



The 3rd Degree

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA

DECEMBER 2024

MWA BOARD MEMBERS SHARE WHAT HELPED THEM

CRAFT, FORENSICS, RESEARCH BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

Need some last-minute gift ideas for yourself or others? Check out this list.

All links are to IndieBound when possible.

ELLEN BYRON:

Forensic Speak: How to Write Realistic Crime Dramas, Jennifer Dornbush

This book is a must-have for mystery authors who don't have a background in law enforcement and want to write realistically about forensics. It's beautifully laid out and Jennifer's conversational tone makes the most complicated procedures accessible. Each chapter ends with exercises that allow you to put what you've learned to the test.

400 Things Cops Know: Streetmart Lessons From a Veteran Patrolman, Adam Plantinga

Reading this book is like having a drink with veteran officer and thriller author Adam Plantinga. Like forensics specialist Jennifer Dornbush, he writes in a conversational, approachable style, adding heavy doses of humor. All of this provides invaluable insight into the life of a beat cop.

Rewrite Your Life: Discovering Your Truth Through the Healing Power of Fiction, Jess Lourey

I adore Jess's book, which is written in such a personal and intimate style that it's like reading a memoir while picking up incredibly valuable writing tools. Her revision system based on an acronym she labels ARISE — Action, Romance or humor, Suspense, Emotion — is my go-to rewriting tool.

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CRAFT, RESEARCH AND FORENSIC BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS, *continued from previous page*

The Language of Flowers, many versions, many authors.

I'm including this book because it's inspired mysterious moments in some of my books. I find the characteristics that Victorians translated to flora fascinating and timeless. There are many versions of *The Language of Flowers* and all I've come across are filled with beautiful illustrations that are useful but also make for pretty procrastination!

How to Write a Mystery: A Handbook from Mystery Writers of America, edited by Lee Child with Laurie R. King

I'm not just shilling for MWA by including this book! Essays on a variety of aspects of writing by some of today's most popular and successful mystery authors make *How to Write a Mystery* both incredibly useful and inspirational.

STEPHEN D. ROGERS:

Make a Scene Revised and Expanded Edition: Writing a Powerful Story One Scene at a Time, Jordan Rosenfeld

Speaking to the un-expanded version on my bookshelf, Rosenfeld discusses scene architecture, core elements, scene types, and other scene considerations. This is not one of those non-fiction books that tells you what you're going to learn, tells you what you're learning, and then tells you what you just learned. Instead, Rosenfeld stuffs *Make A Scene* with actionable information.

JD ALLEN:

The Human Predator: A Historical Chronicle of Serial Murder and Forensic Investigation, Katherine Ramsland

From ancient Rome through the Dark Ages to the burgeoning West to the open highways of urban America, from the unconscionable exploits of French religious zealot Gilles de Rais to such all-American monsters as Jeffrey Dahmer and Aileen Wournos, Katherine Ramsland makes an eye-opening case for the existence of serial killers throughout time and offers a complete chronological record of the serial-killer phenomenon — as well as the parallel development of psychology, forensic science, and FBI profiling in the serial killer's evolving manifestation throughout human history.

What the Bones Tell Us, Jeffery H Schwartz

A physical anthropologist exposes the inner workings of archaeology and anthropology, illustrating what can be learned from fossils and fragments of ancient cultures and civilizations. Schwartz ranges from digs in the Negev Desert through Africa and Europe to the local coroner's office to explain how interpretations of the past are made.

Bodies We've Buried: Inside the National Forensic Academy, The World's Top CSI Training School, Jarrett Hallcox and Amy Welch

An introduction to forensic science and its role in law enforcement goes behind the doors of the National Forensic Academy to reveal the hands-on training in crime scene investigation, taking readers through the complete, intensive, ten-week course offered by the world-renowned school.

JOHN COPENHAVER:

The Craft of Writing, William Sloane

A slim and practical book that helps developing writers understand the importance of meeting a reader's needs in fiction. While not explicitly about crime fiction, its directness and clarity are invaluable to emerging authors who are learning how to connect with readers.

