



# ARDITH'S NOTEBOOK

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Editorial Help: Getting Started

*Common mistakes and how to avoid them. Page 2*

Book Production: Print on Demand

*New technology that makes book printing faster. Page 2.*

Promotion: The Book Launch

*How to create successful promotional events. Page 3.*

*Editorial Help:*

# Getting started

You know what you want to say, but you need some help finding just the right words. In writing, as in so many areas of life, “less is more.” If your story is worthwhile, it will carry your readers along. If it isn’t, no amount of padding will make it better. Leave the embellishments alone for now and you’ll avoid some of the mistakes most commonly made by beginning writers.

In no particular order, here’s a list of those mistakes with some helpful ways to avoid them.

- If you *mean* “she said,” then *say* “she said.” She doesn’t have to “declare,” “contend,” or “maintain,” unless that’s what she’s really doing. Put your Thesaurus at the back of a drawer so you have to make an effort to reach for it. That way, you’ll find it easier to keep it simple.
- Watch out for *adverbs*. Not every verb needs a modifier. Remember that you want to *show* your readers what you mean, not *tell* them. Rely on subtle description, setting scenes, and building character, and trust your readers to follow you.
- Kill your babies. *Edit, edit, edit*. Never be so in love with a sentence, phrase or even paragraph that you can’t bear to cut it out. You must be able to see which parts of your first drafts are expendable. If you can’t, be sure that your readers will.
- When writing fiction, *avoid cluttering* the landscape with minor characters. Think about which ones can be combined or cut out altogether, and which ones should remain minor. Not every character must be described and given equal weight. Some are merely there to advance the plot and can fade into the background: think of the unfortunate crewmembers in *Star Trek* who are in scenes only to be killed off.
- Watch your sense of *place* and *time*. Really concen-

*Book Production:*

## About Digital Printing, also known as “Print On Demand”

New digital technology has made book publishing more accessible now than ever before. It’s ideal for new authors, niche subjects, and self-publishers who don’t want to spend money on books before they’re sold.

Digital books look and feel like any other books produced on conventional offset printing presses. Most use high-quality, acid-free, book-grade paper stock (55-60lb) in either white or cream color. Covers are usually printed on a white, 80lb cover stock.

Using digital printing you can produce books as you need them in batches as small as a single copy, but most digital printers have minimum orders that usually start at about 25 books. Digital printers use a higher speed direct-to-image (disk to drum) electrostatic process with a toner blend that reproduces photographs well. There is no film or plate. Color covers are usually done with the same digital process but on heavier stock and with basic gloss or matte lamination. Production costs are much higher for digital books, however the benefit of not having several thousand copies of a book to store often outweighs the higher unit cost.

Ordering is easy and most printers will take your finished book in a PDF file. The printer will usually run off one copy for you as a proof to check. Once you approve your proof, completed books can be finished in a matter of days.

Digital printing has other advantages, too: books can be customized in several different ways, and corrections and changes are easy to make. As a self-publisher, you can sell a bulk quantity of your title to a company or group and offer a customized cover for these books.

• continued from page 2

trate on building a believable, memorable landscape for your characters to move in. Think carefully about the length of time covered by the action in your story: has a conversation lasted from breakfast until dinner time? Will this make sense to your reader? If you avoid jarring your readers' concentration, you will be more likely to carry them along with your plot.

- Avoid giving your characters needlessly *outlandish* or *similar names*. Are all your friends called names beginning with "T," for example? It's distracting if your characters are Todd, Tom, Ted, and Tim. Readers will feel resentful at having to keep looking to see who's who, or confused and give up. And there can be good reasons for naming a character Napoleon: he's the emperor of France and he's planning to take over Europe.

- Think about *point of view*. Who is telling the story? Is it an omniscient narrator ("Bob sat on the chair.") or is it one or more characters in turn ("I sat in the chair.")? If you plan to tell the story from more than one point of view, you must be sure that they are different enough that readers will know whose head they're in. Changing points of view works best in stories where the characters, rather than the plot, are the most important element.

- Where does your story *begin*? Sometimes the beginning is not the most dramatically satisfying place to start. Consider opening the story in the middle of the action, then going back in time to set the scene, then coming forward again for the climax.

*Promotion:*

## The Book Launch

Most authors like to hold a book launch to celebrate the completion of a book with their friends and family, but a book launch is also a great way to kick start a publicity campaign for a newly published book.

To ensure a successful promotional event, hold your book launch in a central location at the end of the regular business day when many media people are available to attend. If you are not prepared to pay for refreshments for your guests you should look for a local bar or restaurant to host the event. It is a good idea to offer your guests a few drinks and snacks.

Press kits and invitations should be sent out to the media at least two weeks in advance and, if possible, follow this up with a reminder email a couple of days before.

As well as your friends and family and the press, you should also invite people from the local writing and publishing community. This includes arts organizations and booksellers. Be sure to get the launch listed in the local papers and at the local libraries. Generally, half of the people who are invited will show up for the event, so be sure that you have enough space and snacks for everyone.

Set up a book display close to the entrance to the event and offer the book for sale. It's a great idea to offer the book at a discount of at least 20% off the cover price. Bring a cash float so that you can make change. You can also consider asking your local bookstore to run the sales table for you. They will allow people to pay by credit or debit card.

At most launches, the author reads briefly from the new book. It's a good idea to ask a confident public speaker to introduce the author (and thank the guests for coming.) Choose an entertaining or dramatic passage from the book, and keep it concise (under 10 minutes.) Find out in advance if the launch venue has a microphone. If one is available, take a little time before the event to ensure that it is working and you are comfortable with it. If no microphone is available, it's a good idea to rent one.

When you've finished reading, don't forget to remind the audience that books are for sale.

Be sure to bring a pen to sign your books. Unless it's for a close friend, what you write in the book will be something simple: "Best wishes to. . .," followed by their name, your signature, and the date. Ask for spellings and ask again if you don't catch the name exactly.

Most important: enjoy yourself. Publishing a book is a great accomplishment and a launch is the perfect way to celebrate.