus a full membership for 12 months to the CBI Clubhouse; **Second Place** - \$50; **Third Place** - \$25. Go to www.short-story-time.com and click on Writing Contest for complete rules and rights information. **Note:** While CBI is donating a year's membership to the CBI Clubhouse as a prize, we are not involved in the running of this contest or Short-story-time.com in any way. If you have questions about the contest, please contact Kristina Harding through the Short Story Time web site.

The Basics

Theme: Don't Write Your Book Without It

by Jane McBride Choate

Theme is one of those elusive elements of writing that frequently defies explanation.

Theme is the overriding point of a story, what you, the author, want the reader to carry away with him. In my 30th book, *Larrabee's Luck*, the theme is that love can triumph over hardship, even betrayal, when the heart learns to forgive. While the plot is the action of the story, the theme is the unspoken message that the plot conveys.

Too often, theme is associated only with literary writing. No one, including myself, would ever describe my writing as literary. I write to entertain and, I hope, to touch hearts. Any work of fiction can have a theme, even lighthearted, humorous stories.

Theme unifies other story elements—character, plot, dialogue, setting, motivation, conflict, word choice. How can we as writers use theme to strengthen our writing?

◆ **Identify your theme.** You should be able to state it in one sentence. If you have difficulty with this, you may want to clarify the story in your own mind. Search your mind and heart for what you want to say.

◆ **Don't confuse theme with moral.** I intentionally work to keep any moral low-key in my work. Too frequently stories with morals become morality stories. The theme of a well-written story will become gradually evident as the reader observes the character's actions and their consequences, and is allowed to draw his own conclusions. A morality story, on the other hand, beats the reader over the head with its point and sums up the lesson in a heavy-handed way (often via an adult character lecturing the protagonist).

◆ **Use symbols.** In one of my books, I used a necklace with a rainbow pendant as a symbol for the heroine's independence and integrity. The publisher liked the idea so much that it featured a drawing of the pendant on the spine of the book and a stylized rainbow on the cover. It didn't hurt that the title also contained the word rainbow in it.

◆ **Write from your protagonist's point of view, not your own.** Author intrusion is a common mistake, especially among beginning writers. Even more experienced writers occasionally fall prey to the temptation to provide explanations or to comment on their character's behavior (*Sam wisely chose to leave the party before his curfew.*). Such re-

marks pull the reader from the story. In past centuries writers took liberties with the reader, even addressing them with clumsy words as "So you may see, dear reader . . ." Such practices will not fly today. Give your readers credit for recognizing what you are trying to say. Allow your characters to act in ways that reflect their experience and world view. A 10-year-old boy won't be able to predict the consequences of his actions in the same way an adult would.

◆ **Keep theme consistent.** If your story has a theme of "home is a place of the heart rather than of brick and mortar", keep that throughout the story. This goes back to knowing what your theme is. If it is strong enough, it will permeate the plot.

◆ **Use conflicting values and goals to emphasize theme.** What if your story has as its protagonist a middle-school age girl who must go straight home every day to tend her younger brother and sister while her mother goes to work? The girl wants to join a special orchestra group that practices in the afternoon. Her values and goals are at odds. She values her family, but she has a goal to become first chair in violin. These opposing values are the very foundation of dramatic tension.

◆ **Bring passion to the story.** The best books are those written from the heart and with the heart. Ask yourself what makes this story important to you, why it matters to you and why it should matter to others. Then use the right words to share that passion with your readers. If your story features a pioneer girl on the Mormon Trail, show her and her family's struggles to survive. Paint word pictures of the children gathering buffalo chips to use for starting a fire. Employ all the senses to make the scenes come alive. (This goes back to showing, not telling. Are you beginning to see how theme works with other elements?)

Used properly, theme gives layers to stories, intriguing the reader and urging her to want to return to the book to excavate for nuggets that she may have missed during the first read. Theme is what separates a so-so book from a good book and a good book from a great book. Theme is what will have editors eager to buy your work and readers anxiously awaiting your next book.