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CRAFT, RESEARCH AND FORENSIC BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS, *continued from previous page*

On Writing: A Memoir on Craft, Stephen King

A must-read craft text that blends King's journey of becoming a writer with practical advice about writing compelling popular fiction. While not an exhaustive list of craft techniques, it's funny, wise, and honest.

Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft, Janet Burroway

For a complete understanding of fiction craft techniques, you can't get more concise and thorough than Burroway's classic text. Read it through or sample it to help shore up areas of craft where you need to deepen your understanding.

SARAH STEWART TAYLOR:

What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers, Anne Bernays and Pamela Painter

I love the prompts and exercises in this book and have used them to open up plot possibilities in my novels and to practice the kind of character-driven plotting that I look for in the crime novels I love. It's also a great teaching tool!

Writing Fiction Step By Step, Josip Novakovich

This excellent guide also uses exercises and prompts to help newer writers through the process of envisioning, starting, plotting, and polishing a piece of fiction. I love the approach, which really focuses on organic development of novel elements and the exercises slowly build the muscles all writers need!

CHRISTINA DIAZ GONZALEZ:

Dear Ally, How Do You Write a Book?, Ally Carter

Ally Carter (*NY Times* bestselling author of middle grade, young adult, and adult fiction) has written a how-to book geared toward teens/pre-teens, but the information can be helpful for writers of any age that are looking for an introduction into writing. Ally Carter goes through the process of crafting a story (emphasizing that there isn't just one way to write a book) and discusses the business of publishing as well.

You: The Story: A Writer's Guide to Craft Through Memory, Ruta Sepetys

Ruta Sepetys (award-winning author of historical fiction for young adults) has written a book for aspiring writers that encourages an inward look into your own memories in order to discover the story that's waiting to be told. Ruta Sepetys brings in heartfelt stories from her own life that highlight various aspects of writing such as plot, character development, or dialogue. The book also includes a series of writing prompts and exercises.

SHARON SHORT:

Intuitive Editing: A Creative and Practical Guide to Revising Your Writing, Tiffany Yates Martin

Book description: "Developmental editor Tiffany Yates Martin has spent her career in the publishing industry honing practical, actionable techniques to help authors evaluate how well their story is working, where it might not be, and how to fix it. With a clear, accessible, user-friendly approach, she leads writers through every step of deepening and elevating their own work, as well as how to approach the edit and develop their 'editor brain,' and how to solicit and process feedback. *Intuitive Editing* doesn't offer one-size-fits-all advice or rigid writing 'rules'; instead it helps authors discover what works for their story and their style — to find the best version of their vision.

"Whether you're writing fiction, narrative nonfiction, or memoir; whether this your first story or your fiftieth, *Intuitive Editing* will give you the tools you need to edit and revise your own writing with inspiration, motivation, and confidence."

Beginnings, Middles, and Ends, Nancy Kress

Book description: "Is the story or novel you've been carrying around in your head the same one you see on the page? Or does the dialogue suddenly sound flat and predictable? Do the events seem to ramble?"

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CRAFT, RESEARCH AND FORENSIC BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS, *continued from previous page*

“Translating a flash of inspiration into a compelling story requires careful crafting. The words you choose, how you describe characters, and the way you orchestrate conflict all make the difference between a story that is slow to begin, flounders midway, or trails off at the end and one that holds the interest of readers and editors to the final page.

“By demonstrating effective solutions for potential problems at each stage of your story, Nancy Kress will help you...

- hook the editor on the first three paragraphs
- make and keep your story’s ‘implicit promise’
- build drama and credibility by controlling your prose

“Dozens of exercises help you strengthen your short story or novel. Plus, you’ll sharpen skills and gain new insight into...

- the price a writer pays for flashbacks
- six ways characters should ‘reveal’ themselves
- techniques for writing and rewriting

“Let this working resource be your guide to successful stories from beginning to end.”

