

# **SO YOU WANT TO WRITE . . .**

**by Sherry-Anne Jacobs**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This article is for those who'd like to write, but haven't really got started yet. And you know what? The good news is it's really easy to become a writer. You simply start writing. It doesn't matter what quality of writing you produce at first, because you don't have to show your work to anyone until you feel confident about it.

However, the slightly less good news is that becoming a published writer (an *author* ) is usually quite a trek. It takes several years for most people. It's rather like becoming an Olympic athlete, though there isn't any time constraint and you don't have to do it when you're young and physically fit. You can even become a writer in fits and starts and you can begin at any age. (A friend of mine had her first book published at the age of 82.)

Look at writing as you'd look at any other craft - or sport. Your first efforts may be recognisable as fitting into that craft, but they won't be good enough to sell for money. You wouldn't expect a goldsmith to produce saleable jewellery the first time of trying, or an athlete to do brilliant times in the first race she/he enters - and it's the same for writers. But it's fun learning and trying - and watching yourself improve.

However, I want to put in a warning here:

***Writing is addictive!***

This information is often left out of books and articles. I'm stating it up front.

## **HOW TO BEGIN WRITING**

There are several things to sort out *before* you begin writing.

- Tell your family/significant others what you're doing and insist on your writing being treated as seriously as golf or any other leisure activity. Tell them that you need the equipment and the time to do it.
- Decide where you're going to write (not in the kitchen with people tramping through) and sort out the work area so that it's comfortable and right for your body.

- Decide what equipment you're going to use. It's easiest to write with a computer, but you don't need a fancy state of the art one for word processing. I began writing in pre-computer days and hand wrote my first novel with a 2B pencil and artist's rubber, before typing up the manuscript.
- Decide when you're going to write, making plans to write *regularly* and stick to those plans - as much as life and urgent family needs will allow. (NB urgent family needs do not include making cups of tea for other people when you're in the middle of writing. Balance your needs with those of others.)
- Decide how you're going to train yourself (see next section).
- *Do it!* This is the most important advice in this whole article. There are people who want to write and yet never get down to doing it. It's up to *you* to make your dreams come true by taking action.

However recently you have begun writing, as long as you're producing something, you can and should call yourself a writer. But you have to do it and keep on doing it. Books don't suddenly appear in print. Some writer has put months or even years into writing each one - and that's after the years of writing to develop the necessary skills.

## HOW TO TRAIN YOURSELF

There are many ways to learn to write, but the main one is to train yourself by actually writing. The more you write, the better you get. It's commonly said that it takes half a million words to reach a professional standard. It certainly took me several years and about that much writing to produce a saleable novel. It's a good thing the apprenticeship is so interesting, isn't it? I loved every minute of it.

However, there are many sorts of help available in the community:

- how-to books about writing - all good bookshops stock them, as do on-line bookshops. Libraries can get them in for you. I've even written two myself, which you can learn about later in this article;
- courses at universities - may be called 'creative writing' - some have a literary slant, which is fine if you want to write literary fiction, not so fine if you want to write popular fiction;
- short courses, workshops and seminars - find out about these from your local library or writers' centre - but be careful! Make sure your tutor has succeeded in getting published. You want to learn successful strategies, not unsuccessful ones, don't you?
- national/state writers' organisations - they produce newsletters with useful articles and run seminars and conferences - try them out before you join by asking for information and a sample newsletter or by attending a meeting if you can. They're not all alike and some may not suit your needs; and
- critique groups - once you're writing regularly you may want to get some opinions about your work - if there isn't a critique group near you, it's quite easy to start one - there's an article coming about this on my web site later.

## **TAKE YOUR WRITING SERIOUSLY**

Publishers run businesses. They produce books in order to make money. They are not there to help amateurs fulfil their dreams - *you* have to do that. Competition is fierce, so your work has to be more than good - it has to be sparkling in order to persuade a publisher to take you seriously and invest money and years of promotion in you.

## **MY HOW-TO BOOKS**

I have two published and another in the pipeline. The ones already published are under my Sherry-Anne Jacobs name and are:

*'An Introduction to Romance Writing'* - which goes over all the basics and gives a lot of useful information to anyone wanting to write popular fiction.

*'Plotting and Editing'* - two activities I see as linked. My agent (very experienced London editor and agent) says it contains all the information he wishes he could say to writers who send him manuscripts and who clearly have talent but are not there yet.

Information about buying these is on my web page.

I'm half-way through writing a third how-to book:

*'Introduction to Novel Writing'*

I will post an announcement when it's published.

## **FINALLY . . .**

Go away now and start writing - that is, after all, the main way you become a writer. Enjoy it! But come back to visit me now and then, and you'll find new articles on this web site which may be of use.