



The Complete Idiot's Guide to Writing a Novel

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The write stuff for telling a good story...includes exclusive interviews with *New York Times* bestselling authors!

Novelist and editor Tom Monteleone shares his insights about the writing process—from developing a style through creating believable characters and settings, to the final editing and rewriting chores.

€ Features never-before-published interviews with such bestselling authors as Janet Evanovich, Peter Straub, Richard Matheson, Whitley Streiber, Stephen Hunter, and William Peter Blatty

€ Includes chapters on the publishing business

€ Author has more than 20 published novels under his belt

€ Over 8,500 first novels were published last year alone

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Writing a Novel Details

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From Reader Review The Complete Idiot's Guide to Writing a Novel for online ebook

Brandon Miller says

Touches on many (if not most) important aspects of writing a novel. One of the first craft books I ever read. Great overview of the process.

Sarah says

Good insights about writing.

Liza says

By the time you read this book, unless you read it the day after I finished reading the book, you'll find it will have become a two star read.

Let me explain, some of the information here is extremely helpful, but midway I knew the book was in need of a new edition as even some of the technology references Monteleone made were outdated.

There were other industry tips he gave, which I have found are no longer helpful in this day and age such as...going to New York to visit agencies to get to know the agents and tell them you are a writer. He put it a lot more eloquently than that and at the time this book was published it must have been good advice, but things have changed since then. If you read most agent blogs, you'll see that running into them to sell your book would completely freak them out. Unless they are at a conference where they expect you to make a pitch. The publishing industry has already change so much, since there was no mention of blogs, self publishing, print on demand, and all the other options out there waiting for you.

Another odd thing I found was that he swore this was the only book on writing you would need, unless you needed to get a firm grip on grammar and style such as *The Elements of Style*. He did not find other books that tackle specific parts of writing such as editing and dialogue as being credible. I don't necessarily agree with that, because I read one book on dialogue that I found helpful, where another writing book I read recently wasn't as helpful. I think these things tend to be hit or miss.

His humor is also a bit off to me. It's like this odd combination of that embarrassing stereotypical "Dad humor" mixed in with clean Disney humor. He swore he was a great speaker and he has a bit of an ego, but I found it odd people loved to hear him speak, based on the humor of the book. Or perhaps, the people who flock to see him generally love his work and don't mind that he uses old stale jokes. The humor wasn't that terrible, but being I tend to enjoy sarcasm and wit more than sanitized humor I wasn't always on the same page with him. (But just like Disney humor, you'll find the stupidest things make you smile, so don't be surprised if that happens to you.)

The good? His general tips on how to write a story from start to finish were helpful. I liked that he encouraged people to not simply read books in the genre they enjoy, but outside of their genre too as there is a little something in every genre you can learn from, especially nonfiction. I think that's true, because well

written nonfiction can be even better than fiction. Think *Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*.

I did find it useful that he talked about the business side of being a novelist that went beyond publicizing your own work. He went into great detail about taxes, self employment, and money management along with other resources. These were things I never considered...such as getting only one check a year. He also stressed understanding royalty statements and talked about how returned books effect your sales.

The whole practice behind stripped books was also odd to me. I've heard of stripped books, but I just thought some weird thief went around stealing paperbacks and tearing off the cover. Now that I know the publishing industry only gets the cover or 25% of the paperback returned, I find that practice to be crazy! They could just ship those books to Half Price Bookstore or sell the books at discount to a local school district or university, but then again, that's me being practical.

He is very honest and walks you through the initial steps of a novel to what happens afterwards. He's the type of guy that will tell you, "No this is stupid," and expects you to take him at his word. For some people that might turn them off. Personally, I like the fact that he's blunt and tells it like it is. He's never cruel and harsh, but he will always tell you with some silly joke how he wouldn't do X, Y, or Z.

That's it...his humor is just too silly for me.

This is a great introduction and though I wasn't won over by his humor, I did appreciate the honesty. Because I really believe this book is in need of an updated edition, I recommend for now you buy the book used, borrow it from a friend, or from the public library.

There's a lot of good information to be learned, but with the way the publishing industry is changing, I would warn you to simply do your research on agents and befriending distributors, before actually going out of your way and doing it. I'm sure the advice worked back then, but if you did that today, I'm afraid you'd get a restraining order and that's not exactly the kinda publicity you want for your first book.