Which Comes First, Plot or Theme?

When you're developing your story idea, it helps to know the ultimate point you want the reader to take away from your book. But then put the theme out of your mind while you're outlining your plot and writing your first draft. After the basic story's down on paper, see if the action adequately conveys your theme. Are you relying on "telling" devices like lectures from one character to another, or your protagonist summing up what he's learned? If so, work on showing those concepts through your plot and how your character changes by the end of the book..

Jane McBride Choate

is the author of over 30 books, as well as numerous short stories and essays for magazines and anthologies. She has stories in two recent Chicken Soup for the Soul collections: *Miracles* and *Think Positive*.

Outlining Makes Writing Your

The Basic Plot Outline is the culmination of your planning process for a long fiction project. In it, you'll record major information for each scene and chapter from your initial story vision and additional ideas that occur to you. And with it, you'll create your first draft. A young adult novel of, say, 150 manuscript pages might have an outline of eight to ten pages or more, depending on the length of your scene descriptions. It is a valuable tool for fiction writers.

Benefits of the Basic Plot Outline

Why should you spend time and effort creating this outline? Quite simply because with it, you can save hours of time and effort, reducing frustration and writer's block. You can use the outline-building process to work through problems of the events and characterizations, thus constructing a well-built story before you start your first draft.

In addition, you can write the first draft faster and more easily using the outline as your writing guide; your revision time and effort will also be reduced because you've identified and fixed most of the problems during the planning stage rather than revising manuscript pages.

Here is a summary of other general benefits of using outlines with your fiction project:

- ◆ You can see the entire story at a glance, in only a few pages; thus, significant problems with cause and effect or logic flow of the plot are more easily detected.
- ◆ The outline presents a place to record new scenes and to add details for existing scenes, all placed in sequence.
- ◆ It's easier to toss material from the outline that no longer fits your project, than to toss material from pages written.
- ◆ You can evaluate additional ideas more easily as to fit, knowing your plan.
- ◆ The time spent planning pays off with less revision later.
- ◆ You can remove creativity bottlenecks from trying to remember too many details. By placing these details on the outline or a reference page, you don't have to remember them, and your creativity can flow once again.
- ◆ You'll be ready for the first draft, knowing that the story is complete.

Working Toward the Basic Plot Outline

Start by writing out your initial vision of

the story. Freewrite (type fast without editing) until your entire story vision is recorded. Then identify the details contained within the freewriting session in categories: story events, character goals and traits, purposes of events and scenes. You might want to color code your underlining for each category, to find particular details more easily. Also write a brief synopsis of your entire story and post it at your writing space as a reminder of the broad strokes of your story.

With this project plan in mind, start your character development, starting with the main character and the villain or opposing force(s). The story must be based on the main character's abilities, proclivities, struggles with the bad guy and herself, and lessons learned about herself and her fit in her world. The story comes from the main character, so character development is the foundation on which to build the story.

Once you have a good foundation of information about your plot and characters, you can create the blank table to be used for the Basic Plot Outline and start filling in the boxes.

Building the Basic Plot Outline

The Basic Plot Outline contains descriptions of the individual scenes within each chapter, listed in sequence. They contain the important details you need to know in order to write the first draft, including details about events, characters, and purposes for each scene.

Along with your initial vision of the story, you will develop more scenes as you work through the planning process. Write out scene descriptions with their important details and place them in sequence (as best as you can at this point) on the outline. As you create your main character's traits, fears, and abilities, you will develop even more scenes. If you're not sure they actually fit into the story, create a file called "Proposed Scenes" and store your description there for safe-keeping.

As new ideas occur to you, add them to the outline and return to your planning process. Realize that scene descriptions and their sequence will change and solidify during your planning process. Using the outline as your place to record these ideas makes the writing process easier as everything is in one place; you can compare ideas to others already recorded.