TERESA CAIN:

WITSEC Inside the Federal Witness Protection Program, Pete Earley and Gerald Shur (founder of WITSEC)

Book description: “For decades no law enforcement program has been as cloaked in controversy and mystery as the Federal Witness Protection Program. Now, for the first time, Gerald Shur, the man credited with the creation of WITSEC, teams with acclaimed investigative journalist Pete Earley to tell the inside story of turncoats, crime-fighters, killers, and ordinary human beings caught up in a life-and-death game of deception in the name of justice.”

A deep dive into the formation of the WITSEC program with lots of interesting, real life anecdotes about its practical implications. Invaluable information for authors who are merely referencing the program or building a plot around it.

Self-Editing for Fiction Writers: How to Edit Yourself Into Print, Renni Browne & Dave King

Book description: “Renni Browne and Dave King teach you, the writer, how to apply the editing techniques they have developed to your own work. Chapters on dialogue, exposition, point of view, interior monologue, and other techniques take you through the same processes an expert editor would go through to perfect your manuscript. Each point is illustrated with examples, many drawn from the hundreds of books Browne and King have edited.”

An excellent resource for self-editing that messy first draft complete with plain language explanations, easy to understand examples, and exercises designed to make referencing the book superfluous.

LESLIE S. KLINGER:

For historical fiction, I am a strong believer in looking at period books, including the 1888 and 1910 editions of the *Britannica*, Baedeker guides to various European cities, and almanacs. These are generally available for purchase on eBay. There are also “city registers” for a variety of American cities, listing hotels, restaurants, etc. Not only can you “fact-check” in these volumes, you can find authentic oddities!

MICHAEL BRACKEN:

The Chicago Manual of Style, The University of Chicago Press

This is the “venerable, time-tested guide to style, usage, and grammar — an indispensable reference informing the editorial canon with sound, definitive advice.” Most book publishers and some periodical publishers use this when editing, and the

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CRAFT, RESEARCH AND FORENSIC BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS, *continued from previous page*

better I understand and apply the information in this, the cleaner my manuscripts are. I currently use the 17th edition, but the 18th has been released.

Dreyer's English: An Utterly Correct Guide to Clarity and Style, Benjamin Dreyer

A few years ago, after I mentioned reading *The Chicago Manual of Style*, Linda Landrigan (editor of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*) suggested I also read *Dreyer's English*. This is excellent advice from a legendary copyeditor that, if followed, will significantly improve one's prose and lead to fewer changes and corrections during the editing process.

DAVID B. SCHLOSSER:

The Science of Storytelling, Will Storr

"Stories mold who we are, from our character to our cultural identity. They drive us to act out our dreams and ambitions, and shape our politics and beliefs. We use them to construct our relationships, to keep order in our law courts, to interpret events in our newspapers and social media. Storytelling is an essential part of what makes us human.

"There have been many attempts to understand what makes a good story — from Joseph Campbell's well-worn theories about myth and archetype to recent attempts to crack the 'Bestseller Code'. But few have used a scientific approach. This is curious, for if we are to truly understand storytelling in its grandest sense, we must first come to understand the ultimate storyteller — the human brain.

"In this scalpel-sharp, thought-provoking book, Will Storr demonstrates how master storytellers manipulate and compel us, leading us on a journey from the Hebrew scriptures to *Mr. Men*, from Booker Prize-winning literature to box set TV. Applying dazzling psychological research and cutting-edge neuroscience to the foundations of our myths and archetypes, he shows how we can use these tools to tell better stories — and make sense of our chaotic modern world."

Into the Woods: A Five-Act Journey Into Story, John Yorke

"*Into The Woods* is a revelation of the fundamental structure and meaning of all stories, from the man responsible for more hours of drama on British television than anyone else, John Yorke.

"We all love stories. Many of us love to tell them, and even dream of making a living from it too. But what is a story? Hundreds of books about screenwriting and storytelling have been written, but none of them ask 'Why?' Why do we tell stories? And why do all stories function in an eerily similar way?

"John Yorke has been telling stories almost his entire adult life, and the more he has done it, the more he has asked himself why? Every great thinker or writer has their theories: Aristotle, David Hare, Lajos Egri, Robert McKee, Gustav Freytag, David Mamet, Christopher Booker, Charlie Kaufman, William Goldman and Aaron Sorkin — all have offered insightful and illuminating answers. Here, John Yorke draws on these figures and more as he takes us on a historical, philosophical, scientific and psychological journey to the heart of all storytelling.