W.C. says

The author opens with the humblest of statements, as follows:

"Three things I know are true: (1) millions of people dream about writing a novel; (2) there are a lot of books out there purporting to teach you how to do it; and (3) this is the best one."

He might be right. This is the only book about writing a novel, specifically, that wasn't downright awful. And not being half bad in a sea of awful starts to look pretty good. I had fun with this and actually have finished a novel or two, at least partly because of what I read here.

Michael says

The Idiot's Guide books and the Dummies series typically give you the basic information and sometimes all the information you need on a particular subject. They typically go into much more detail than you would expect if you haven't read one.

I bought this mainly for the information on publishing since I know (knew) nothing about the book

publishing business. I see that it's similar to the music and film industry. They're the same give or take a few details. The great thing about a book though is that it doesn't cost you anything except time to write one.

I would not recommend using this book as your only reference to build your story structure. Although the author does a great job, I highly recommend *Story* by Robert Mckee.

This book does what it intends in a clear and concise manner.

Eilidh Dunsmore says

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Writing a Novel (a second edition) by Tom Monteleone is not only extremely informative but easy to read. Throughout the whole book, you end up encountering a healthy amount of the narcissistic banter as well as the kind of dry humor only ever acquired through experience that the multiple editors failed to bleach out of the final product. At times I would look questioningly at a sentence and be like *editors let you put that in there?* To say the least, this book has personality (I hesitate to call it “sass” but that might just be it...) and you cannot read it without coming across it. I feel that the tone of this book may set a certain person off but it just ended up endearing it to me. The book did what it was supposed to: introduced a neophyte like me into the actual process writing a novel entails. It not only included an easy-to-read (this is where it fulfills the “for complete idiots” advertising in the title) dissection of the things that make up a story (plot, character, setting, etc...) but what happens after you've got that heavy paperweight of a manuscript. Monteleone speaks from experience and relays the information in this book with an easy to understand familiarity that eventually leaves you thinking that he's been sitting in front of you speaking the whole time. I would urge anyone who wants to know more about the craft of writing a book or the endgame of publishing it to read this book. I gave it five stars and expect to probably end up looking for some of his other novels to read.

Josiah says

Overall, I found his tone inaccessible and condescending.

LydiaMae says

Very informative and helpful, a tad out of date though.

Rica says

Outdated when discussing technology. But even in the chapters that touch on timeless topics like story structure, plot, dialogue, etc., this is a painful read. Sorely in need of a good copyedit (for instance,

"exhaustibly" should be "exhaustively"; and the writing abounds with wordiness--e.g., "first starting"). Not recommended.

Allan Walsh says

Book Review – The Complete Idiots Guide to Writing a Novel by Tom Monteleone

The Complete Idiots Guide to Writing a Novel by Tom Monteleone runs through the basics of what it takes to write a novel, including writing techniques, marketing and publishing tips and much more.

The Bad Stuff: Firstly, let me say that the version I read was the 2004 edition and there is a revised version of this book that was produced in 2010. So, it is no surprize that some of the content seemed dated to me. I have not seen the 2010 edition, so I am not sure if the issues I found have been updated at all. I would suggest they have, as the problems were really around genre, publishing and marketing section of the book and these areas have changed dramatically since 2004. However, I'd still suggest that a lot more has changed since 2010 and it is probably due for another revision.

The Good Stuff: This book is full of good advice on writing and will open the eyes of the naïve novice coming in thinking it will be an easy way to make a fast buck. The techniques and advice given on writing and managing your time still apply today.

Overall this book is for the beginner. It may provide some new tips to the intermediate writer, but the value of the information within will diminish with the more experience you have. Isn't that the case with all non-fiction though? This book is well worth the money if you are just starting out and because of this, I'm giving it a flourishing 4 out of 5 golden bookmarks.

Lauren says

While I do believe the book helped me gain insight into my own writing, it felt too centered on science fiction and mystery novels. In addition, the sheer brevity of the most important elements (in my opinion) of a novel was disappointing to say the least. I did gather some tips, however, so I would recommend skimming through it, rather than reading it word for word.

Jennifer says

I found this book to be a great source tools and advice for a person who would like to attempt to write his or her first novel. The author has the perfect credentials, from his formal education to his early years submitting short stories to science fiction magazines. He has read slush as well as edited seven SF anthologies.

