

Questions on writing:

1. In the modern age of the jobbing writer, is there such a thing as an average writing day for you?

Not even a little. There are some things I try and hold to somewhat of a schedule but largely this depends on what projects I have in the air and what is happening in real life. An essential part of being an author and a parent is to be able to be flexible with your work schedule. This is also one of the advantages of publishing as an independent author, I'm not necessarily as pressured with deadlines. So while I hold myself to the standard of working every day, I try to not set too many expectations on myself in terms of what specifically I am working on.

2. How often do you feel a seething envy whenever one of your writer friends posts about their latest publishing success?

Some will likely think I'm lying about this but I actually get more excited when friends of mine are successful. I have never seen other authors as competition. There are plenty of readers out there and it isn't like we are all selling widgets. I can't believe there is anyone out there who comes across your work and says, "Nah, I already have a book." What we are essentially trying to do is set a jar down on the ground to catch lightning. Your probability of success isn't diminished if there is more than one jar out there.

What it comes down for me in the end is that it's more important for me to succeed as a person before I succeed as a writer. And if I can't find success as a writer, I want it to at least find people I know and can root for.

3. Should prolific writers be tied to a chair for a few days, before being allowed to post constant updates on social media sites relating to their literary prowess?

I think most writers know when to put the Internet away for a while and get the work done. We don't always follow through and it's not always easy but it's also important. We live in an age of distractions and sometimes we have to be strong. Ultimately, if you are passionate about your work, you should be willing to put your portal to the world away for a little while.

But I also don't give much thought to whether or not I would be considered prolific. I try and see the body of my work as what I was meant to produce at this time. I think of you put too much stock in your external goals you make it harder to be happy with what accomplishments you have achieved.

4. How long does it take you to complete a short story from start to finish in the age of the internet and Facebook?

I can usually work through a draft of a seven to ten thousand word story in about ten days to two weeks.

5. Can controlled substance abuse really aid the writing process?

Everyone has their process. We've all seen the famous Hemingway quote, "write drunk, edit sober". I can't say that it has ever worked for me but it isn't like I have really tried it, either. I suppose you could make the argument that coffee is a controlled substance. In the grand scheme of things though, you are likely putting yourself in a better position to succeed if it is in a condition of sobriety, rather than reaching for the extended frontiers you think that drugs or alcohol are helping you reach.

6. What are your thoughts on setting word targets each day? Are they constructive, or is it something only an insufferable pedant would claim essential?

As I hinted at above, I'm a big proponent of a daily writing habit. For me, the difference in my abilities and in the output of my work has noticeably improved since committing to writing every day. My brain is much faster at engaging whatever I am working on and my work habits are much better.

That said, I don't think that huge, strict word quotas are needed. After all, what if you are editing or proof reading? I think you should still give yourself credit for working in those situations. Writing is a big process and there is more to it than just generating new words.

7. Would you like to be a reviled and unpopular obscurantist if it meant having worldwide success in the literary world, or are you a true artist who would never dilute the substance of their art?

I guess I've never really thought of my art as having particular substance or value. I do it because I'm passionate about it and I love it. I don't really have any particular goal in terms of sales or readers or fame or popularity. All that matters to me is to be able to do it. I guess that while I wouldn't turn down having paychecks with the amount of digits on it that writers like James Patterson, JK Rowling and Stephanie Meyers get, I don't see myself as being able to arbitrarily construct something that achieves that level of success. I don't think that's the kind of thing that you can really do by design, I think it just happens when it happens.

8. More importantly, how often are you involved in an online argument among other genre writers bemoaning the state of the writing community?

I generally stay out of stuff like that. There often seems to be a ton of drama surrounding various publishing houses and individuals that I have no control over. Ultimately, as an independent author, I can only answer to myself and I can only explain my own actions. It's kind of nice that way. So while I certainly take time to network with other writers, I have the advantage of being able to take my time to carefully choose the people I want to support and interact with. As for the rest, the way I see it, it's kind of like a fish protesting the overall water quality of the pond itself.

