

The Glossary Method

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this is part of my
Broken Stories Unfinished Dreams
series

I never did finish it.
And I'm never going to.
Not even going to reread it here and now.

Feel free to enjoy it for what it is or turn the page at your own discretion.

Like what you see?
Want to finish it?
Or transform it into something else?
Let's work out a deal.
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Note Carding: being the art of quickly and efficiently putting into writing that which you wish to say... and nothing more.

The Glossary Method: is a practical writing technique in which thought and discipline trumps quantity and needless repetition. Pretty much any useful idea can be conveyed in a paragraph or less, so why write more? Any thought that cannot be distilled down to a few sentences is probably a group of ideas. The way to address these larger writings projects is to simply split the larger idea up into its composite parts, and then write a short blurb on each part, one at a time. This technique is a useful way to address journaling and diaries, to hone one skill at writing, and to purge the mind of wayward thoughts. It is also an excellent method for preserving and organizing information such as might be desired for a group of recipes or as an instructional manual on

nearly any topic--such as writing a book for instance. (150)(11-19-08)

50 days to organizing your journal. The note carding method.

Note Carding

Simple perfection, the thought of the day.

Getting Started

In the beginning, it is best to simply start. Write a short blurb, look it over, and then take a break for the day. You can come back to it tomorrow, next week, or then again, maybe never.

The point is, if you're making a collection of entries, it is inevitable that the first few will not match the later ones. Don't hassle it. It probably doesn't matter, and if it does, go back and redo, edit, and/or polish any entries that cry out for help. (11-20-08)

The Medium versus The Message

Having decided to give Note Carding a whirl there are a few things one will need to consider. Now by all means, start writing, but as you do, you'll need to decide a few important details... like what to write about. Along with the topic(s) you intend to cover, you'll also need to decide how to organization of the entries (alphabetical, chronological, in order of importance, or as written), the medium to be used (note cards versus notebooks or computer files), the length of a typical entry, how often you want to write, and any standardized data that you might wish to include to make your entries more useful (like date written, a title, and so forth).

Oh, and I also like to decide in advance how many times I'm going to proofread and edit the entries. Not to be a snob about it, but the main difference between journaling and writing is that once journals are written, they are typically left alone and forgotten, whereas writing is an endless process of editing, correcting, polishing, and refining--subject verb agreement doesn't happen by accident you know. (11-23-08)

What Ya Gonna Write About?

Don't look to me for topics. You know why you picked up this book. Maybe you want to sort out some personal issues, maybe you want to be a writer but don't know how to start, maybe you don't want to fill up endless pages and so you're looking for a form of journaling that doesn't take up endless hours of your time. Well, whatever it is; that's your topic. Obviously a short entry--Note Carding--system is going to work better for some projects than others. It's a great way to catalog... anything: the events of the day, recipes, movie reviews, random ideas, poems, whatever. It's less suited towards writing that epic novel, but that doesn't mean you couldn't force the issue and still do it. Novels are broken down into chapters, chapters into sequences, and sequences into individual bits. There's no reason why you can't write a story as a linear grouping of 100 word blips, but you're better off using the Note Cards to develop individual characters, locales, chapter outlines, and the like. Bottom line, I figure you know what you want to write, organize, and/or solidify onto paper. Well, whatever that thing is, that's your topic.

Writer's Block

I don't believe in "Writer's Block." I guess I don't really know what it means. I know that some days I don't feel like writing... and so I don't. Or, that at other times it seems that all I can get out is complete crap. But, to be literally unable to write, to

be unable to find the words--however pathetic--to express a thought? It hasn't ever really happened to me. What has happened is that I've written over 500 sheets of paper on a project and then decided it wasn't worth pursuing. I could have pursued it, but I didn't because I made a time management decision that it would be easier to scrap the story than try to salvage it. In fact, this is such a common occurrence that my file of unfinished, semi-started, and rough story ideas surpasses--to an astonishing degree--my finished work. But the very fact that I have a colossal file of unfinished manuscripts pretty much indicates writing (or at least starting to write) isn't my problem. So bottom line, I'm not really an expert on "Writer's Block." The closest I get is when I want to write, but I'm convinced anything I do write will be crap, so I don't bother to waste my time. This is time management. This is common sense. I hope you don't go surfing, skiing, or play basketball when you don't feel like it, so why write when that's the case?

Variety is the Spice of Life

If I was going to make a recommendation for anyone interested in starting to write or in Note Carding specifically, I would simply advise them to pick up a card, fill it in with whatever words they think are appropriate, read it over once, date the card, and then move on with their life. Then, the next day, grab a new card and repeat the exercise. After a while, you'll see a pattern. Start exploring the patterns and as the patterns expand to become categories, put some effort into filling out those categories.

