

Time Out: Offering Advice and “Write A Book With Me”

By Holly Lisle

I’ve noticed a problem with folks offering writing advice in the “Write A Book With Me” threads, and I figure I’d better point out the problem before it gets bigger.

There are some folks here besides me who do this professionally. There are some folks here who have written a lot but never sold anything (some, I suspect, because they haven’t yet tried)—and there are some folks here who have not yet written anything.

And I’ve noticed that the most aggressive “you should do this” advice is coming from that latter segment.

So here’s the deal on advice.

I CANNOT answer all the posts. I read every single one, I answer questions as I get to them, I cheer you on (whether I write a comment or not).

So I welcome you folks encouraging each other as a critical, wonderful part of this game we’re playing. And frankly, some of the folks here are as qualified to offer suggestions as I am.

BUT...

First, if you’ve never written a book, don’t tell other people how they should do it. This seems like an obvious thing to me, but apparently...not so much.

I’ve written more than 30 novels, a bunch of non-fiction, a bunch of short stories, **and I STILL don’t tell people how they should do it.**

I don't know how you SHOULD write a book, and neither does anyone else.

I do know how I've written and sold a bunch of them, so when I offer advice, I offer what has worked for me, in the hope that it may also work for you.

If you're offering advice, phrase it as: "I had a similar problem, I took the following steps to fix it, you might find this useful."

I also ask questions, because in my experience, one good question is worth several pages of "here's how you can fix that." It allows the writer facing the problem to find his own ways to solutions. If something someone has written stirs up a huge question in your mind, ASK IT.

If someone asks you a story question here, you don't have to answer it here. But do think about how that question relates to the story you're writing. It'll frequently point out a hole you need to address.

Finally, from this point forward, any post offering any sort of suggestions or advice that includes ANY sort of "I'm sure Holly would say..." phrase is going to be deleted. No questions, no apologies. I've let a couple of these slide, but the last batch were full of such atrocious advice that from this point forward, I don't care if you've written the Golden Mean of Writing—if you stick my name on it, it's gone. I'm the only one who gets to say "what Holly would say."

You get to say what you would say—and that is a thing of beauty all on its own.

Finally, links to questions I've answered elsewhere.

- "Can you read something I've written?"
- "How do I crit?"
- "How do I revise my story?"

- “How do I start my story?”
- “What is conflict, and how do I use it?”
- “What kind of questions should I ask myself?”
- “How do I format my manuscript?”
- How do I finish a story?
- How do I plot using notecards, and why would I want to?
- The free Professional Plot Outline e-book and course.
- “I have problems with description.”
- “How do I make my fantasy world better?”
- “How do I find my writing voice?”
- “What if I’m working with a collaborator?”
- “Why am I writing anyway?”
- “How do I write suckitudinous fiction?”
- “How do I write scenes?”
- “I’m getting bogged down in worldbuilding.”
- “How do I choose a writers’ group (or start one of my own)?”

These are just a few of the articles and workshops on the site. If you haven’t gone over the site, you may find the answer to something that’s been causing you problems already answered.

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