



Fiction Writer's Workshop

Josip Novakovich

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This book exemplifies the best of a writing workshop: thought-provoking instruction, a charismatic teacher and illuminating examples from classic and contemporary literary masters.

Each chapter explores a different aspect of the art of fiction and ends with a series of writing exercises –127 in all. Complete with self-critique questions to help you assess your work, these exercises challenge you to experiment with the diverse writing styles as you clarify your own.

Make the most of Josip Novakovich's insightful, mind-expanding workshop and come away with a stronger voice, a broader perspective and better fiction.

Fiction Writer's Workshop Details

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Author : Josip Novakovich

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From Reader Review Fiction Writer's Workshop for online ebook

Gaby says

I found Fiction Writer's Workshop to be very informative. There was a lot of information in this book that I had previously learned, but had almost forgotten. While reading the book when I learned about a new technique or was re-familiarized with an old, I would suddenly feel inspired to write just to test the techniques out. Novakovich does an excellent job of breaking down by chapter the fundamental principles of writing. For most of his advice he provides clear examples, which help to better illustrate the principles he is trying to teach.

Early into the book, in the Setting As Antagonist section Novakovich speaks of a writers need to view the world through fresh eyes. To experience everything, not only in the rare but in the mundane. I felt this was an extremely important bit of advice. As a writer, inspiration can sometimes appear rather illusive, but that is usually a result of our wanting to be inspired by an external force without attempting to find the inspiration on our own through simple appreciation of our surroundings. Familiarity can sometimes be very inspiring, but only if we allow ourselves to see the familiar in different ways. Novakovich says, "I took my eight-month-old son to the zoo to see the elephants. He found a bee circling around us far more intriguing than a dancing elephant. Instead of noticing gibbons leaping on trees, he noticed fish in the water. It struck me that his perspective had a tremendous advantage over mine. He saw the world, while I saw the zoo." I found this to be wonderfully appropriate and important observation. As writers, we can easily believe that ideas can be hard to come by, but if we view the world as a child would, we would find a story to tell about most anything.

Later within the chapter, in the Setting as a Character Portrait section, Novakovich speaks about using the setting to describe a character. He explains how using the character's habits of arranging or keeping his belongings can be a useful way to illustrate the characters personality. This seemed to me to be a very comfortable way to describe a character, because it is something most people naturally do when entering another person's space. It's human nature to judge a person by how they organize (or lack of organizing) their surroundings (life). The example Novakovich used from Dead Souls, by Nikolai Gogol, was a perfect example of this method. It gave me a good starting point to begin my own experimentation of the method.

I would say that the biggest potential shortcomings of the book were the exercises. Not for their content, but for the layout. But, that would only be a problem in my opinion, depending on how the reader approaches them. If someone felt they had to do each and every exercise then they might find themselves a little overwhelmed. I took the exercises as suggestions that you could use in the future. At times you either need inspiration or just want to practice, but I am not sure that is how Novakovich meant the reader to use them.

Overall, I found the book to be very well structured making referring back to it rather easy. Novakovich does a good job of providing clear tools that the reader can quickly apply to his/her own writing. I think I will find myself turning back to this book often. While the practical tools he provides are valuable, I believe his advice on how to approach writing, and his advice on how to personalize your writing is probably the most important portion of anything he has laid out in the book.

Raven Tiger {Paint me like one of your 19th century gothic heroines!} says

Need to be reviewed.

John David says

A very good resource for new and seasoned writers. I am moving into the fiction genre, and this book is very helpful, especially the exercises. Even if you don't actually do them, just thinking about the subject helps you learn. There are many awesome examples of the situations that are described.

Erin *Proud Book Hoarder* says

A great source for fiction writers, although it falls short in some areas. Each section begins with a lecture of some sort, with examples and thoughts, then numerous assignments.

It's divided into Sources of Fiction, Setting, Character, Plot, Point of View, Dialogue and Scenes, Beginnings and Endings, Description and Word Choice, Voice, then Revision.

The chapter on gathering story ideas is pretty generic but useful in a broad way. He lists some general things to trigger your thinking, like childhood, friends, stories you hear, but that's as far as it goes.

Setting is divided into many sections, all useful, very informative, alive with detail. If you had a problem with setting before, this is up your alley.

The character section discusses round characters, their mannerisms, appearance, etc. It has useful comments but again is all general.