Toss scenes and details that are no longer relevant to your story as your concept of the project changes. You might want to create a "De-

Novel's First Draft a Breeze

by Katherine Ploeger

leted Scenes” file to keep these tossed descriptions, just in case you can use them later.

Using a table format on your word processor allows you to add and delete scenes easily from the table, expand the boxes as the text expands, and keep the scene numbers sequential and accurate.

Creating the Table

Create a blank table using your word processor’s table function with the following columns: | **Ch #** | **Scene #** | **Location/Time** | **Characters** | **Scene Description** |. You can also use columnar (accounting) paper if done by hand.

Columns 1 and 2 record Chapter and Scene numbers in sequence, from one to the end of the project. Format the Scene Numbers column as a numbered list, so that as you add or delete scenes, the scene numbers change automatically, saving you the frustration of redoing the scene numbers over and over. If you can’t use the numbering function, don’t number the scenes until you are sure you have included all scenes in the story, then number them once as your last effort with the outline before starting the first draft.

Column 3 names the specific Location and Time of each scene. Be as specific as possible with the location name, so that when you refer to that scene, you remember the visual details immediately. For example, instead of using “Sarah’s House” as the location, use “Sarah’s Kitchen Pantry.” Keep the location labels consistent to avoid confusion. If the time of day is not important, don’t include it; otherwise, be as specific as necessary with the time of day.

Column 4 lists the names of all characters appearing in that scene, in sequence of appearance. Include every person in the scene, even walk-ons, such as waiters or strangers at a bus stop. This column serves a variety of purposes: when revising, you can easily find a scene by finding a secondary character’s name in the column. You can also determine if a character disappears from the story for too long or all together, or if the character appears too many times in one section of the story. This tracking is especially important with the villain, who can disappear for chapters at a time while the main character struggles with other issues.

Column 5, Scene Description, contains the most information: major and minor events, character details, and important character realizations. This is the widest column of the table. However,

try to avoid excessive details, such as dialogue, setting descriptions, costuming details, and so on; record these tiny details on a reference sheet or table, in another file, to keep down the clutter factor in the Basic Plot Outline.

You can also include the purpose(s) for the scene: What do you need to do in this scene? Purposes may include “Introduce Character #3” or “Add intermediate arc growth for main character” or “Include major conflict event between main character and Character #2” or “Show character’s realization about the solution.” Remember, this outline records the main points to remind you of your vision when you write the first draft.

Using the Results

First, use the Basic Plot Outline as a gathering place for all scene descriptions as they come to you during the planning process. As new ideas occur to you, make sure they fit into the story or change the story for the better. Add the information at the appropriate place in the outline, creating new scenes (rows) as needed. And make sure each scene adds to characterization or advances plot, or both.

Then, once the outline is complete and ready to go, use it as your writing guide to create your first draft. Simply read the Chapter 1/Scene 1 description, refresh your mind of the scene’s images, and write the scene as completely as possible. Do the same with the next scene and so on until the first draft is finished according to your outline. Using the outline, you can write the first draft much faster, and it will be more complete than if you just write from memory of the story vision and a few notes. Once the first draft is done, put this outline into archives; its purpose is done.

Realize that this first draft will be revised, so don’t worry if new ideas sneak in or seem awkward. Add details and allow for detours of story and character traits as you think of them while writing the first draft. Later, during revision, if you find that these detours or details don’t fit or a new idea fizzles early in the story, you can delete it.

The Basic Plot Outline gives you a road map for your first draft. Using it creates a smoother, more effortless writing experience and gets you to the revision stage that much sooner.