Too abstract? First off, don't grab a pile of note cards and fill them up rapid fire one after the other. Instead start with a single card and take your time slowly fill it out--however you want. Read what you have written (perhaps edit a line here or there), and then put it down and go do something else. In an hour, or a day, come back and repeat the exercise. In a while--a week, a month, a year--you'll notice that some cards are similar in structure and content to some of the other cards. Some cards might relate to your day to

day life (like a diary), or your childhood (like a journal), while other might address places you've visited, places you want to go, practical household hints, things you want to do, story ideas or whatever. Whatever the subjects turn out to be, group these different cards together, and then, when it is time to write in the future, try to decide in advance what pile of cards or group of ideas you are working on.

Currently I have different groups for: this book, my autobiography (sure to be a best seller), article reviews on every piece of media that I consume (books, magazines, movies, plays, cultural events), a book on UFO that I am working on, a fantasy fiction based on my Dragon Bound series, and a Hawaii travel log. I try to do one (and only one) card for each project every day, but I don't always succeed. Today for instance, I did the last three sections of this book in rapid succession... and because of that, something else won't be getting done. (11-26-08)

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The Medium Defines the Method

The basic methodology is to write a small--perhaps constricted entry--that is concise and to the point. Whether you do that on a Note Card, a typewritten sheets of paper, a spiral notebook in which each page has been split into quarters by two hasty strokes of the pen, or just sit down at a computer (as I do) and pound out 50-250 words on a subject, you'll find that whatever you choose to write on and/or with WILL effect your writing. If you only have a 3"x5" Note Card to work with, you're going to stick to the basics... and perhaps learn how to write small. While if you sit down in front of a computer, you soon might find yourself zooming past your predetermined word limit without ever realizing it. One method isn't better than the rest. They all have their plusses and minuses.

The Good, The Bad, and the Opinionated

Note Cards: are small and easy to store, but are also, easy to lose, and don't have a lot of room for comments on them.

Note Books: are portable, cheap, and give you more room to write, but they will likely never get organized, and it is hard to edit out entries without ripping out entire pages.

Typed Pages: are clean, neat, and have just the right amount of room on them, but are you anal or something? Besides who uses a typewriter anymore? Do they even sell those things?

Computer Word Documents: editing is a breeze, and if you ever want to be published you're going to end up using a computer at some stages, so why not start now? On the other hand, on a computer things tend to get wordy, like real-real wordy, real-real fast and it's much harder to keep yourself in check.

No Idea is So Big It Won't Fit on a Note Card

Romeo and Juliet is the story of two uppity adolescents who manage to kill themselves with the help of a renegade monk.

Frankenstein is the original mad scientist story concerning juxtaposing the wonders of technology against the dangers of a soulless industrialized society.

Every idea exists in different forms and lengths. Note Carding isn't about turning every thought into a novel, but rather about writing the editorial blurb that appears on the back of the novel.

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The Ideal Entry Length

The shorter the better.

Short entries force you to concentrate on the basics of the thought, the bare bones, and nothing else.

Fight the urge to pad it out. When it's done, it's done.

Organizational Man

Originally, I called this methodology of writing the Glossary Method. At the time it was more accurate, but it wasn't as catchy as Note Carding, didn't convey as much information, and in the end is only one subset of Note Carding, so as you may have already guessed, I ultimately renamed it.

In short the Glossary Method is Note Carding with all of the entries listed in alphabetical order. This can be useful for a compilation of book reviews, recipes, or anything of that nature where the order of presentation is more or less random to begin with. Being alphabetized allows both you and any future readers to know immediately where any given entry might be.

The Glossary Method - An Example

I live in Hawaii. Like every writer who lives here, I've thought about doing a travel book. However, most travel books are of limited value, because they read like long boring lists. Do you really want to know the names and locations of all 247 restaurants within 15 miles of downtown Kona? Or do you want to know detailed information about the best 10-20 so you can make an informed choice for the night? Me, I only care about the ones worth going to, and that goes with the sights as well. If you're going to be on the Big Island for two weeks, you might eat at 25 odd restaurants, stay at 10 or so hotels (or just 1 or 2), and avail yourself of 50-100 activities. Well, in my opinion, that's all a travel guide has to review then. Why make it longer?

Hawaii Travelogue

So my travel guide would give detailed coverage of maybe fifty restaurants, maybe a dozen hotels, and maybe a hundred sights and attractions. This is just a small slice of what Hawaii has

to offer. There are over a dozen hotels on Banyan Dr in downtown Hilo alone. So what to do about the rest?