Plot is a great chapter - he discusses character conflict plots, non-confrontational plots, and combinations. He mentions a note card technique for generating plots but as before, it's more of an educational guide and not an inspirational one. I didn't find much useful advice for organizing or structuring a story.

His point of view is loaded with stuff I've never seen before; I consider this one of the best chapters the book offers.

The only problems I had was the guide was written in a sort of stuffy way at times. Also, many of the story examples used were not works I read, or have an interest in reading, more literary types work that you focus on in school. Because of this, it was a bit harder for me to get drawn into these sorts of examples.

Overall, though, it's a great guide for writing itself, not necessarily novel writing or short stories alone.

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Kate says

Oh my God! From ideas in the first couple of chapters, I wrote three, count 'em THREE short stories! Similar output throughout the rest of the book. Love it!

Jerry says

If you're looking for a writing book where an author riffs on writing for a while looks elsewhere. It reads more casual than a textbook would, but Fiction Writer's Workshop demands a lot of work out of the reader. If you're not willing to go through it performing most of the exercises you're not going to get the most out of it

Granted I've yet to redo the whole book doing all the exercises, but as far as I've gotten I've consistently found stories that I didn't know I had in me. The author takes the approach of throwing as many techniques your way as possible and then asking you to experiment with them. You'll embrace some and loathe others and in the process you'll find out more about yourself as a writer and end up with a few pieces that you'll definitely want to work on some more.

FWW probably has more value if you're a beginner with the dedication to write everyday and learn the craft or an aspiring writer who's had trouble actually getting stories completed. If you've been published and are just looking for a source of new ideas this is probably a path you've already been down before.

Amanda Patterson says

Great for writers!

4/5

Galena says

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Andrew Knighton says

There's a familiarity that comes from reading a lot of writing books, and certainly Novakovich's book spends time on things you'll have read elsewhere. But it's good to be reminded of these lessons, and they come with some excellent practice exercises. His breakdown of subjects like forms of humour also gave me some

interesting new food for thought.

Adrian Astur Alvarez says

Okay okay so I always complain about books on writing yet I am constantly reading books on writing either for classes or as craft markers for my own practice. This one was actually pretty good. First of all, it's written by an accomplished author (that's crucial for me at this point). Secondly, it presents itself as a textbook. One of the aspects of the "how to write..." genre that I can't stand is the veiled arrogance behind most of those books. The posture tends to be, "well you are actually a perfectly great writer and here are some tips to get past those pesky gatekeepers who need to be tricked into publishing your already great, flawless writing." At least a textbook comes from the perspective that writing is a craft to be worked on and improved. I'll stick with that sort of optimism carried over: good work gets published; no one is tricking anyone with secret codes and methods.

Anyway, Novakovich is an interesting writer and though I disagreed with his opinions at times he actually invites this and by no means considers his own word final. All in all this was a useful overview of the main building blocks of fiction and the included anthology of stories were useful and interesting.

Elizabeth Howe says

It's super basic. Some of the examples are taken out of context and the suggested changes are absurd. The exercises are really the only reason to get this book.

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Karine Green says

I really enjoyed it, and did get some great ideas from it. It was a bit dry in places. I think someone in a review mentioned that it reads like a textbook. I would have to agree.

Carrie Mitchell says

I was introduced to this book last year, through participation of an Open University online course, so got myself a copy. It's written in plain English, without the sanctimonious habit many instructive authors have of loading everything with mysterious jargon and/or elusive, frilly words not used since Dickens was a lad. This means that it's a book which extends a welcome to new writers, rather than making them feel out of their depth. As a seasoned author himself, Novakovich is able to justify his lessons and examples through his own experiences. He does, however, honestly state that these are just his experiences, and in no way intended to dismiss methods others support. This makes the book as welcoming to other experienced writers too, because it doesn't disregard what they have to say.

I've read other reviews, and many of them allude to the extensive amount of exercises at the end of each

chapter. Some have insisted it's top heavy, in that respect. Is it? I challenge that and assert that writing as a profession is bloody hard work! If a reader is serious about becoming a professional writer, then these exercises are really just the tip of the iceberg, and a realistic way of setting expectations of what needs to be done to succeed. I still have many of these exercises to do, and will continue to redo them in the future.

Overall I think it's an excellent guide, providing the reader has an open mind and a good work ethic.