9. What are the most common gripes that authors make on social media sites which drive you bonkers?

I think that there is a ton of bad advice given out on the Internet and I think that sadly, many writers use their advice as a way of bullying others. The thing is, there isn't just one path that leads to success in publishing. There are a lot of routes that will take you there and there is no small amount of luck involved which is required. What you have now is writers who have arbitrarily zeroed in on what has made them successful and they then go about shoving their methods down everyone else's throats. While I'm not going to say that there are no rules to writing, I think that the things we often get worked up about are issues that only writers care about. Just one example, Rowling uses nearly as many adjectives and adverbs as she does punctuation and that certainly didn't stop the buying public from making her richer than the Queen.

10. How long does it take for you to decide if the story is a work of genius or utter drivel?

Sometimes I never decide. Sometimes I think it's nothing but drivel. All I can say is that for the work I have published, I do eventually reach that moment where I become excited about a project and how it is being executed. The amount of time really depends on the project itself and how excited I am about the idea, initially.

11. Are beta readers a good idea, or are they the equivalent of your Uncle Bertie's friends from the local library reading group?

I think that having beta readers is essential to crafting your story. It's important to have someone look at it who isn't as closely connected as you are. It's hard to be completely objective with your own work and it can be very easy to overlook simple problems.

A few notes about good beta reader practices. First of all, you should be prepared for the possibility that some of your beta readers might end up not responding to you at all. Don't push it. Remember that people's lives are busy and sometimes they just aren't able to follow through on doing something. It isn't like you are paying them, after all. Also remember that you don't have to agree with everything you are told. After all, it's your story and you need to do what you feel is right. That said, if you get multiple people making the same note, you should probably give that more consideration. Finally, it's a good idea to have at least one or two people reading the book who aren't writers. We tend to read books differently so it's good to have someone reading who just responds to the story, not necessarily the craft of the writing itself. Keep in mind though that if you use a non-writer, you may have to give them more guidance in terms of what you mean by asking for feedback. The challenge with having close friends and family read our work is that they think they need to be as positive as possible in order to support you. So you need to make it clear that you are actually seeking out critical feedback, that your feelings won't be hurt and that the point is to make the story better.

12. What is the most difficult form of fiction to write, a short story, a novella or a novel?

They are all a little different, but for me, a novel is probably the most challenging, just because of the amount of time that is needed and the work needed to maintain a narrative continuity through all those pages. My hat is off to those writers out there putting out the two hundred thousand word epic fantasies. No idea how they keep all that straight in their head.

13. Have you ever considered writing under a pseudonym to kick-start a lengthy career as a writer of erotica?

I can certainly understand the attraction, pardon the pun. I would love to see those kind of numbers for my books but it's never really been something I've been interested in doing. I'm not going to disrespect other authors for what they choose to write but it's not for me. Also, as much as I think erotica is kind of dismissed, I think that there is more to it than we often give credit for and it isn't a matter of just waking up and deciding to write in that genre.

14. What has been the longest writing project you've embarked on? Was there any point at which you thought of abandoning the story so you could get absolutely shfaced?**

I'm just about to publish my first full length novel and that project has been about two and a half years in the making. And there are constantly points in any project, but especially this one when I have felt the call of other things. I'm not much of a drinker though, so for me that would

probably be replaced by the desire to let the television or Netflix suck my brain out through my eyeballs while I stuff my face with more sugar and calories.

15. Have you ever lain awake at night and wondered why you write? Have you ever considered if other people lie awake at night also wondering why you write?

Sure. I've even dozed off in the daytime wondering why I write. And I'm sure there are people in my life who wonder, not just why I write but why I write the things I do. I don't have a great answer for that. I guess the way I've always seen it is that there is this great song out there but I'm the only one who knows how to find it. I'm not creating the song as much as I'm the one who finds it and shows it to his friends.

16. Do you conduct research for everything which you write? Have you ever broken into a top secret facility to add authenticity in the name of research, or is Wikipedia your ultimate guide to authenticity?