Katherine Ploeger is an author of fiction, nonfiction and screenplays, and a writing coach. This article is based on information from her book *Plot Workshop*. Her Workshop e-books (*Plot Workshop*, *Character Workshop* and *Brainstorming Workshop*), written exclusively for CBI, are a series of writing prompts, exercises and step-by-step techniques especially useful when writing longer fiction. Each book contains active links to online resources that supplement the exercises. Clubhouse members can purchase any Workshop e-book for \$15.95, or download all three for \$44.95. To order, go to <http://cbiclubhouse.com/book-worm-discounts/>, or click on "Special e-Book Discounts for Fightin' Bookworms" at the top of the CBI Clubhouse home page.

From the Editor

Dear Reader:

Just because you can doesn't mean you should.

If you're the parent of a teenager, you find yourself saying this often. Just because it's possible to live on pizza doesn't mean it's a good idea. Just because you have unlimited texting doesn't mean you have to send 300 texts a day. Just because you technically know how to drive a car doesn't mean I'm giving you the keys.

And now, I'd like to say the same to authors, with a twist. Just because you can, doesn't mean you should...yet.

You're all aware of the seismic changes occurring in the publishing industry, with new developments in the news every day. For the first time in history, virtually any person can become a published author. In the past, options for self-publishing were limited. What used to cost thousands of dollars, months of production time, and countless hours of expensive and labor-intensive marketing (with the hopes that just one reviewer would overlook your book's self-published status) can now be done in days and for very little money. If you e-publish, you don't have to hire a distributor, turn your garage over to your inventory, or incur tremendous up-front costs. Online marketing means that a few well-placed reviews or interviews can quickly go viral, spreading word about your book while you sleep.

Electronic publishing is the great equalizer. And publishing's old guard, those authors who grew their publishing credits and made a living back in the paper and ink days, tend to fall into two camps. One group embraces ebooks, seeing them as yet another opportunity to share the written word with even more readers. The other is wary of the electronic format, saying it's not really a book if you can't turn the pages, and the whole reading experience is somehow cheapened if you can't wander into a store and browse through titles on a shelf. I certainly understand those who say e-readers lack the physical touch of good paper and a glossy hardcover (though many apps provide a multi-sensory experience that paper books can't). But what I think some publishing veterans are really worried about is the perceived loss of their unique status. If anyone can be a published author, how special can it be? Is what I have to say really that important if thousands of other people are saying something as well? And if the gatekeepers are gone, who's going to tell the world that my writing is better than yours?

The answer is you. You're going to tell the world. The power of your voice and the scope of your reach is limited only by your own efforts. But before you start shouting from the cyber mountaintops, you'd better be sure you've got something to shout about.

Ideally, of course, the market will weed out the drivel and elevate the truly skilled authors to bestselling ebook status. And I believe that after the newness of e-publishing wears off, we'll have a new set of trusted gatekeepers (mainly in the form of review bloggers and juried sites showcasing select titles) that will help readers wade through their choices. The ebooks will be judged on their artistic merit, not on the name of the publisher or the size of their ad budgets. If an author wants to create a buzz, she has the ability to do that, regardless of how many books she's previously published.

But we're not quite there yet. And so it's up to you, the author, to make every effort to put out the best book you can. If you're self-publishing, you're not just the author. You're also the editor and publisher. That means you're three times as responsible for the quality of your product as you'd be if published by someone else.

Please, please take this responsibility seriously. You're creating books for children. What you write will be shaping their opinions of what books are all about. It will be setting the standard for everything they'll want to read in the future. That bar should be constantly raised, not lowered. It's not enough that a story be sweet, or cute, or teach a nice lesson. You need to reach for nothing short of spectacular.

I've read many self-published ebook success stories in the past year, and every author said they first had to write an excellent manuscript, something that could compete with the famous books of that genre. But here's the catch: most authors already feel their manuscripts are pretty close to excellent. So how do you know if you're right? How do you know if those 40 publishers who rejected your work with a form letter were just shortsighted, or really knew what they were talking about? Sometimes you can't. Sometimes, you need help from the outside.

