Think Sideways—Here's What I'm Putting Together

written by Holly
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By Holly Lisle

Thank you so much for the comments on the Think Sideways demo video. Your suggestions have been hugely helpful.

- I now have an earclip headset with a microphone that only makes me look a little like a Borg.

- In order to eliminate the handwriting time-lag, I'll prewrite sections of the whiteboard and do closeups using Photo-to-Movie, which I've owned for years and have been looking for a good excuse to put to use. I'll add in drawings in real time. I like live drawing because of its immediacy, and the fact that it lets you engage directly with your viewer.

- There will be a few clips of me, but frankly, watching people talk in videos is dull, and I hate seeing myself talk, so you'll see me for intros, and maybe conclusions, and that's about it.

- PowerPoint slides are what you do to people you don't like. They induce comas in lab rats. They deplete oxygen in rooms, causing CO_2 overload and unconsciousness in those nearby, and are under investigation by the EPA. The Geneva Convention lists them specifically as a means of torture, and prohibits their use. (Okay, I just really hate them. No PowerPoint slides.)

- I will, however, look into Keynote. I make no promises. In general, canned slide presentations bore me.

What *"How To Think Sideways"* Will Be

The videos, however, are simply a small portion of what I have planned. I've mentioned before that this is going to be a big course—the first one I've ever done. So far, I have 32 pages of just brainstorming notes. That doesn't include example lists, demo lists, exercise lists, and so on.

I owe Thinking Sideways for my career, and for a lot of other things that have worked out well in my life. It is the single most important skill I have. Well, collection of skills. From an ungodly number of entries; data points; questions to myself; and dissections of how I got from Point A to Point B in sticky situations, through complex problems, and past just plain hard times, I've winnowed out 18 specific problem-creating, problem-complicating, and problem-solving skills I've used to create characters, develop and write books, plan series, change genres, maintain a business while maintaining creativity, and help my kids grow up right. (The first lesson, in fact, will start with my two older kids and me sitting in an interrogation room in the Fayetteville police station in December, 1994, after the two of them caused a 15-man undercover police stake-out at the Cross Creek Mall. They were at the time 9 and 11 years old. This is, believe it or not, completely relevant to both writing AND thinking sideways.) You'll learn and apply all eighteen of these skills.

I've also figured out and will teach you five ways I combine those skills to find new angles of approach to particularly tough problems. AND four thought patterns you must lose immediately in order to be able to think sideways. (I had to rid myself of all four of them, so I know that it can be done, and I know how to do it.)

I figure (please correct me if I'm off base here) that what you need from a course like this would be:

- Usable skills
- applied to salable projects
- presented in a fluff-free, entertaining, and immediately applicable fashion
- for a reasonable price.

So at this point, I'm planning on 24 weekly lessons that will teach you the skills you need to:

- Develop both creative ideas and salable ideas, and recognize how to put the two together;
- Develop presentations that will appeal to agents, editors, the marketing department, and finally readers, (who never get to see all your hard work if you can't hit the first three);
- Write the book while maintaining quality, delivering what you promised, and hitting your deadline;
- Identify the key marketing components of your work and present them in the best possible light to the people who need them, while letting those people do their jobs;
- Connect with your audience (or know when you shouldn't); and…
- Move on to the next project, while dealing with the numbers, either good or bad, and success or failure of the previous one.

You will create a project as your course homework. (Well, you will if you DO the homework. That's entirely up to you.) You'll start applying the techniques immediately, and you'll either write a novel, a nonfiction book, a series of short stories, or some project unrelated to writing—the techniques I'll be teaching are applicable to any sort of creative endeavor.

What " *How To Think Sideways*" Will NOT Be

With that said, this course WILL NOT teach you how to write. I have a bunch of courses already written that teach the essentials of plotting, characterization, worldbuilding, scene development, and organization. HOW TO THINK SIDEWAYS truly is a course that teaches thinking: creative problem solving directed toward problems of creativity. There will not be any "how to write a scene" or "how to create a character" or "how to plot" walkthroughs included.

The course will not be one-on-one. In order to keep the price down (and because I just don't have the time to answer individual questions or read and crit projects) it will operate in the same do-it-yourself format as the small courses I offer in the shop. I will put everything I have into making sure you have clear demos, lots of examples, easy-to-follow instructions, and good direction for your project, but my assistance will be limited to technical issues: making sure you get working copies of each lesson, and tracking down and fixing bugs that you find.

I may offer separate tutoring, but this would cost significantly more, would only be open to a handful of students at a time, and I'm not sure if I could do it at all because of the possibility of tutoring cutting into my writing time. I have not yet committed to this idea.

Seats Will Be Limited

For the first class, they will be severely limited, because I have not done something of this nature before and I'm not sure how much time technical support will take.

I do not know how often I'll be able to open registration, either. Depending on the amount of work involved with

maintaining the course, doing necessary upgrades and technical fixes, and so on, **and depending on my book deadlines**, it could be twice a year. Or once a year. I don't know what to expect yet. I do know I need to put together another proposal for Scholastic when I finish THE SILVER DOOR, and I need to write "C".

So those are the caveats. I know this course won't be for everyone. I am making every effort to make it suitable for writers from Absolute Beginner to Pro Who Needs A New Genre, but with lessons at one per week, it will be pretty intensive—a lot of things to learn, a lot to apply.

Comments?

Questions?