My decision was to write full scale reviews of the good stuff, and then, in addition, a one paragraph blurb on everything (good or bad) that I had ever experienced.

Still, at a thousand plus entries, this was going to take some time to do, and since I didn't have a publishing contract for my travel guide (and still don't) I didn't want to stress myself out on this little side project, so I decided to make an single entry on Hawaii once a day, every day.

It wasn't' hard. I had a large backlog of places that I'd already visited that I'd never written up, and whenever I encountered something new, I already knew the format I was going to use.

Hawaii - Must See

Akaka Falls (Hilo side): is a magnificent waterfalls, and a pleasant walk through a tropical rainforest. Crowded with tour buses, the key to enjoyment is to go slower than everyone else. Once you get to the falls, sit down, and rest a spell. The parking lot is still going to be there in 15 minutes, and watching the water splash onto the rocks below is one of the most relaxing sights on the island. (10-25-08)

Hawaii - Skip It

Devastation Trail (Volcanoes): was a disappointment. The highlight is a cinder ash cone, but as you see plenty of these elsewhere in the park, hunting one out is pointless. It's a pleasant enough walk: forest on one side and then on the other a big pile of small rocks--pumice, as they call it. But there are better ways to spend your time, and calderas are far more interesting. (10-25-08)

Hawaii - Does Your Tourist Guide Tell You This?

Crosswinds (Hawi): a.k.a. the Chaos Winds... OK. Fair enough. I'm the only one who calls them that. As you drive up Hwy 270 from Kawaihae to Hawi look off into the ocean, and on a good day you will see a wondrous sight not listed in your typical guidebook--a line of waves extending out into the ocean where the tradewinds meet. Kona ways the waves are mellow. Hawi ways the wind drives them--often to white caps. Where they meet is just bizarre. It's a magical place to me, and well worth keeping your eye on the ocean. Calm ocean to white caps in the matter of a few feet. When they talk about the dangers of the open water, this is exactly the sort of thing they have in mind. (11-11-08)

Hawaii - Enough Already

It's starting to feel like sales pitch to the publishers of the world for a travelogue, so I'll try to wrap it up quick. My conception for the book was detailed 250-1000 word articles on all the must see stuff, but the rest, the filler, the beaches not worth going to, the restaurants that suck, and on and on; I'd put these in a black and white section at the back of the book in small 8pt type so as to not take up a lot of space but be able to include every listing. Want to know about Ed's Hamburger Emporium and Sushi Bar, just look in the index. If it's listed, you know what I do about the place, and if it's not listed, I've never been there, so your guess is as good as mine.

And how would I organize this end of the book section you ask? Alphabetically as a glossary, of course. Hence the original name, The Glossary Method.

A Category for Everything -- The Fine Art of Pigeonholing

Believe it or not, not everything is best organized alphabetically. Image how confusing this little book would be if

every blurb was organized according to its--quite arbitrary--section heading. So there are other ways to organize your work:

Alphabetically: as already covered, recipes, long lists, critical reviews.

Chronological (as written): journals and diaries. Has the advantage that you always know where the next entry goes, but it can be hard to locate a previous entry.

Chronologically (as happened): best for stories, even if you're doing flashbacks--and/or flashbacks within flashbacks, offset by jump forwards--the action, when it happens, will be chronological moment by moment. Of course, one way to handle the jumbled mess of narrative confusion so popular these days is to write your story chronologically, and then shuffle the cards to determine the order in which you will tell it.

Logically: from one idea to the next in a logical progression. How I like to think this book is organized.

By Type: doing a review of Hawaii? At some point, maybe it makes sense to split the hotel, restaurants, and beaches up into different lists. I'm going to have to think about that one. Type can be anything from color, age, class, subject, to horoscope sign and so on..

At some point it should be noted, that it is quite possible that not all of your cards belong in the same stack.

Variety the Spice of Life

Perhaps two different subjects, but I treat them as one and the same, because to me they are interrelated. I try to write once (and only once) a day on my major projects, which is another way of saying I have more than one project going at any one time.

You have to decide how much you want to write, and how focused (or unfocused) you want that writing to be. However, working on the assumption that you are asking me for advice, I'd say start with one topic, write once a day, and if things are going

well after a week and you think you'd like to spend more time writing, then add a second topic.

I mean, the worse thing that you can do is write multiple entries on the same subject in one day.