His guidance on writing assumes from the outset that you have basic writing ability and talent. Chapters range from advice on how to manage your time and use proper grammer to a tutorial on self-publishing and E-publishing. The author writes in a well-organized and clear way that gives succinct examples of his teachings. His tone is not that of an English professor (a profession he shows obvious disdain for) and he insists that writing should be a fun venture. After reading this book I felt like I had a friend, an experienced author in my corner, cheering me on.

Recommended for writers who want to get a basic grasp of what it takes to write, rewrite, and publish their first novel.

John says

Idiot Proof: Surely the Best Book on Writing Out There, March 15, 2011

I finished reading Stephen King's *On Writing* and thought there could definitely be a better book about writing available for the struggling youngster trying to master the craft. King's own was an autobiography and a frank dismissal of anything except his own and other horror as "bull." He also did a very dangerous thing when he dismissed other writing books as trash. But King's book was more about his struggle with alcoholism—a vice which claims the solitary writer more often than even self doubt it seems.

Thomas F. Monteleone's book is most certainly not trash and is quite insightful into everything about writing: POV, pacing, grammar, presentation, characters, plot, setting, dialogue, reading to write, nonfiction, and research. All subjects covered have a chapter of their own, and he goes into some detail about each.

Personally now, I want to cover a few of the things I liked and didn't like about the book.

First off, I should say that Tom Monteleone was a relatively unknown writer to me. I had heard of his 1993 Bram Stoker award winner *Blood of the Lamb*, but had never read it and I probably won't in the future. However, Tom has talent and he does a good job telling others how to nurture their own. But he was never a New York Times bestselling author; he just doesn't seem to me to get there. His books are weird and violent and his subject matter is a little reprehensible (I mean, come on! *Lyrice: A Novel of Horror and Desire* is erotica about a female vampire for goodness sake!) I stopped with vampires after Anne Rice, Bram Stoker and Stephen King. And by the way, Tom is not really on the same level with those other three.

But *Writing a Novel* is truly a great book regardless of who wrote it. I have read the 2nd edition, and you can put me down for the 3rd. I got the 1st, bought it right when it came out. The second edition (in case you want it; I did) has all new info on genre fiction and what the categories require. Also included is an updated look at "The List" including the top picks for readers for 2009. And a new chapter on e-publishing (publishing on the internet not involving putting pen marks on printed paper) puts things into perspective.

A note on the current changes for all you older writers trapped in the 1980s: get over it. E-publishing is here to stay. As Tom says, we stodgier people who like things old fashioned can either learn to adapt or miss out on a plethora of opportunities and resources for our fiction.

Also, the book includes an expansive glossary and interviews with writers (albeit horror ones like Peter Straub and Richard Matheson). Monteleone claims his book is the best and after having read a dozen books on the subject, I think he's right. The only overarching problem is that he is a horror writer, and as such maintains a form bias in that direction.

But, hey, good news! Tom also broke in writing science fiction (SF) which is what I enjoy reading ... and sometimes trying to write! His book is accessible and entertaining and it is a pleasure to revisit as a kind of "novelist's bible" book to give you that extra nudge you may need to get writing and produce something of merit. Kids, if you want to learn the game of writing pick up this book and get going. Also, pick up *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Getting Published*, 4th edition (includes a CD of templates). Monteleone tells you how to finish a rough draft, but the latter tells you how to wade the market. Get going and drink deeply the sweet wine of creativity. Write away and good fortune be your guide!

Enjoy!

I don't read Stephen King anymore, but his words apply here too: the well of creativity is always open. "The water is free. So drink. Drink and be filled up."

Beth says

I read this book rather slowly. It helped me decide that I don't want to write a novel. It contains lots of good information and details that seem to be helpful to someone who was serious about writing. The timing isn't right for me now.

Becky says

A solid reference guide for the beginning writer. Monteleone gives advice similar to Stephen King's On Writing, but actually covers a bit more of the nuts and bolts. He briefly touches on everything from story ideas and grammar to rewrites, literary agents, and marketing your novel. He also supplies the names of books, magazines, and websites that are useful tools. King is better able to tap us into the story development part of writing by referencing his more familiar works, but again, Monteleone covers more of the basics. The only reason I'm not giving 5 stars is that I'd liked to have had more examples in certain sections. However, **DO NOT CHEAT YOURSELF** & let this deter you from exploring this book if you are a beginning writer. While the only other book on writing I've read was Stephen King's, this is my favorite & I venture to say one of, if not the best on the subject.