Critique groups. Writing workshops. Professional critique services. Freelance editors. To the self-published author, these services take the place of the traditional editor, and can't be skipped. You have to believe in your book to publish and market it, but before that, you have to believe in your ability as a writer to set your ego aside and take a hard, objective look at your work. Have the confidence to get critiqued. Have the patience to revise your manuscript over and over. If you're considering e-publishing, ask yourself first if you're ready to do the hard work of an author before the work of a publisher. If the answer is yes, then read my editorial next month when I give some tips for dealing with critiques.

Of course, not everything published now by the big publishers is spectacular. But this will be your book, with only your name on it. You can create an ordinary, average ebook and even sell some copies. But why would you want to?

Just because you can, doesn't mean you should.

Writing Workshop

Reel in Readers with a Strong First Chapter

by Jane McBride Choate

We all know that a great first chapter can sell a book, and a lousy first chapter can garner a quick rejection. So what makes for a sale-grabbing first chapter?

The easy answer is great writing. That said, I could end the article right now. But I won't. If you're reading CBI, you're serious about wanting to improve your craft and you want more than an easy fix. So let's talk about why the first chapter is so important:

◆ The first chapter is the hook to keep your reader reading. Whether you have sent it to an agent or an editor, you want this chapter to snare her interest and make her want to read the rest of the book.

◆ The first chapter introduces the characters, the conflict of the story, and prepares readers for what is to come. It also establishes the tone of the book. Will it be humorous or serious? Does it promise a mystery or a light romance? Will there be paranormal elements or a spiritual overtone? Whatever the tone, your first chapter hints at what the reader can expect.

◆ Writing a great first chapter is excellent practice for writing the rest of the book. All the chapters should include the elements that make the first chapter sparkle.

Now let's dissect how to make that important first chapter great:

Opening sentence and opening paragraph. Let your writing shine here. Make sure the first paragraph, indeed, the first line, grabs the reader's attention in a way unique to your story. It should promise something that only your story can deliver.

Dialogue. Fine-tune your dialogue. Read it aloud. Listen to not only the words, but to the tone as well. Have you captured the voice of your characters? Have you eliminated tags whenever possible? Have you kept adverbs to a minimum? Consider the following examples:

1. "I'm not playing another note," Amber said angrily. "Not until I get to choose my own pieces."

2. Amber slammed the book on the piano. "I'm not playing another note. Not until I get to choose my own pieces."

The first tells how the character is feeling, while the second shows what the character is feeling. Showing is always more pow-

erful than telling.

This brings us to "show, don't tell". Look for places where you have committed the cardinal sin of telling rather than showing. Go back and fix these. Sometimes it's as easy as removing a few words. Other times you may need to restructure a scene or add dialogue to a long piece of narrative.

Pacing. Make certain your pacing is appropriate to the story line. If you've written a mystery for the kids younger than about 11, you'll probably have a rapid pace, slowing down only occasionally to allow the reader to catch her breath. The momentum should pull the reader through the chapter. Older readers can handle a slower, more thoughtful pace, but only if it fits that section of the story. Be careful not to let the pace drag in the opening scenes.

Characterization. Of course you will introduce your main character or protagonist in the first chapter. Readers need to connect with him. Include only the most essential and vivid details that introduce the character's motivations to reach his goal. Let readers see why his goal is so important to him. This builds sympathy and empathy in the reader.

Word choice and sentence structure. Have you chosen the best word, not just a good word? I'm not talking about going crazy with the thesaurus feature on your computer; I mean finding the word that best evokes the emotion you want to engender in your reader. Have you used strong verbs and nouns? Think of the difference between "sat" and "slumped" and "perched." Each brings up a different mental image. Have you cut your "darlings," the pet words most writers have that we can't seem to let go? I know I have mine. I use my word-search feature, which highlights every time I've used that particular word. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, I delete the word. Have you varied your sentence structure and length? Or do all your sentences follow the bland subject-verb pattern?

Last sentence. Just as the opening line should grab the reader's attention, so should the closing line. It also serves as a setup for the next chapter, making the reader want to keep turning the pages.