Something about a Leading a Horse to Water

I, of course, tend to do just that--write multiple entries a day. So as with all things, you have to figure out what you want out of it all. If I'm writing a book or working on a storyline and I'm on a role, well if that's the case, you can bet that I'm going to write more than one entry. Like this blurb. This here is my second entry on the Note Carding project today. Pretty much from the start I've been doing two and three sections on this and then skipping a few days inbetween. But for things like my Hawaii Tour Guide or my personal autobiography, I limit entries on those to just one a day. It a hard and fast rule, that's easy to follow because otherwise I might get carried away. I mean, my Autobiography? That's pretty much a never ending story.

This book on Note Carding, on the other hand, is going to end soon enough, and as such, I don't mind cheating a little here and there and doing multiple entries.

Editing

And as long as I'm skipping ahead, and doing multiple entries today, I might as well mention editing. Want to know the difference between writing and journaling? It's called editing. It takes ten and twenty rewrites to get a manuscript published, whereas it typically only takes one quick swoop of the pen to make a journal entry.

But even if journaling is your goal, and even if you never plan on showing your work to anyone else, I recommend reviewing (and reworking) your words at least once.

It's good practice, and after you've done it a time or two, you'll know why, because you'll find yourself asking yourself, what was I trying to say here?

Editing for Fun and Profit

My editing process for a book like this is as follows:

First rough draft=writing it, and editing it once.

First read through=edit as I go and decide if I actually want to pursue the project.

Edit to death=read at least three more times (quite possibly many more times) and edit as I go. I sort of get a feel for when enough is enough.

Line by line=making sure every last sentence is grammatically correct... or at least that I am aware of the errors.

Read it again=and maybe again, and then maybe again.

Start sending it out=to agents, publishers, family, and friends. On the off chance that I get any useful feedback (publishers aren't particularly known for giving feedback on stuff they aren't going to publish), I decide whether to incorporate any of the advice and and keep on keeping on.

Editing Fiction

Fiction is slightly different. For fiction I:

Write whatever I am going to write for the day (usually only 250-1000 words, or about 1-4 pages).

Proofread that seven times over the course of the next few days (typically before I write the next day's work).

After I have written it and proofread it seven times (call me superstitious), I call what I have my rough draft.

Then it's time to read it all from beginning to end and decide if it is worth pursuing.

If so, I reread the story and edit it for internal consistency (i.e. so it makes sense) at least three times.

Then I do a line by line edit.

Before sending it out to family and friends (i.e. my fanbase).

I listen to whatever advice and/or criticisms they have to offer, let the project sit and gel for awhile, and then proofread it yet again.

It is at this point, years after initially setting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) that I send the manuscript out to publishers and agents.

At which point I collect a heaping pile of rejection letters.

The interesting aspect of all of this is, if you don't get a rejection letter, you've got at least three more rounds of editing to go through.

Bottom line, writing is editing.

Make a Program and Work Your Program

So, do you have to edit everything that you write seven times? Heck no.

All I am advising you to do is recognize that:

1) Your writing will improve the more times you go over it.
2) Your unedited rough draft is worthless (i.e. not marketable).

3) And, if you are not willing to read your own stuff twenty and thirty times, don't expect anyone else to want to read it even the once.

My advice is to decide in advance how many times you want to go over your stuff. For journals, one and two times is plenty. For something you eventually wish to publish, the more the merrier. Think of it as writing practice--the kind that actually gets you somewhere.

Because it's not about how much you write, but whether the material you actually write is worth reading.

Focus on Note Carding - You're Wandering,, Exactly what you're trying to avoid.

Time Management

A critical advantage Note Carding has over pretty much every other writing system is the insignificant amount of time required. Once a day for five or ten minutes and then you're done. Sure, day by day it isn't much, but after a year, that's an impressive pile of entries.

Slow and steady wins the race, and all that.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this is that it minimizes the time wasted exploring tangents and unproductive dead ends. Which is to say, once you've written one little blurb, you have the whole day to work on the next.

Spread Sheets - Time Management

Believe it or not, I don't actually do the one note card a day--call me an over achiever. To keep track of all the different projects I have going, I like to use another card just for this purpose.

One card for each week, Monday through Sunday, with a checkmark box for each project that I have going. Then when I am done with the days assignment, allotment, or whatnot, I put a check in the appropriate place, and then that's that. Time to work on the next box.

Oh, and I don't recommend that you have thirty different Note Carding projects. Far more productive would be to have a single Note Carding project coupled with a poetry project (write a short poem, it's just not that hard, heck I don't even care if it rhymes), photography project (that's right, haul out that hundred dollar camera and take a picture--get your money's worth), do a

sketch, model something in putty, pull a weed out of the front yard, and so on and so forth. Heck, I even got a little checkmark for cleaning up the kitchen sink, but I usually never get to it...

Note Carding: being the art of quickly and efficiently putting into writing that which you wish to say... and nothing more.

And these days, that's all I'd write...