

art of storytelling

A COACHING SERVICE FOR WRITERS (AND ARTISTS)

International Writers Survival Kit

1. Buy an English dictionary. Now put it away.

The rough draft of a novel, memoir or short story should emanate from the soul. Write it quickly, passionately, from the depths of your being. Even a 350-page book should be written this way. Write it rough, and write it quickly. Stopping to fix grammatical errors, awkward sentences, mistaken vocabulary words will ruin the flow and break the spirit. This is not a school essay. Your first job as a writer is to see your soul on the page. You have a “voice” that goes beyond language, and whether you’re writing in your home language or a foreign language, we need to hear that voice.

2. Dream of writing a novel, but start with a short story.

Even for writers where English is their first language, a novel or memoir is an intense undertaking that can take years. Why not try your hand at a short story first? Our upcoming E-courses explain the short story writing process in a step-by-step fashion. (Registration opens September 2013.)

3. Put away your books.

Stop reading books in any language but English. Purchase your favorite novels and/or your favorite authors in English translations of the originals. Read, read, read in English. After reading some of your favorite books in translation, turn to books by American, British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand authors who have little or no international experience. Immerse yourself in the pathos of the English language.

4. Be careful who sees your rough drafts.

Stay away from people, especially English speakers, who may be too focused on nitpicking your grammar or vocabulary usage. Again, the most important point of the rough draft is to capture the essence of you, the song of your voice, the message of your soul. Nothing can shut writers down more quickly than someone missing the more profound message, and criticizing the smaller errors. One can always hire a copy-editor to clean up the language, but that should come later. We have such copy-editors on staff at Art of Storytelling.

5. Don't try too hard.

What do you bring to the literary community as a writer of novels in English? Your outsider, unconventional perspective. Don't we all love picking up novels by foreign writers and reading an unusual lilt to the language, an unconventional idea posed in a different way? Isn't the whole point of reading novels by foreign writers to enter ways of thinking that break us out of our cultural norm?

Do not try to write like an American or Canadian or Australian. Write like yourself. An unusual turn of phrase, a quirky way of constructing sentences...readers in English will find this enriching. Many of us seek out foreign writers for these very quirks.

As you enter the English language itself, and explore using unfamiliar words, phrases and ideas, you are engaged even through the language itself in an outsider act. Your unconventional use of the language itself can break cultural expectations in the reader. That is the gift you bring as a foreign writer of books in English.

Interested in hiring a writing coach? Art of Storytelling offers a free initial consultation.
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