Common First Chapter Mistakes

Backstory Dump: Don't open the book by listing everything your character has done in his life up to this point, or by describing his family and friends. Begin with a relevant event that launches the book's plot, and only weave in whatever background details are necessary for the reader to understand the character's present behavior and motivations.

Too much description: Action and dialogue are key, especially in opening scenes.

Focus on setting: Some authors get caught up describing the book's setting, especially in fantasy and science fiction, and ignore story. The setting should be revealed as your protagonist moves through her world, not as a stand-alone block of text.

Focus on secondary characters: While secondary characters can certainly be a part of the first chapter, the opening paragraph should revolve around your protagonist. The reader needs to be immediately acquainted with the viewpoint character and start seeing the story through his eyes.

A note about prologues: A prologue should contain the same elements that make for a dynamic first chapter. If it doesn't, then omit it.

Jane McBride Choate is a CBI Contributing Editor.

Book Publishing Today

Free Up Writing Time with Outsourcing

by Jon Bard

Outsourcing Possibilities

- web site/blog maintenance
- social bookmarking of blog posts
- historical research
- collecting publisher's guidelines
- press release submissions
- Twitter background and Facebook fan page designs
- voiceover work
- audio/video editing
- creating video book trailers and submitting them to video sites
- desktop publishing, including book layouts, cover design, etc.
- animation for apps, web and video
- photo research
- online advertising planning and execution
- translation
- proofreading and copyediting
- custom photography ...and thousands of other tasks, large and small.

We don't have to tell you that being a writer today means much more than writing. Among other things, building a career may result in you also being a blogger, an app developer, an art director, a researcher, a marketer, an advertising writer...or any of a hundred other tasks that need to get done.

Sounds pretty daunting. And it would be, if you had to do it all yourself. But here's the good news: thanks to outsourcing, it's never been easier or less costly to find qualified professionals to help whittle down your to-do list. In fact, for as little as five bucks you can get some really cool work done on your behalf.

To get you thinking, take a look at the list to the left for some tasks that can be outsourced, freeing you to find more writing time.

Surprised? Now let's see where you can whittle down that list with a little help from some new friends:

◆ *Artwork, logos, promotional design, book covers, etc.:*

99designs.com
crowdspring.com

These sites allow you post job requests along with a budget. Professional artists and designers then respond with mockups of how they'd handle your project. From there, you're free to ask questions, request a change or two and then, when you have all the candidates in place, you select the artist to get the job. We created our Fightin' Bookworm logo using crowdspring.com and we're thrilled with the results—and the price.

◆ *Web design, app development, software creation, audio transcription, marketing help, freelance writing, research, photography and more:*

elance.com
freelancer.com
guru.com
odesk.com
vworker.com

From small tasks (like getting an audio recording transcribed) to full web development, these sites get you in touch with motivated freelancers around the world. Because it's a competitive environment, they also keep rates low, so some fantastic help is available for much less than you might imagine.

◆ *And last, but not least, one of the most innovative of outsourcing sites:*

fiverr.com

The concept of fiverr.com is simple—anyone can post a “gig” describing what they'd be willing to do for \$5 (within the law, of course). It ranges from taking care of mundane tasks or creating simple videos and artwork to some truly outlandish and fun things. Want to have your book cover drawn on the side of a mohawked punk's head and photographed? No problem. Want a video of someone dressed as a bullfighter singing the praises of your blog? Sure.

Thousands of folks post gigs on the site, and it's a treat to check out the unbridled creativity they provide for five bucks. (And, by the way, what can **you** do for five dollars? Post a gig yourself!)

Most outsourcing sites allow for some way to check on the reliability and trustworthiness of the freelancer, either through ratings, comments or other feedback. Still, it's smart to start small, with a couple of minor tasks to make sure your new helper is the right person for your bigger jobs.

So have fun—and enjoy all your new free time!