Sadly, the most frequent reason I have for turning to the Internet is to either make sure I am using/spelling a word correctly or if I have correctly grasped a grammatical concept. I do some research for technical details in my story but I generally try to avoid letting the little details of a book blow up so much that they end up taking over. If go all out to present the most factually correct and accurate details on a subject, one of two things is likely going to happen. One, the reader is going to be an actual expert on the subject and as such will recognize my attempt at know-how as superficial and paper-thin. Or, the reader will have no knowledge and all of my work will go right over their head.

I think Dan Brown's novels are a good example of how research can just get away from you. I'm talking about parts of the book where the narrative comes to a halt while our characters pause to have a very lengthy conversation about (often) a fairly minor point. Ultimately, I think that the story and the characters should be what matters the most and that the technical matters should exist as minor supplements to the story.

I should also say that I do feel that there are certain genres who require much more research than what I write so the statements I'm making here shouldn't be interpreted as meaning across the board.

17. What piece of research might show up on your internet history and give your family cause to worry about your stability?

Ha. Off the top of my head, I'd have to say that I should probably plead the fifth on this one.

18. What life experience has been the most advantageous in terms of writing a story?

All of them. Every day, I see something or hear something or learn something that one day will help me be better at crafting a character or a story. I am constantly learning and growing, even when I don't know it's happening. Being a writer is about observing and I hope I never lose my ability or willingness to do that.

19. Should authors give advice to aspiring authors , or should they leave them to do things their own way? What was the worst bit of advice you ever heard ?

I refer also to my answer above about behaviors online which I have witnessed. Advice is great and there is no problem with offering it. I think that the key though, is waiting until that advice is actually solicited. More writers out there need to understand what the word "advice" means and that it isn't their responsibility to turn everyone around to their way of doing things. I think the most important thing to keep in mind when offering advice is to realize that your life and career will not be affected by what that person does and you shouldn't feel like you have a stake in their ultimate decision. Offer your input, make your case and move on.

20. What are some of the most popular misconceptions about writers from the perspective of the public?

I think a lot of people don't understand how much work goes into the actual creation of a book. It's the old statement of, "I don't know what the big deal is, you just sit around and make stuff up." Being able to start and finish a book is an incredible gift, one that I feel blessed to have. Sometimes I wish non-writers had more appreciation for how much time goes in to making writing sound natural and easy.

21. What was the worst rejection from a publisher you've ever had?

I've been fairly lucky in that pretty much all of my rejections have been right down the middle. No one has ever been particularly nasty or excited. What I get is the standard, "Thank you for your interest, but..." I've also never gotten any of the variety of "We won't be accepting this story at this time but we love your writing style. Will you please submit something else soon?"

22. Have you ever thought of launching a secret hate campaign against a publisher who simply misjudged your literary genius?

No, nobody ever wins in battles like that. I've never really had any kind of negative interaction with any publisher, other than getting rejections which is just a part of this business we are in. I don't take rejections personally. It doesn't mean my writing is bad necessarily, just that it doesn't work as well for one person.

23. And finally, which would you choose, a commercial contract with stipulations about what you're allowed to write, or a career in the Small Press with no restrictions on what you are allowed to write?

Not even a question here for me. I would always choose the small press if it meant I still retained control over what I write. There is this frequent debate, sometimes contentious over the route writers should take, whether it be large press, indie press or self-published. But I think that a lot of people don't understand that even if you sign a lucrative contract with a publisher, you still end up being the one at the end of the day who has to take on the lion's share of the work in terms of promoting yourself and your work. It isn't like the national media is going to start buzzing about you just because your book was put out by a press instead of yourself. I have never sought to be rich or famous as a writer. I have a passion for the art and for publishing. So at that point, why would I go down a road that would lead me to being in a position of having to write things I'm not happy with? I am proud of who I am and of the work I do. I can point at my books and say confidently that they are my art and my words. At the end of the day, that is what is most important to me.