"What he reveals is that there truly is a unifying shape to narrative — one that echoes the great fairytale journey into the woods, and one, like any great art, that comes from deep within. Much more than a 'how to write' book, *Into the Woods* is an exploration of this fundamental structure underneath all narrative forms, from film and television to theatre and novel-writing. With astonishing detail and wisdom, John Yorke explains to us a phenomenon that, whether it is as a simple fable, or a big-budget 3D blockbuster, most of us experience almost every day of our lives."

The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers, Christopher Vogler

"Originally an influential memo which Vogler wrote for Walt Disney Animation executives regarding *The Lion King*, *The Writer's Journey* details a twelve-stage, myth-inspired method that has galvanized Hollywood's treatment of cinematic storytelling. A format that once seldom deviated beyond a traditional three-act blueprint, Vogler's comprehensive theory of story structure and character development has met with universal acclaim, and is detailed herein using examples from myths, fairy tales, and classic movies. This book has changed the face of screenwriting worldwide over the last 25 years, and continues to do so."

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CRAFT, RESEARCH AND FORENSIC BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS, *continued from previous page*

Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting, Robert McKee

“Robert McKee’s screenwriting workshops have earned him an international reputation for inspiring novices, refining works in progress and putting major screenwriting careers back on track. Quincy Jones, Diane Keaton, Gloria Steinem, Julia Roberts, John Cleese and David Bowie are just a few of his celebrity alumni. Writers, producers, development executives and agents all flock to his lecture series, praising it as a mesmerizing and intense learning experience. In *Story*, McKee expands on the concepts he teaches in his \$450 seminars (considered a must by industry insiders), providing readers with the most comprehensive, integrated explanation of the craft of writing for the screen. No one better understands how all the elements of a screenplay fit together, and no one is better qualified to explain the ‘magic’ of story construction and the relationship between structure and character than Robert McKee.”

On Writing Well, William Zinsser

“*On Writing Well* has been praised for its sound advice, its clarity and the warmth of its style. It is a book for everybody who wants to learn how to write or who needs to do some writing to get through the day, as almost everybody does in the age of e-mail and the Internet. Whether you want to write about people or places, science and technology, business, sports, the arts or about yourself in the increasingly popular memoir genre, *On Writing Well* offers you fundamental principles as well as the insights of a distinguished writer and teacher. With more than a million copies sold, this volume has stood the test of time and remains a valuable resource for writers and would-be writers.”

CLAIRE JOHNSON:

The Art of Character—Creating Memorable Characters for Fiction, Film, and TV, David Corbett

The Forest for the Trees, Betsy Lerner

The Emotional Craft of Fiction—How to Write the Story Beneath the Surface, Donald Maass

Corbett, Lerner, and Maass’s books are deep dives into what creates a character with a past you don’t have to write about, but it’s there in between the lines. This is what makes the difference between a book you can’t remember and a book you can’t forget.

Writing Down the Bones, Natalie Goldberg

Bird by Bird, Annie Lamott

I consider Goldberg and Lamott’s books to be inspirational books. Books you pick up with the writing isn’t going well, when the words won’t come and when they do, they sound pedestrian and trite.

Woe Is I, Patricia T. O’Connor

Where would we be without grammar? There are a thousand books out there on grammar. I found this book not too overwhelming and pedantic (as grammarians tend to be).

TONI L.P. KELNER:

Motivate Your Writing: Using Motivational Psychology to Energize Your Writing Life, Stephen P. Kelner, Jr.

This book is aimed to keep writers writing. It is anchored in psychological research into implicit motivation, creativity, and goal setting, including the author’s assessment of scores of professional published writers. It provides self-diagnostics to understand one’s own motivation, patterns of creativity, and process and approaches used by many successful writers. The 2nd expanded edition adds input from follow-up research with additional writers, writers’ groups, and writers’ associations across genres and internationally.

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